

December 2022



The health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in remote WA

Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

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:

Thank you to the Aboriginal students across WA who participated in the Speaking Out Survey 2021, particularly the students, in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields who were part of the Remote Aboriginal Students extension (SOS21 extension). We would also like to thank participating schools for their contribution to this project. Without their help, the survey would not have been possible. In addition, we would like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities who supported the survey.

The extension of the Speaking Out Survey was made possible due to funding from Lotterywest. Further information about the Speaking Out Survey is available at ccyp.wa.gov.au.

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The images of Western Australian children and young people used in this report are generic and do not infer a particular school or student's involvement in the Speaking Out Survey.

Message from the Commissioner

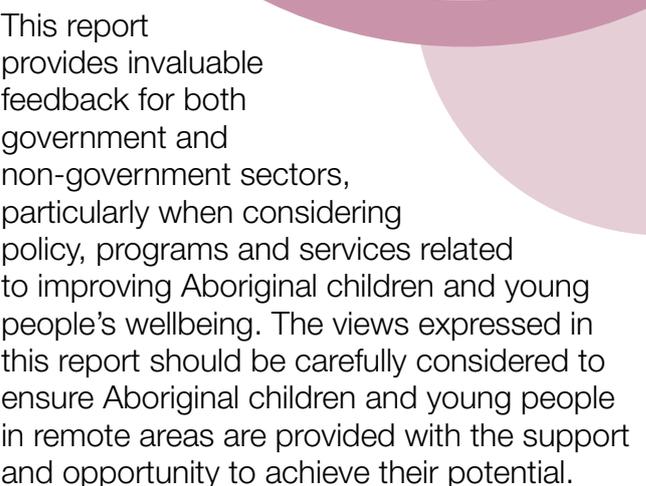
In 2021, my office undertook the second Speaking Out Survey (SOS21) collecting the views of 16,532 children and young people across Western Australia (WA). In this survey, 660 Aboriginal children and young people living in remote areas provided their perspectives on a range of topics including their physical and mental health, their connection to community and whether they feel safe and supported at home and school.

In 2020/2021, Lotterywest funding was received to extend SOS21 to include more Aboriginal children and young people in remote communities. Through this extension we reached another 327 Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations.

In total, we visited 36 schools in remote areas across the Kimberley, Pilbara, Mid West, Goldfields, Wheatbelt and South West.

In my role as the Commissioner for Children and Young People I am committed to supporting the social, cultural, emotional and physical wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people across WA. I am an Arrente-Waramungu woman myself and this makes me particularly mindful of the importance of ensuring the voices of Aboriginal children and young people are heard.

This report shows that many Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas of WA are doing well, they have loving and supportive families, they like going to school and they feel safe and welcome in their communities. However, there are challenges, which are often related to experiences of poverty and social disadvantage.



This report provides invaluable feedback for both government and non-government sectors, particularly when considering policy, programs and services related to improving Aboriginal children and young people's wellbeing. The views expressed in this report should be carefully considered to ensure Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas are provided with the support and opportunity to achieve their potential.

I would like to thank the 987 Aboriginal children and young people in remote WA who completed the survey. I would also like to thank the staff of the schools we visited and the community members who welcomed my team and assisted with the survey.



Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner for Children and Young People



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1 Executive Summary

This report presents the results of the Speaking Out Survey 2021 for the 987 Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations across Western Australia (WA) who participated. It provides an overview of their health and wellbeing and a critical insight into their views and experiences.

The Speaking Out Survey is a unique opportunity for children and young people across WA to have their say on their health and wellbeing. The survey results increase understanding of how children and young people are faring and highlights the priority areas that need to be better understood and acted upon.

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. Of these, 660 children and young people identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and lived in remote locations across WA.

In 2020/2021, Lotterywest funding was received to extend the Speaking Out Survey to include more children and young people in remote communities and other children and young people who are not engaged in mainstream schooling.

Through this extension survey, a further 327 Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations participated in the Speaking Out Survey.

To conduct the survey, the Commissioner's staff undertakes fieldwork across WA to facilitate the survey and ensure children and young people feel safe and supported to take part.

Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations across WA can often experience significant disadvantage and vulnerabilities for a variety of reasons including poverty, limited access to health services, fewer opportunities to engage in quality early childhood education and lower attendance rates at schools. Further, the effects of colonisation including the stolen generations, inter-generational trauma and racism all intersect to disrupt many Aboriginal children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing.

“Thanks for doing this for us kids, we don't really get stuff like this thank you.”

(female, 8 year-old)



Despite these challenges, most Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas feel safe, have good relationships with their friends and family, and enjoy going to school; they also show their strength and resilience across many areas of wellbeing.

- Almost **three-quarters (72%) of Aboriginal students in remote locations feel safe at home all the time** and 72 per cent said that there is a parent or another adult at home who listens to them when they have something to say.
- **Most Aboriginal students in remote areas like going to school** and two-thirds (65%) said it is important to attend school every day.
- **84 per cent** of students reported that their **general health was good, very good or excellent**.

This report also highlights that many Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas continue to experience significant material disadvantage.

- **Fifteen per cent** of participants reported that there is **never or only sometimes enough food to eat at home** (all of WA: 9%).
- **Almost one-third (31%)** of Aboriginal secondary school students in remote locations **do not have their own laptop** compared to 12 per cent of all secondary school students across WA.

