



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

The views of home educated children and young people on their wellbeing

Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 extension project

The Speaking Out Survey 2021 extension project was supported by funding from Lotterywest.





Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent. 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

We would like to thank participating children and young people, and their families, for their contribution to this project. We would also like to thank Home Education WA who advocated for home educated students' inclusion in the Speaking Out Survey and provided assistance in the recruitment of children and young people and administration of the survey.

The extension of the Speaking Out Survey to reach children and young people outside of mainstream education was made possible due to funding from Lotterywest.

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

Suggested citation

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2022, *The views of home educated children and young people on their wellbeing: Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 extension project*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth

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Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA undertook the second Speaking Out Survey in 2021 (SOS21) as a follow up to the inaugural survey carried out in 2019 (SOS19). Despite various short-term COVID-19 restrictions in place during 2021, a total of 16,532 Year 4 to Year 12 students from 94 schools in all regions of Western Australia (WA) consented to participate in the main SOS21 survey.

The Speaking Out Survey is conducted in government, independent and Catholic schools throughout WA. This means children and young people who are educated at home are not included in the main sample.

In 2021/2022, Lotterywest funding was received to extend the Speaking Out Survey to children and young people who have diverse education experiences, including students who are educated at home in WA. In total, 39 children and young people completed a modified version of the Speaking Out Survey questionnaire – the Home Educated Students’ Speaking Out Survey.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in students who are being educated at home across WA.

Students registered to receive home education 2017 to 2021

Year	Number	% increase
2017	3,464	
2018	3,563	2.9%
2019	3,720	4.4%
2020	4,116	10.6%
2021	4,562	10.8%

Source: WA Department of Education, 2021 Annual Report, WA Government

There has been little research conducted with children and young people who are home educated¹ and these survey results provide a unique insight into these children and young people’s views and experiences.

The Commissioner would like to thank [Home Education WA](#) for their advocacy in this space and their assistance with the administration of the survey.

¹ Jackson G 2020, [Summary of Australian and New Zealand Home Education Research - 20-5- 2020](#), Australian Home Education Advisory Service.



Key findings

The participants in the survey report generally positive outcomes. Most reported feeling physically and mentally healthy, supported by their family and safe in their community.

Most of the participants had previously attended a mainstream school² and many said they had switched to home education due to learning difficulties. Almost one-third (30.4%) stated that bullying was one of the reasons they stopped mainstream education.

Almost all participants reported that they like learning when they are being educated at home. Most reported having good relationships with their family and feeling supported and listened to.

A relatively high proportion of participants reported having a long-term disability (37.5%), with autism spectrum disorder being the most commonly reported condition.

Almost half (47.4%) of the participants reported the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes to daily life had affected their life in a bad way a lot or somewhat.

As part of the survey, we asked the participants what they thought of the survey, they responded with the following:

I liked it I feel it asked all the right questions

It was a very good survey and I'm very impressed with how quick it was.

It was fun and easy to do! 😊😊😊😊

This survey was good. I am very glad you have chosen to include homeschoolers in this.

² The term 'mainstream' is used here to represent primary and secondary schools across the government, independent and Catholic sectors. This was the term used in the survey and was understood by the participants.

Background

Speaking Out Survey 2021

Designed as a triennial survey series, the aim of the Speaking Out Survey is to capture the views of a representative sample of children and young people in WA to develop a robust data source relating to the wellbeing of children and young people in our state.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commissioner brought forward the planned second survey from 2022 to 2021. The inaugural SOS19 established not only a baseline of data on WA children and young people's wellbeing but also a pre-COVID data set of their views and experiences. Undertaking the survey again in 2021 has delivered a strong evidence base of how children and young people's wellbeing has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to inform the planning for the government's response and recovery.

For more information on the SOS21 refer to [Appendix A](#).

Reporting on the Home Educated Students' Speaking Out Survey

Thirty-nine children and young people who are educated at home participated in the Home Educated Students' Speaking Out Survey. One-quarter of these participants were aged 11 years or under, while the remainder were 12 to 16 years-old. The majority of participants identified as a boy (59%) and 33 per cent identified as a girl, the remainder identified 'in another way'.

Due to the small number of participants, non-random sampling process and bias toward male children and young people, the data herein is not representative of the home educated student population in WA. This report does however provide a unique insight into the views and experiences of the participating children and young people, who are being educated at home.