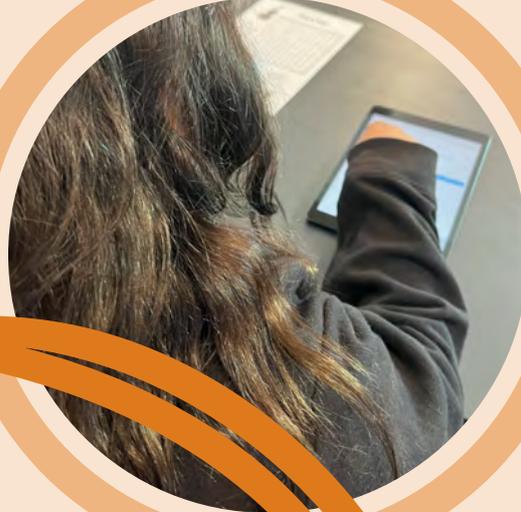
Aboriginal children in remote locations in Years 4 to 6 are also three-times more likely than those across WA to have moved home two or more times in the past 12-months (36% compared to 11%).

Further, Aboriginal secondary students in remote areas are less likely than non-Aboriginal secondary students to feel like they are doing well at school and less likely to be planning to complete further education after secondary school.

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 provides invaluable data for the decision-makers and service providers within WA to enable them to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people.



2



Introduction

“Thank you for doing this, I like the idea a lot because it’s kinda like a silent listener that is actually listening to your problems.”

(student who selected ‘in another way’, 12 year-old)

2 Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (the Commissioner) developed the Speaking Out Survey to capture the views of a representative sample of children and young people in Western Australia (WA) and produce a robust data source relating to the wellbeing of children and young people in our 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).

Despite various short-term COVID-19 restrictions in place during 2021, 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. Of these, 1,488 or 9.1 per cent of the children and young people who participated in SOS21 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 660 of these lived in remote locations across WA.

The *Speaking Out Survey 2021: The views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing – a summary report* published in November 2021, outlines the results of SOS21, including a chapter on the views and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people across all of WA.

Under the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, the Commissioner is required to have special regard to the interests and needs of Aboriginal children and young people and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and children and young people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged for any reason.

In 2020/2021, Lotterywest funding was received to extend SOS21 to include more Aboriginal children and young people in remote communities and other children and young people who are not engaged in mainstream schooling. This was deemed crucial to ensure all children and young people's experiences and views are heard to help shape the response and recovery to COVID-19 in 2022 and beyond.

The Remote Aboriginal students' extension project was therefore initiated to enable more children and young people in remote communities to have their say through SOS21.

This project provided an opportunity to engage more directly with remote communities and modify the Speaking Out Survey to potentially improve accessibility. As part of the extension project, the Commissioner's office visited an additional 11 schools in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields to pilot a modified version of the Speaking Out Survey questionnaire with 327 Aboriginal students.

This project and a summary of results are discussed in more detail in **Section 4** below.

Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations who participated in the Speaking Out Survey 2021

660	327	987
Main survey	Extension survey	Total participants

There is limited data available relating to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in WA, particularly data for children and young people aged 0 to 17 years living in regional or remote locations.

This report provides significant insights into the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people (aged 8 to 17 years) living in remote locations across WA.

It is important to note that while this report provides summary findings of Aboriginal students reporting on health and wellbeing across remote regions of WA, it can be misleading to generalise findings and challenges across individual communities. Direct community engagement by establishing long-term relationships is advised for evaluating Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

It should also be noted that because the Speaking Out Survey is facilitated through schools, those children and young people who do not attend school regularly may not have had the opportunity to have their say, and the results may be biased accordingly.

Participants in the Speaking Out Survey were 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.

Aboriginal students were generally less likely than non-Aboriginal students to provide responses to the open text questions, however 406 Aboriginal participants in remote areas provided their views on these topics.

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 (...).

All quotes in this report are from Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations.

The survey asked participants whether they describe themselves as a girl, a boy or 'in another way'. Whilst the students who selected 'in another way' may identify as another gender (for example non-binary, gender diverse, genderfluid etc.) – this cannot be assumed, given the way in which this question was asked. Additionally, we know that these responses will not reflect many trans children and young people who identify as a boy or girl. Therefore, the data does not represent the full cohort of trans and/or gender diverse children and young people.

In this report, when presenting a quote from these students, in place of their gender identity we have *stated: student who selected 'in another way'*.

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 or not relevant to their lives.

“Too many questions.”

(female, 9 year-old)

“Make it shorter.”

(male, 12 year-old)

“No one is gonna change specially with this cringy survey.”

(male, 15 year-old)

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

“Thank you for listening to me.” 😊

(female, 8 year-old)

“I recon that you did a great job!”

(male, 8 year-old)

“Thanks for doing this for us kids we don’t really. Get stuff like this thank you.”

(female, 8 year-old)

“I loved it.” 👍👍👍

(male, 10 year-old)

“This survey is very quick and simple to do.”

(male, 10 year-old)

“What I think about this survey was it was good.”

(female, 11 year-old)

“I thought this was good to do, to let us vent in private.”

(male, 16 year-old)

“Cool and special for my culture.”

(male, 17 year-old)

“I found this survey very helpful because I got talk about how I felt.”

(female, 10 year-old)



3



Speaking Out Survey 2021 results

**“It was good to
tell people about
how I felt about school
home and even my
physical activity.”**

(male, 11 year-old)

3 Speaking Out Survey 2021 results

3.1 Demographics

This section presents results for the 660 Aboriginal children and young people living in remote and very remote areas across WA who participated in the main Speaking Out Survey 2021. In total, 25 schools in remote WA¹ participated in SOS21.

Of these, 51.0 per cent identified as a girl, 46.5 per cent identified as a boy and 2.5 per cent selected the option that they describe themselves 'in another way'.

Just over two-thirds (69%) of the students were in secondary school (Years 7 to 12) and 31 per cent were in primary school (Years 4 to 6).