To ensure confidentiality, any responses with three or less participants are not reported. This is discussed in more detail in [Appendix A](#).

In this report some results are compared with the main SOS21 survey results. This is not a statistical comparison but provides some contextual information on how the responses of these children and young people compare with the general population of children and young people in WA.

The survey results are sometimes disaggregated by school year, reporting on children who are notionally in primary school (Years 4 to 6) and young people who are notionally in



secondary school (Years 7 to 12). It is possible that some participants in home education do not directly relate to these school years – however for simplicity the results are still reported in this manner.

Participants in the survey were also asked open text questions about schoolwork stress, their mental health, feeling safe and their local community. These are questions on issues of concern for children and young people, therefore the responses are often children and young people explaining their worries and challenges.

A selection of quotes are included in this report on the relevant topics. The quotes 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 (...).

Results

Learning and participating

Mainstream schooling experience

Most of the participating students had previously attended a mainstream school and many said they had switched to home education due to learning difficulties.

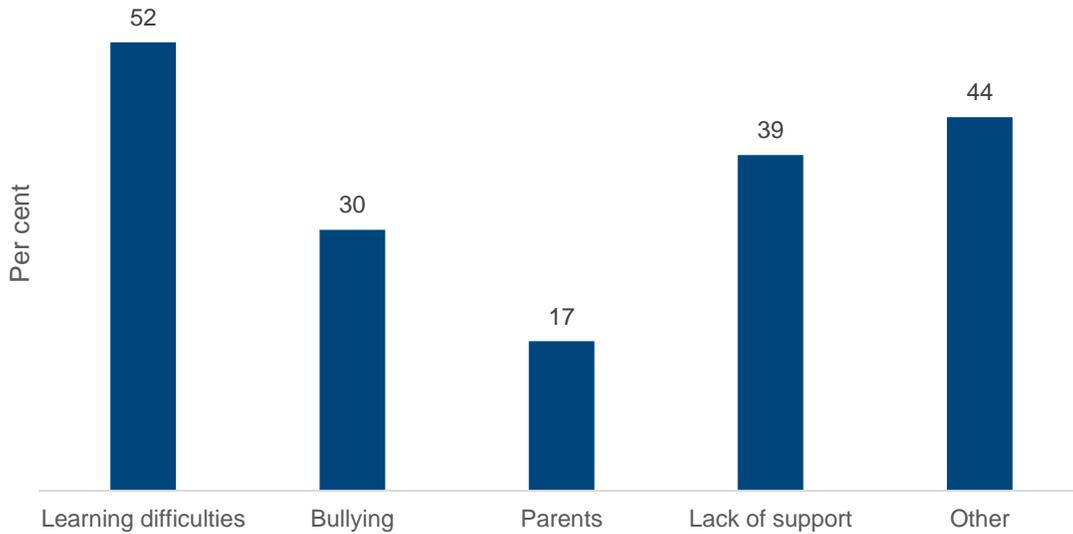
Of the students surveyed 62 per cent said they had attended a mainstream school in the past. Of these students 46 per cent had attended one mainstream school, while 54 per cent had attended two or more mainstream schools in the past.

Of those students who had previously attended a mainstream school, 21 per cent reported liking it, 21 per cent said it was OK and 58 per cent said they didn't like it.

Over one-half (52%) of the students surveyed cited learning difficulties as a reason for stopping mainstream education, followed by "Other" reasons (43%) and lack of support (39%). Almost one-third (30%) stated that bullying was one of the reasons they stopped mainstream education.



Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting reason why they stopped mainstream education (if they had ever attended), multiple responses possible



“Other” reasons given by students included COVID-19, stress and school not meeting their educational needs.

Not getting taught what i needed

Because it didn't meet my educational needs and was boring

I discovered that home education allowed a lot more freedom during there first lockdown, because I was going to school and realised I functioned a lot better when the learning was more independent.

School is very generic, and whilst I applaud the social hub it creates, I feel like it can be very middle targeting, leaving smart kids treading water and kids with learning difficulties flowing down the waterfall.

Experience of home education

Two-thirds (67%) of the students surveyed reported liking home education a lot, while 21 per cent reported liking it a bit. Similarly, 66 per cent strongly agreed they feel happy when they are being home educated. By comparison, only 28 per cent of students in mainstream schooling strongly agreed their school is a place where they feel happy.



Most students (>89%) agreed that they like learning when they are being home educated, while 58 per cent said that it was very important for them to learn every day when in home education and 34 per cent said it was somewhat important.

Nearly all students (>89%) reported using the internet for home education purposes.

Almost one-third (31%) of students said they learn with other students (not including siblings) every day or almost every day, with most of these students (84%) reporting they get along with the other students they learn with.

Nearly three-quarters of students (74%) said they usually get along with their parent or carer when they are acting as their home educator/teacher, while 24 per cent reported they only get along sometimes or less often.

Students reported that if they needed extra help with their home education, they receive it from a variety of sources including teachers, other home educating families, the internet, tutors, other family members and universities.

Of the secondary students surveyed, 16 per cent said they feel pressured by the work or study they have to do as part of their home education, while 84 per cent said they feel only a little pressured or not at all. By comparison, 43 per cent of students in the main survey said they feel only a little pressured or not at all by schoolwork.

The participants were asked: The majority of mainstream high school students feel stressed by schoolwork or study. Do you feel stressed by home education work or study? Most responded with a 'No', while some provided more context.

At the moment I have two exams next week and I am worried because in one of them I will have to talk to people and I am not very good at that.

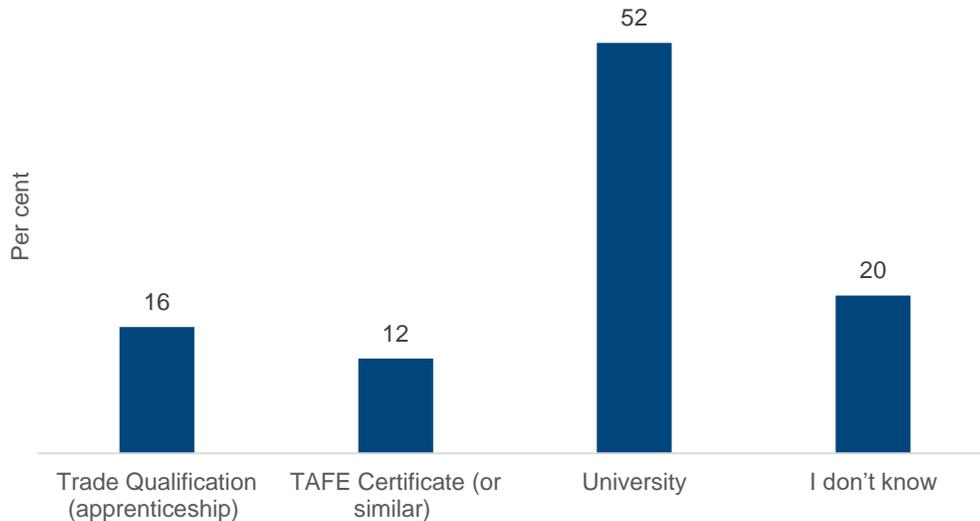
Not as much as when I was in a mainstream school

Seven-in-ten (71%) participants reported it was very much true that through home education they are learning knowledge and skills that will help them in the future. By comparison, 21 per cent of students in mainstream schooling responded very much true to this question.

When secondary students were asked the highest level of education they would like to achieve, just over one-half (52%) reported wanting to attend university, this was in line with students across WA (55%).



Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting the highest level of education they want to achieve



One-in-six (16%) reported wanting to complete a trade qualification, 12 per cent wanted to attend TAFE (or similar), while 20 per cent said they don't know.

Independence

A high proportion of the participants in Years 7 to 12 were not allowed to go out alone at night (76%) or catch public transport on their own (48%). These proportions are higher than for secondary school students across WA (56% and 29%, respectively).

The majority (80%) of the young people responding felt that they are involved in making decisions in their life. This is consistent with the responses of students in the main survey.