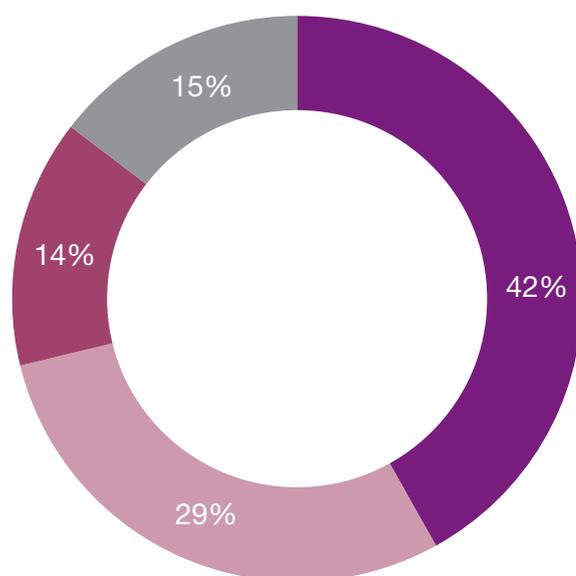
Almost all participants reported being Aboriginal (87%) and five per cent reported that they are Torres Strait Islander, while eight per cent reported they are both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

3.2 COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had less impact on people in Western Australia than many other jurisdictions, children and young people across WA were still affected by intermittent lockdowns, home-schooling and worries about family and friends in other states and countries.

Of the Aboriginal participants in remote locations, more than two-fifths (42%) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected their life in a bad way at all, while 44 per cent reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their life in a bad way a little or somewhat and 15 per cent said it had affected their life in a bad way a lot.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting whether COVID-19 had affected their life in a bad way



■ Not at all ■ A little ■ Somewhat ■ A lot

These results were more positive than respondents across all of WA, where only 24 per cent said it had not affected their life at all while a similar proportion (12%) said a lot.

With regards to what emotions students were feeling about COVID-19, 15 per cent of respondents felt very anxious/stressed about COVID-19, while over one-third (36%) were not at all anxious or stressed. These results were similar to the responses across WA.

In the Commissioner's consultations with children and young people, it is evident that some children and young people enjoyed being temporarily educated at home and/or having more family time during lockdowns. However, a number of children and young people also reported feeling sad and worried about their family members in other states and countries, being worried about their parents' jobs, or missing their friends if they were at home.

3.3 Healthy and connected

*“Have more local and accessible places for young people to go about their mental health without them feeling pressured to do so, or that they would be judged for doing so.”
(female, 15 year-old)*

Physical and mental health is a basic building block for children and young people’s current wellbeing and future life outcomes. For Aboriginal children and young people health is viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health and the importance of connection to the land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community.²

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.

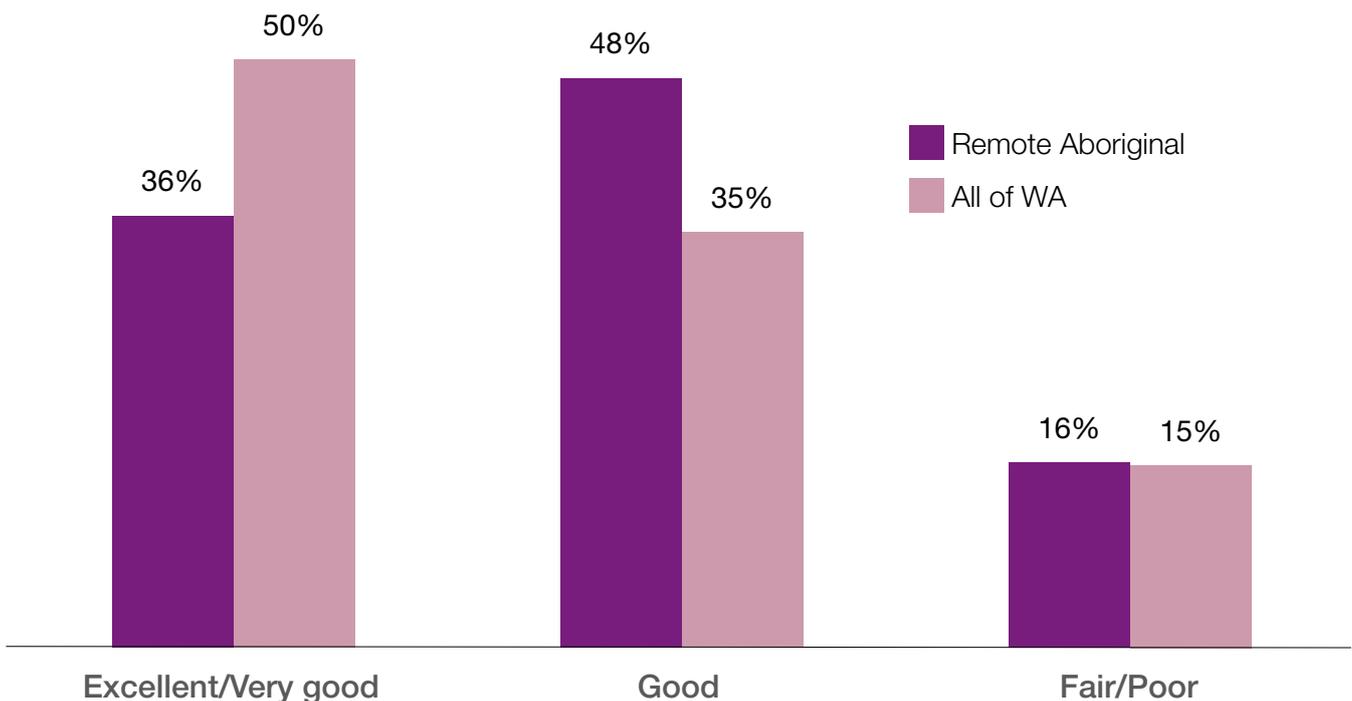
Physical health also influences children and young people’s engagement with family, education and friends and supports socio-emotional health.³ Being physically healthy includes being physically active, having a good diet and being in the healthy weight range.