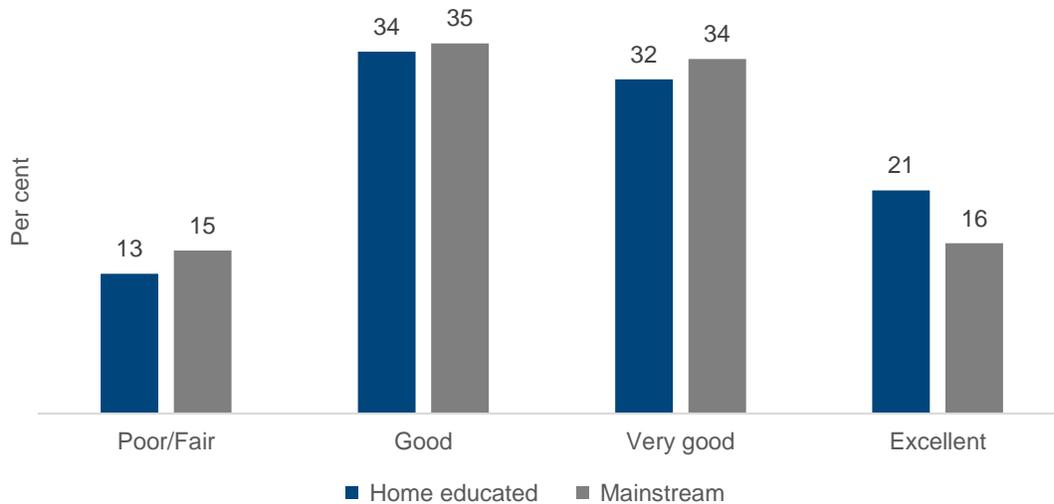
Healthy and connected

Physical health

Over one-half (53%) of students in Years 4 to 12 reported that their health is very good or excellent, while 13 per cent reported their health was only poor or fair.

These results followed a similar distribution to the responses from students in the main survey.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students rating their physical health



Of the secondary students surveyed, just under one-quarter (24%) reported having a long-term health problem and 38 per cent reported having a long-term disability.

While the proportion reporting a long-term health problem was similar to the students in the main survey (25%), the proportion reporting a long-term disability was more than triple that in the main survey (12%). In the free text responses, the most commonly reported disability was autism spectrum disorder.

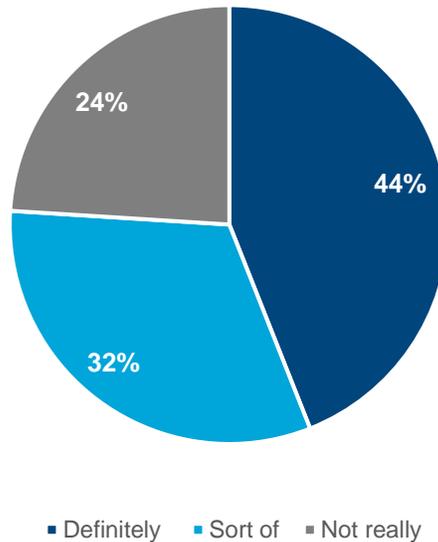
I would like very much if adults were more aware of and caring towards neuro-diverse people. They could do this by being more careful about making loud noises or swearing.

Just over one-half of participants (54%) reported they care very much about staying fit and physically active, while 36 per cent care some. This was consistent with responses from students in mainstream schooling across the state.

Less than one-half (44%) said that physical activity, sport or exercise was an important part of their life. By comparison, 54 per cent of students in mainstream schooling said that physical activity, sport or exercise was an important part of their life.



Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting if physical activity, sport or exercise is an important part of their life



Further results from the Year 4 to Year 12 students include:

- 56 per cent reported they care very much about eating healthy food and 31 per cent reported they care some.
- Most reported eating meals every day: breakfast (62%), lunch (85%) and dinner (>89%). Girls were more likely than boys to report not eating meals every day.

The secondary school-aged students were asked if 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. Three-quarters (76%) of participants said no, they had not experienced this. Just over 10 per cent said yes, this was something they had experienced. In the main survey, one-quarter (25%) of students reported being unable to see someone when they needed.

Because I am 16 years old I fall in a gap where doctors that see children don't want to help me because I am too old and doctors that see adults don't want to help me because I am too young.

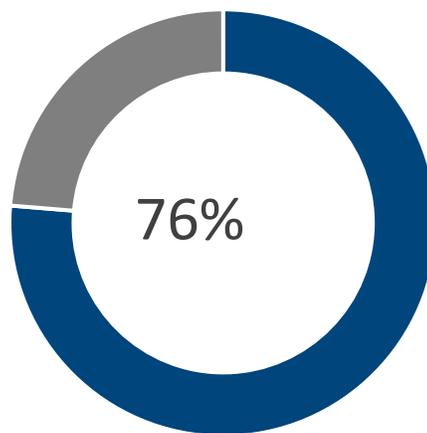


Mental health

Overall, most of the participating students reported high life satisfaction and self-esteem.