Most Aboriginal secondary school students (86%) in remote areas reported they did not have a long-term disability and around 68 per cent reported no long-term health problems. Of those who reported long-term health problems, common conditions reported were asthma and/or mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Of the students surveyed, over one-third reported that their health is excellent or very good (36%), one-half (48%) reported their health was good and 16 per cent reported their health was fair or poor.

Aboriginal students in remote locations were less likely than students across WA to report that their health was excellent or very good (36% compared to 50%).

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

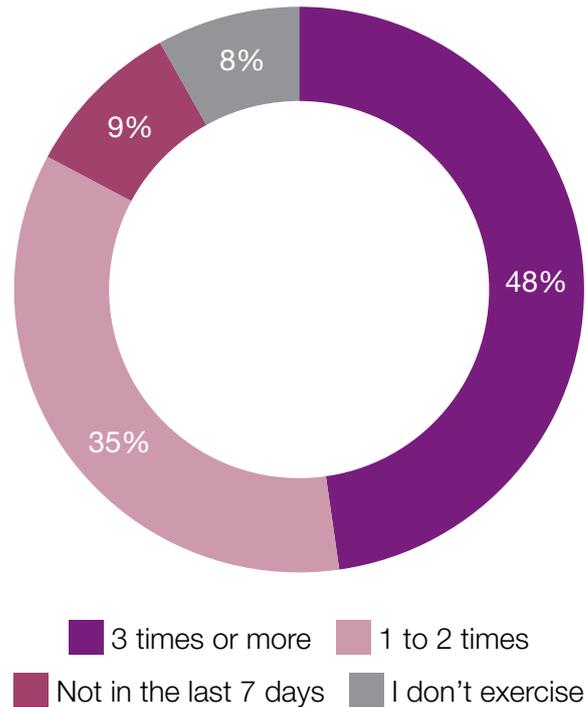


Most participants (Years 4 to 12) reported they care about staying fit and being physically active very much (48%) or some (33%), while 19 per cent reported they care only a little or not at all. Three-quarters of participants said they care about eating healthy food very much (38%) or some (38%) and 23 per cent said they care a little or not at all.

The data suggests that primary school students (Years 4 to 6) care more about eating healthy food than secondary school students. This is consistent with the results across all of WA.

Less than one-half (48%) of Aboriginal secondary school students in remote locations had done any exercise or activity that made them sweat, breathe hard or get their heart rate up at least three times in the last week. Further, eight per cent said they don't exercise and nine per cent said they had done no vigorous exercise in the last week.

Year 7 to Year 12 students' responses to how often they do any exercise or activity that makes them sweat, breathe hard, or gets their heart rate up

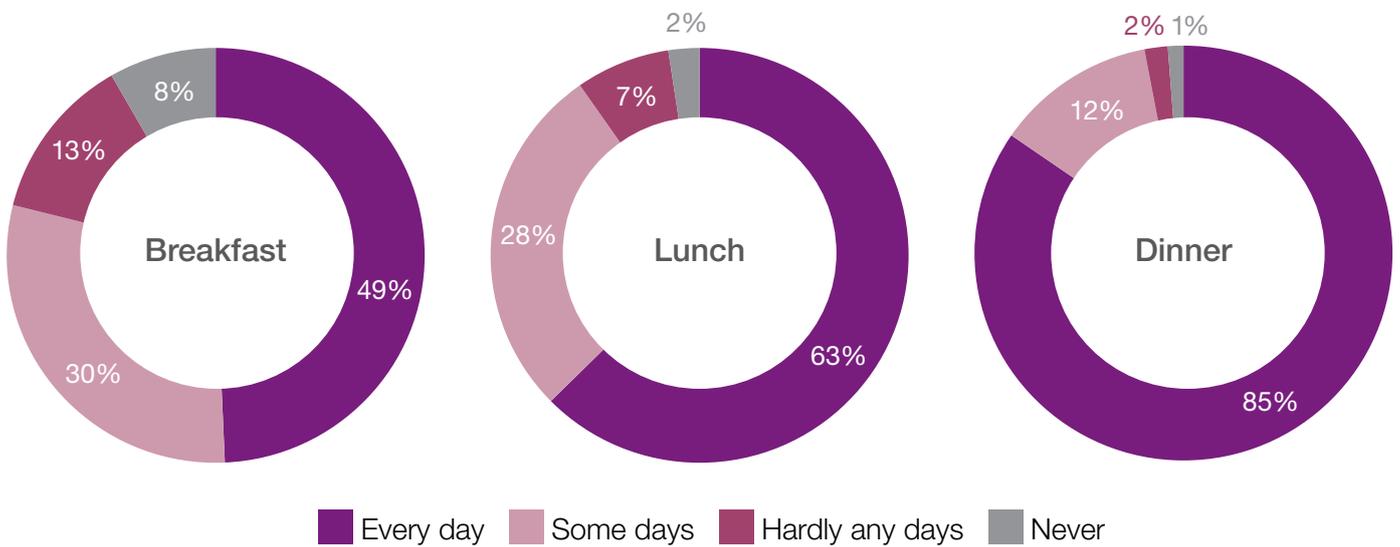


In contrast, 63 per cent of secondary school students across WA do vigorous exercise at least 3-times a week, five per cent said they don't exercise and six per cent had not exercised in the last week.

More than one-half (52%) of Aboriginal secondary students in remote areas reported eating vegetables at least two times each day, while 18 per cent said they eat vegetables only a few times a week or less. These are similar proportions to children and young people across WA.

One-half (51%) of Year 4 to Year 12 students do not eat breakfast every day, while a significant minority of students do not eat lunch (37%) or dinner (15%) every day.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting how often they eat breakfast, lunch or dinner



Female secondary students were less likely than male students to eat breakfast every day (30% vs. 45%), however male secondary students were more likely to never eat breakfast (15% vs. 8%). There were no gender differences for lunch or dinner consumption.