Students were asked to rate their life satisfaction from 0 to 10. The mean life satisfaction rating was 7.4. Over three-quarters (76%) reported a high life satisfaction (7 to 10), while 24 per cent reported a life satisfaction of 6 or less.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting a high life satisfaction (7 to 10)



By comparison, 61 per cent of students in the main survey reported a high life satisfaction, while 39 per cent reported a life satisfaction of 6 or less.

Results were similar for self-esteem questions with 78 per cent agreeing they feel good about themselves and 82 per cent agreeing they were able to do things as well as most other people.

Most (72%) secondary students agreed they can deal with things that happen in their life, while 76 per cent agreed they can achieve their goals even if it is hard.

For mental health issues such as insecurity and depression, I believe this should be a case of prevention not cure. One of the things I found worked for me were looking in the mirror every day and saying one or more things I found that were positive.

Understanding more, not judging people, less pressure to be normal

Year 9 to Year 12 students were also asked about sources of stress in the previous 12 months. The most selected sources of stress included climate change (50%), school and



study problems (40%) and mental health and wellbeing (40%). In the main survey, school and study problems were the most common source of stress with 89 per cent of student experiencing stress from this.

Notably, no home-schooled students selected “bullying” as a source of stress, compared to 15 per cent of students in mainstream schooling.

Healthy behaviours

In the survey, questions about healthy behaviours, including drugs, alcohol and sexual health education are asked of secondary school students only. It is critical that young people are well informed and supported to make healthy and safe choices.

Most of the young people reported having learnt a lot or some about smoking (79%), drinking alcohol (75%) at school or through home education, although less than one-half reported having learnt a lot or some about marijuana (48%).

Almost all young people reported that they felt that they know enough about the health impacts of alcohol and cigarettes. However, 22 per cent reported they either did not know enough or were not sure if they knew enough about the health effects of marijuana.

Almost all (>89%) students reported they have not tried smoking or drinking or had any experience with marijuana.

In terms of sexual health education, only two-thirds (68%) of students reported that they feel like they know enough about sexual health and ways to support their sexual health and 27 per cent are not sure if they know enough about pregnancy and contraception.

However, almost all (>89%) participants reported that if they needed help for something about their reproductive or sexual health, they would know where to go.

Connection to community

Most Year 4 to Year 6 students (64%) agreed they belong in their community, whereas only 36 per cent of secondary school students agreed. A comparatively greater proportion of secondary students in mainstream schooling felt like they belong in their community (57%).

Three-quarters of Year 4 to Year 6 students (79%) reported they like where they live, a similar proportion of secondary students agreed (84%). Most students also agreed that their neighbours were friendly and that there were outdoor places for them to go in their area like parks, ovals and skate parks.



Just over half (55%) said there were lots of fun things to do where they lived. These results are similar to the responses from students in mainstream schooling.

I wish there were more green spaces in my local area. I also wish that people would build new building that are eco architectural (sustainable and work with nature).

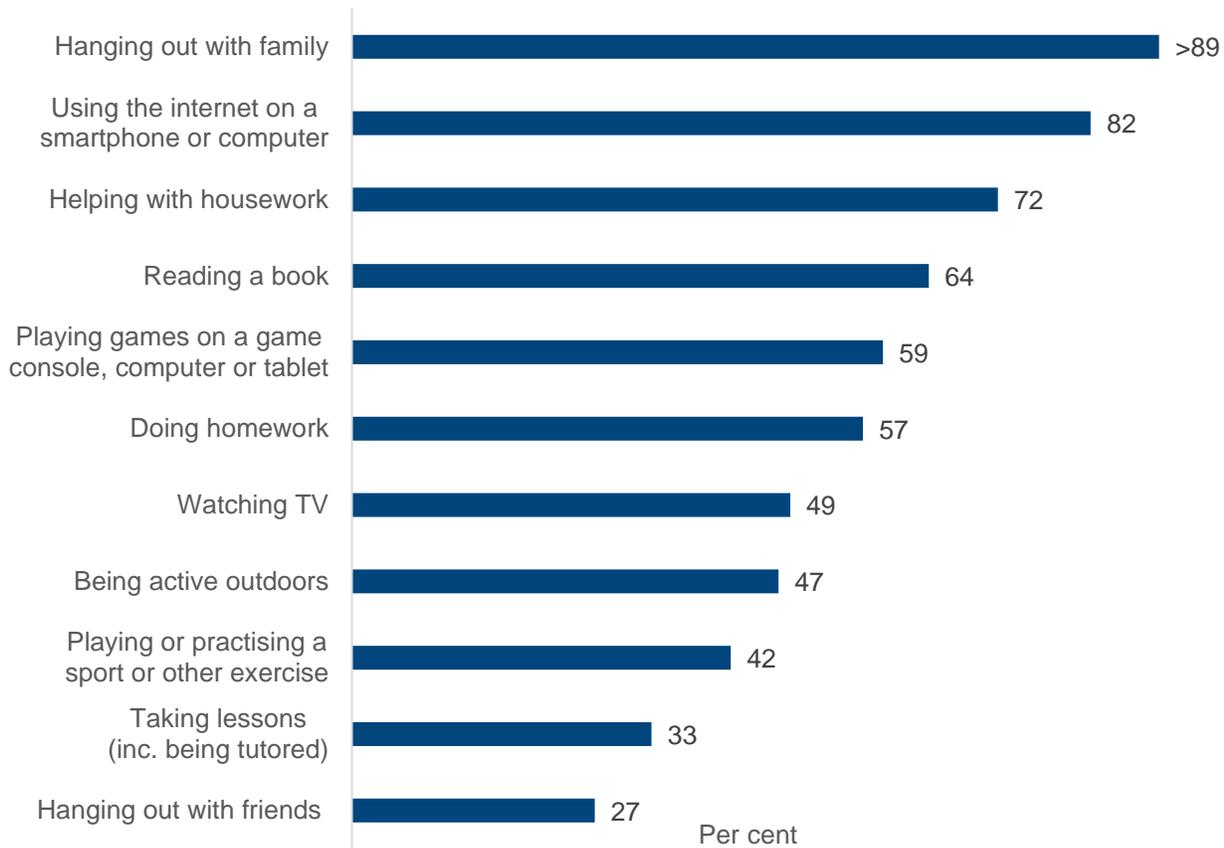
Put more bike trails in. Because I like riding my bike but there aren't many bike trails near me.

I want to keep it a rural area and stop subdivisions. More youth group type activities, but with higher supervision to keep drugs and other negative behaviour out.

Better library

In terms of activities they do when not engaged in home learning, the most common activity for these children and young people was 'hanging out with family' (>89%).

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students doing selected activities outside of home education every day or almost every day





A high proportion (72%) of these participants reported helping with the housework every day or almost every day; this was greater than children and young people in mainstream schooling (55%).

Over half (57%) said they spent time doing homework every day or almost every day, while 35 per cent said they hardly ever or never do homework.

Most students (82%) said they spent time practicing or playing a sport at least once or twice a week, however only 42 per cent reported doing this every day or almost every day.

Just over a quarter (27%) said they spent time hanging out with friends every day or almost every day, 51 per cent did this once or twice a week, and 22 per cent did this less than once a week. In the mainstream survey, 32 per cent of students reported hanging out with friends less than once a week.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Almost half (47%) reported the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes to daily life affected their life in a bad way, a lot or somewhat. This is a greater proportion than children and young people in the mainstream schooling population who felt this way (35%).

Two-fifths (41%) reported feeling very or somewhat relaxed when they thought of COVID-19, while 34 per cent reported feeling very or somewhat anxious/stressed. These views were similar to those reported by students in the main survey.

A number of secondary students also reported COVID-19 as a source of stress in the past year.

One third of students (32%) reported that they were more positive about home education since the COVID-19 pandemic, while the majority had no change in their views on home education.