Most students said they care about how they look very much (41%) or some (24%), while 16 per cent worry a lot about their weight and 28 per cent care some. Female secondary school students were more likely than their male peers to worry a lot about their weight and more likely to care about how they look.

Having a good nights' 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.⁴

Just over three-quarters (78%) of Year 4 to Year 6 Aboriginal students in remote areas reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night. Less than one-half (48%) of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night, with 41 per cent going to sleep between 10pm and midnight and 11 per cent reporting they usually go to sleep after midnight.

This corresponds with the results for secondary school students across WA (10% usually go to sleep after midnight).



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.

In Aboriginal culture, people’s sense of self is viewed in a collective sense, connected to ‘all aspects of life, community, spirituality, culture and country’. Aboriginal people find meaning through their connection to country and their Dreaming.⁵ In contemporary society the effects of colonisation including the stolen

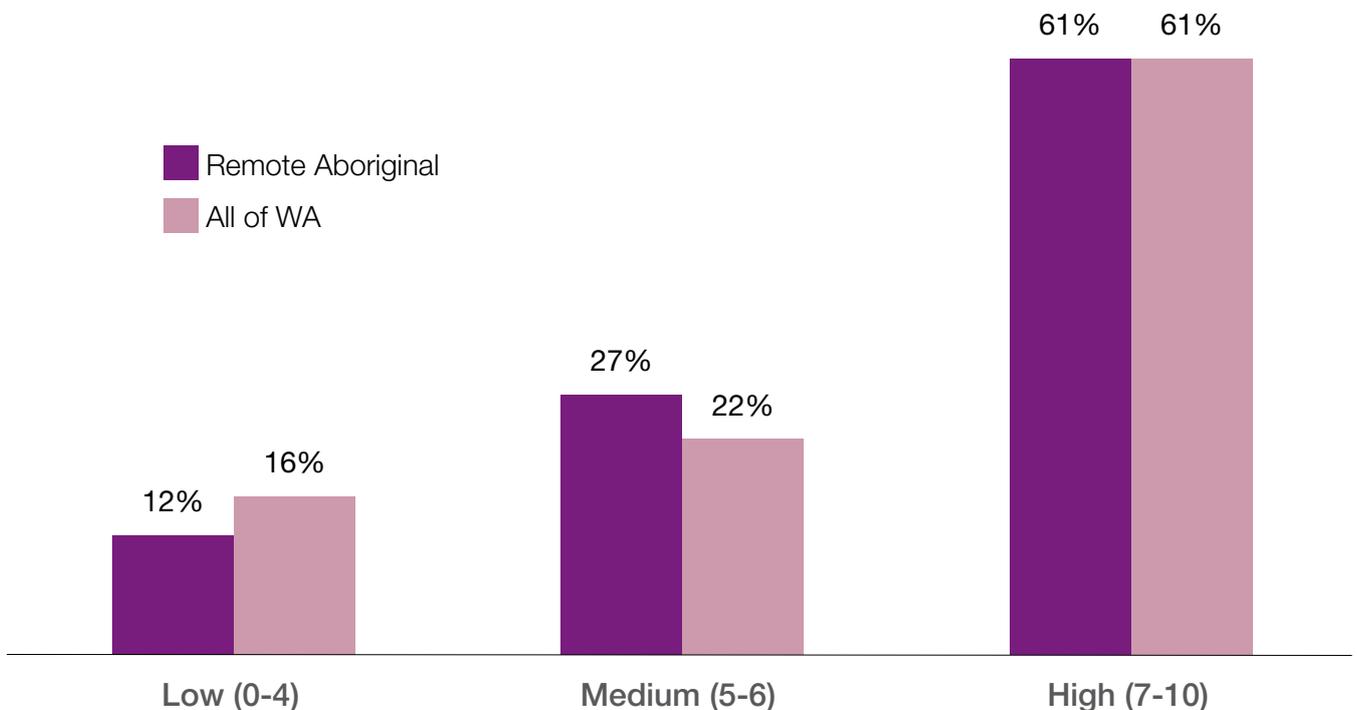
generations, ongoing social disadvantage and racism all intersect to disrupt Aboriginal peoples’ social and emotional wellbeing.

Despite these challenges, Aboriginal children and young people in remote WA reported similar responses to the questions on mental health as the full survey population across WA.

More than one-half (61%) of participating Year 4 to Year 12 students rated their life satisfaction as between 7 and 10 (out of 10), 27 per cent rated their life satisfaction as between five and six, and 12 per cent rated their life satisfaction as low (0 to 4).

Similar to results across WA, primary school students reported higher life satisfaction than secondary school students, and female young people were more likely than their male peers to rate their life satisfaction as low (female: 22%; male: 11%).