Safe and Supported

Supportive relationships

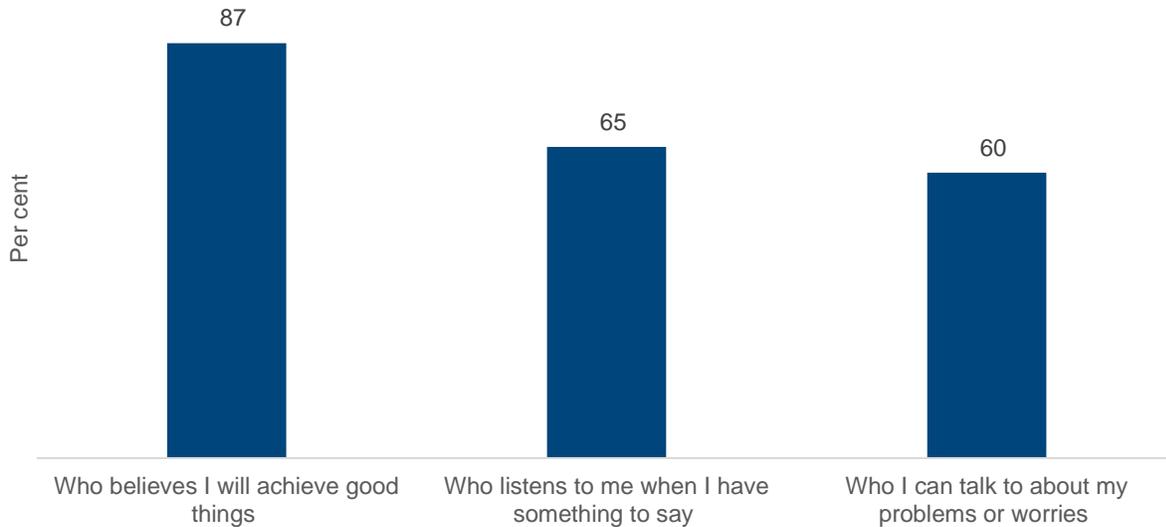
Most of the participants reported having good relationships with their family and feeling supported and listened to.

The majority of students (87%) said their family gets along very well or well and reported it was very much true they lived with a parent or another adult who believes they will achieve good things (87%).



Around three-in-five students said it was very much true they lived with a parent or another adult who listens to them when they have something to say (65%), while 60 per cent said they lived with a parent or another adult they can talk to about their problems or worries.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting it is very much true they live with a parent or another adult who supports them in various ways



Moreover, the majority (85%) of students reported that if they were having serious problems, they have an adult they would feel okay talking to.

When it came to peer friendships, over one-half (56%) felt they are very good at making and keeping friends and most students (85%) reported they feel they have enough friends. Further, one-half (50%) said they feel their friends care about them a lot, while 29 per cent said their friends care about them 'some'. These results were in line with those of students in mainstream schooling.

Material basics

Most students reported having their own bedroom (85%) and that if they were hungry there was always enough food for them to eat at home (82%).

Over three quarters (76%) reported having 'the right kind of clothes' to fit in with people their age, most of the remainder said that while they don't have this, they don't want or need it.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of participants said they get some pocket money each month.



The vast majority reported having their own tablet, laptop or computer, while only two thirds of participants of secondary school age (64%) have their own mobile phone. By comparison, 91 per cent of secondary students in the main survey reported having their own mobile phone.

Safe in the home

Almost two-thirds (66%) of students said they feel safe at home all the time, this was on par with the responses from students across WA (65%).

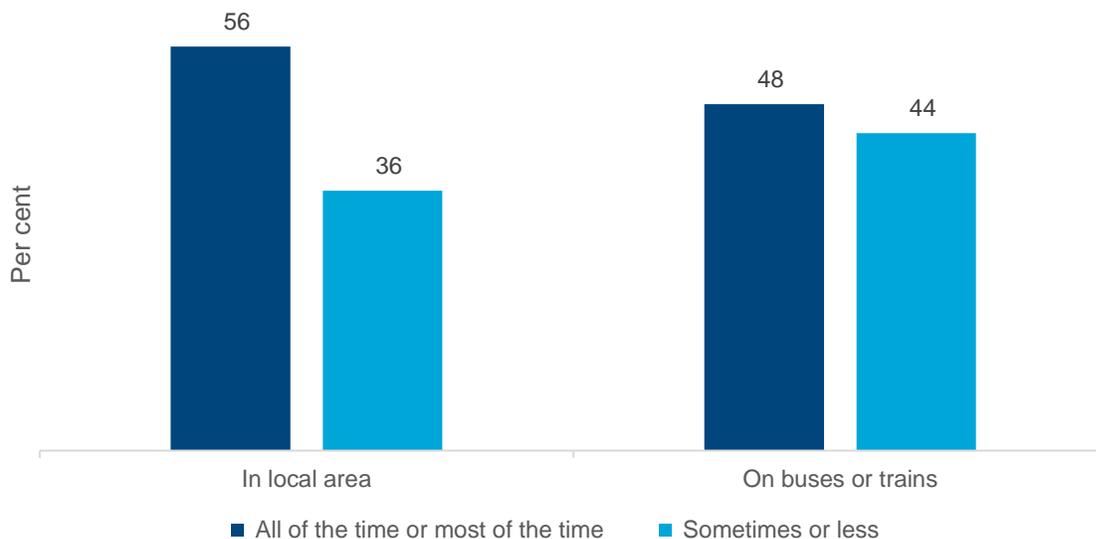
Over two-thirds (68%) said they are not at all worried that someone in their home or family will be fighting, however almost a third (32%) said they were at least a little worried. Similarly, 82 per cent said they are not at all worried that someone in their home or family will hurt somebody, while 18 per cent said they were at least a little worried.