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

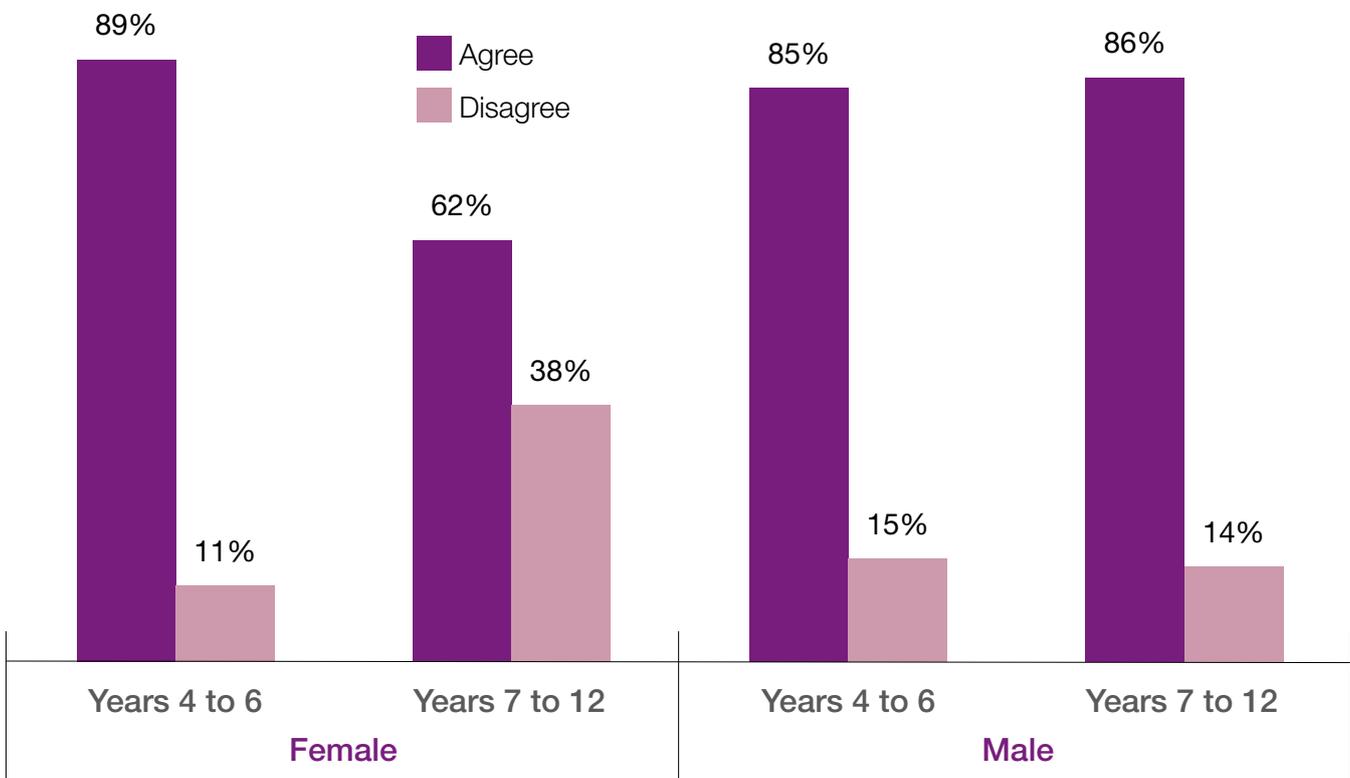


“Schools could maybe check ups on students every once and a while? I can’t really ask someone about my own mental health, and I’d like to have someone to talk to where I don’t have to go find them on my own, I’m not too confident.”

(female, 15 year-old)

A large proportion (86%) of children in Years 4 to 6 said they feel good about themselves, while this decreases to 75 per cent of secondary school participants. This is principally due to a reduction in the proportion of female young people feeling good about themselves.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students agreeing that they feel good about themselves



These results are consistent with the findings across all of WA.

In the open text responses, female young people were more likely to talk about feeling down or having mental health issues.

“If I feel down at school I don’t want the teachers being nosey and constantly pressuring me to tell them I don’t want my parents blaming my anxiety on my phone.”
(female, 13 year-old)

“I don’t know how to handle with my anxiety because when it gets too much for me I struggle and my depression takes over my body and it doesn’t make me feel good. I hate feeling alone.”
(female, 13 year-old)

“I don’t like to talk about it to other people and there’s just some things that I scared to talk about because of [feeling] emotional embarrassed and ashamed.”
(female, 15 year-old)

Male young people were more likely to note that it is hard to talk about personal problems.

“Not make such a big deal out of the little thing because it can pressure us into not want to look for help again in the future also not make up things to put in our heads later on filling it with overthinking constantly because it possibly effect the friends and family around you.”

(male, 16 year old)

“A lot of people won’t talk to anyone about their problems.”

(male, 17 year-old)

“Create a more supportive environment and not lean on the masculinity side of things, such as allowing emotions to not be seen as ‘weak’ or ‘unmanly’. Create a support group where men and women that suffer from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression have each other to support one another.”

(male, 17 year-old)

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 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 Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12 in remote areas reported having learnt a lot or some about smoking (71%), drinking alcohol (72%) and marijuana (57%) at school. However, a sizeable minority reported they had learnt nothing about these topics in school (cigarettes: 13%; alcohol: 11%, marijuana: 24%).

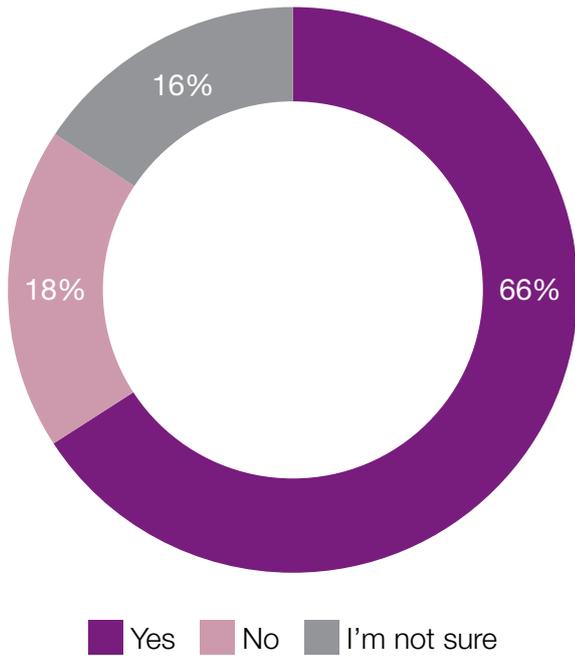
One-third (33%) of Year 7 to Year 12 Aboriginal students in remote areas reported they had tried cigarette smoking (even just a few puffs), while 7 per cent said they would prefer not to say. In contrast, 18 per cent of secondary school students across WA had tried smoking.

Two-in-five (42%) of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported they had drunk alcohol. This is similar to the responses across all of WA.

Over one-third (34%) of students reported that they have had experiences with marijuana⁶ and 37 per cent said at least one of their friends uses marijuana. These results are marginally higher than the results across the state.

One-third (34%) of participants reported that they do not know or are unsure where to go if they needed help for something about smoking, drinking, or other drugs.

Secondary school students' responses to the question: If you needed help for smoking, drinking, or other drugs, would you know where to go?



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

The majority of Aboriginal students in remote locations reported they had learnt some (36%) or a lot (28%) about sexual health, while 12 per cent reported they had learnt nothing. With respect to pregnancy and contraception, one-half of students reported they had learnt a lot (22%) or some (28%), while 28 per cent reported they had learnt a little and 22 per cent of students reported they had learnt nothing.

The data suggests that male students are more likely to report having learnt nothing compared to female students. This pattern was not evident for the results across WA.

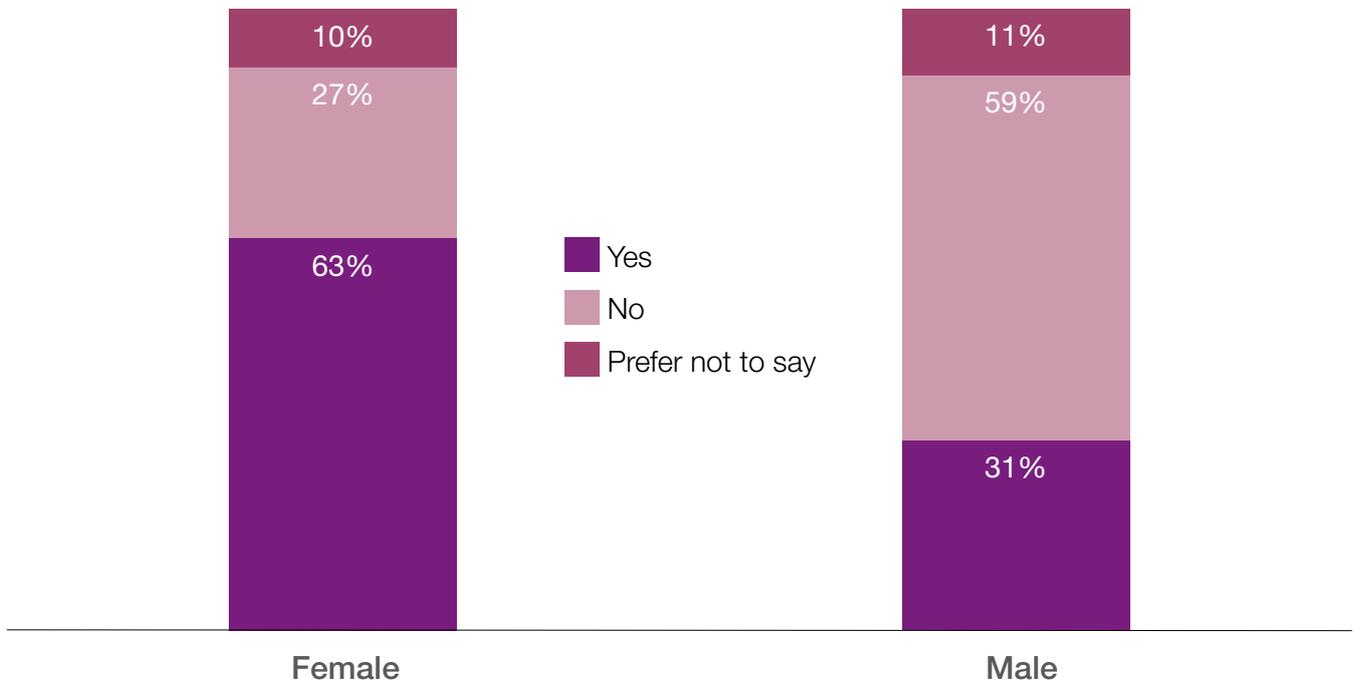
Students were also asked whether they found sexual education classes relevant. Only one-third of students found the classes extremely relevant (9%) or very relevant (28%), while just over-one half reported the classes were somewhat relevant (52%) and 11 per cent said they were not relevant at all. These results are similar to the responses for the whole of WA.

Less than one-half of students (44%) said they feel they know enough about pregnancy and contraception, while 19 per cent reported they do not feel they know enough and 37 per cent are unsure. Further, 15 per cent of students reported they would not know where to go if they needed help about their reproductive or sexual health, while 20 per cent were not sure.

One-in-five (21%) Year 9 to Year 12 students reported having had sexual intercourse (this question was not asked of students in Years 7 to 8), while 12 per cent preferred not to say.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of female students and almost one-third (30%) of male students in Years 9 to 12 reported having ever been sent unwanted sexual material, such as pornographic pictures, videos, or words. These results are consistent with the responses for the whole of WA.

Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students reporting whether they have ever been sent unwanted sexual stuff, like pornographic pictures, videos or words



The majority of students who had been sent unwanted sexual material received it through social media.

Connection to culture and community

Connection to culture and community is critical for young people’s health and wellbeing. It provides a positive sense of identity and belonging. Having a connection to culture is particularly central to the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people.⁷

In the Commissioner’s consultations with Aboriginal children and young people they have spoken about how important culture is to them, including doing traditional activities, spending time on country, respect for elders and spending time with family.⁸

Most (75%) Year 4 to Year 12 Aboriginal students in remote areas know their family’s country, while 21 per cent were not sure.