Safe in the community

Most participants (68%) reported they feel safe in their local area all the time or most of the time, while over a quarter (26%) reported feeling safe in their local area only sometimes or less often. These results are similar to those for students in mainstream schooling.

A large proportion (44%) of participants of secondary school age feel safe on public transport only sometimes or less.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting how safe they feel in their local area and public transport





I have anxiety and dont ever really feel safe Except when I am with my boyfriend, he makes me feel safe and wanted.

People I don't like the look of, things I see which I believe or know are wrong, a feeling of unease, dark city at night, backstreets, being alone.

Being in a back alley in a street, people on public transport being antisocial (not just to me), being home alone (sometimes).

Conclusion

In recent years there has been a significant increase in children and young people who are being educated at home in WA. While it is likely some families experienced home education for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic and decided to continue with it, there was a steady increase occurring before the pandemic.

There has been little research or consultation conducted with children and young people who are home educated. These survey results therefore provide a unique insight into these children and young people's views and experiences.

Children and young people who are educated at home are a diverse group of students and their views and perspectives are important. The Commissioner will continue to create opportunities to listen directly to children and young people who are engaged in home education and ensure their voices are heard.

Appendix A: Approach and methodology

Speaking Out Survey 2021

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 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.

For the 2021 Speaking Out Survey, a sampling methodology was designed to select 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, and to understand changes in these estimates over time.

Schools were randomly selected and invited to participate. Schools were stratified by sector (government, Catholic, independent) and by region (major cities, inner/outer regional and remote/very remote).

Approval for the research to be undertaken on their respective school sites was granted by the Department of Education and Catholic Education WA. The Association of Independent Schools WA supported the research. Participation in the survey was the decision of the individual principal of the selected schools.

The survey was also supported by the following organisations:

- Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC)
- Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum (KAHPF)
- Pilbara Aboriginal Health Planning Forum (PAHPF)
- Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
- Yamatji Aboriginal Health Planning Forum.

For more information on the methodology employed for the Speaking Out Survey 2021 refer to the SOS21 summary report: [*Speaking Out Survey 2021: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report.*](#)



Home Educated Students' survey

The extension to include home educated students in the Speaking Out Survey involved:

- Modifications to the survey instrument to adjust questions that mentioned 'school' and to add some additional questions on home education.
- Parents with home-educated children were contacted (via email) and provided with information on the survey and the opportunity for their child(ren) to participate.
- Parents who were interested contacted Home Education WA or the Commissioner's office to be included in a survey session. Most of the survey sessions were conducted online via Microsoft Teams.

At the start of each survey session, students were advised that the survey was voluntary, and they were not required to participate. They were also asked for their specific consent in the first question of the survey.

For the online surveys, parents/carers were requested to not sit with their child or assist, unless this was necessary for comprehension. However, because the surveys were conducted online this could not be controlled, therefore it is possible some participants' responses may have been influenced by having a parent/carer in the room.

Due to the small number of participants, data in this document has been reported based on a confidentiality threshold as per 'the frequency rule of 4', in line with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data confidentiality guide.³ Under the rule of 4, any responses with 3 or less participants answering in a particular way are suppressed. Since this report presents results in percentage terms, the percentages values that equate to responses of 3 or less are suppressed. Specifically, percentages equal to or less than 11 per cent and percentages equal to or greater than 89 per cent are suppressed.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, [Treating Aggregate Data: Data confidentiality guide](#), Australian Bureau of Statistics [website].