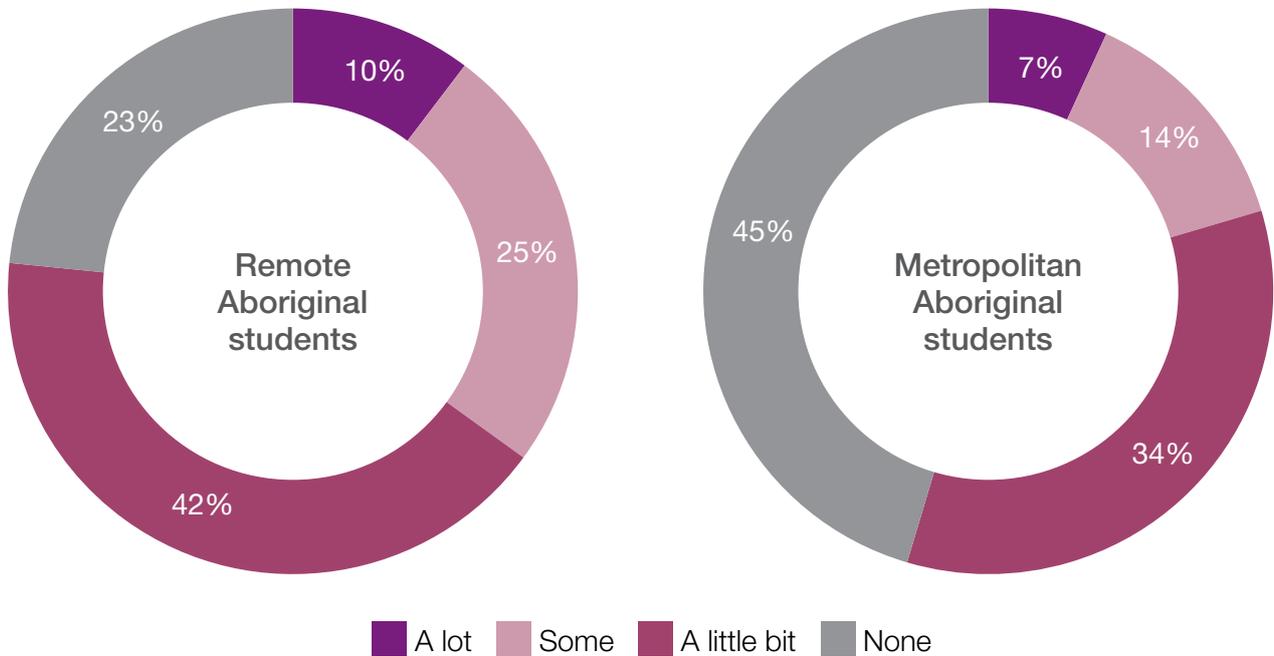
Of those who know their family’s country, 89 per cent reported that they spend time there.

Over one-half (57%) of Aboriginal students in remote areas do cultural or traditional activities with their family. Female children and young people were more likely than male to say that they do cultural or traditional activities with their family.

With regard to speaking an Aboriginal language, 35 per cent of students across Years 4 to 12 speak Aboriginal language a lot or some (primary school: 53%, secondary school: 25%), while 42 per cent speak a little bit. Almost one-quarter (23%) of Year 4 to Year 12 students reported not speaking an Aboriginal language (primary school: 16%, secondary school: 28%).

In comparison, 20 per cent of Aboriginal Year 4 to Year 12 students in the metropolitan area speak Aboriginal language a lot or some, while 45 per cent reported they speak none.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students who speak an Aboriginal language



Most participants (98%) speak English at home, while 15 per cent also spoke another language. The other languages spoken included Martu, Kriol, Aboriginal English and Bardi.

The majority (80%) of children in Years 4 to 6 like where they live and feel like they belong in their community. In secondary school, a high proportion (74%) also reported liking where they live, while 63 per cent feel like they belong in the community.

Female Aboriginal young people in remote areas were less likely than their male peers to agree a lot that they feel like they belong in their community.

These results are consistent with the results across all of WA.

In this survey, no open text questions were asked about connection to culture or community although at least one respondent was clear about wanting more education on Aboriginal culture.

“Teach our culture.”

(female, 12 year-old)

Only 44 per cent of young people reported that there are lots of fun things to do in their local area. This is consistent with the responses from all students (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in remote areas.

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 Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas were very similar to non-Aboriginal children and young people.

Many Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations mentioned needing a skatepark, swimming pool or basketball courts.

“A park and a swimming pool and cold water fountains.”

(female, 13 year-old)

“Add a basketball court.”

(male, 16 year-old)

“Build a footy oval.”

(male, 16 year-old)

“Have a local pool.”

(male, 12 year-old)

In some instances, there were existing facilities, but they were old and run-down.

“The skate park Like bruh it’s so trash.”

(male, 12 year-old)

“I would make the pool slides a lot bigger and build a lollie shop in south so we don’t have to drive all the way to port and a deeper pool and a kfc and a bigger pool at the school (oh that rhymed) and that’s pretty much it so yeah bye :)”

(female, 13 year-old)

Many students reported that there was simply not a lot for young people to do in their local area.

“For activities for teenagers rather than little kids.”

(female, 14 year-old)

**“A better park?
There’s only
one small oval,
basically grass.”**

(female, 15 year-old)

“This town is so trash there’s nothing to do here.”

(male, 14 year-old)

“More places for teens to hang out all year round and more parks.”

(female, 15 year-old)

“Bit more stuff for young people to do.”

(male, 16 year-old)

“More opportunities open to the youth, active places and things to do such as theme parks, arcades, cinemas etc.”

(female, 16 year-old)

“The town of Port Hedland/ South doesn’t have much activities to keep us busy and other kids out of trouble.”

(female, 17 years)

The Commissioner is planning to publish a report on regional results of SOS21 which will provide further insight into children and young people’s views on their local communities. Refer to our website for further information.



3.4 Safe and supported

“If you’re sad/ not feeling the best mentally, try and surround yourself with people that love and support you, you don’t have to be by yourself all the time, there’s always someone that’s there for you whether you know them at school or somewhere else. Sometimes if you feel anxious or sad, those feelings will come and go.”

(student who selected ‘in another way’, 14 year-old)

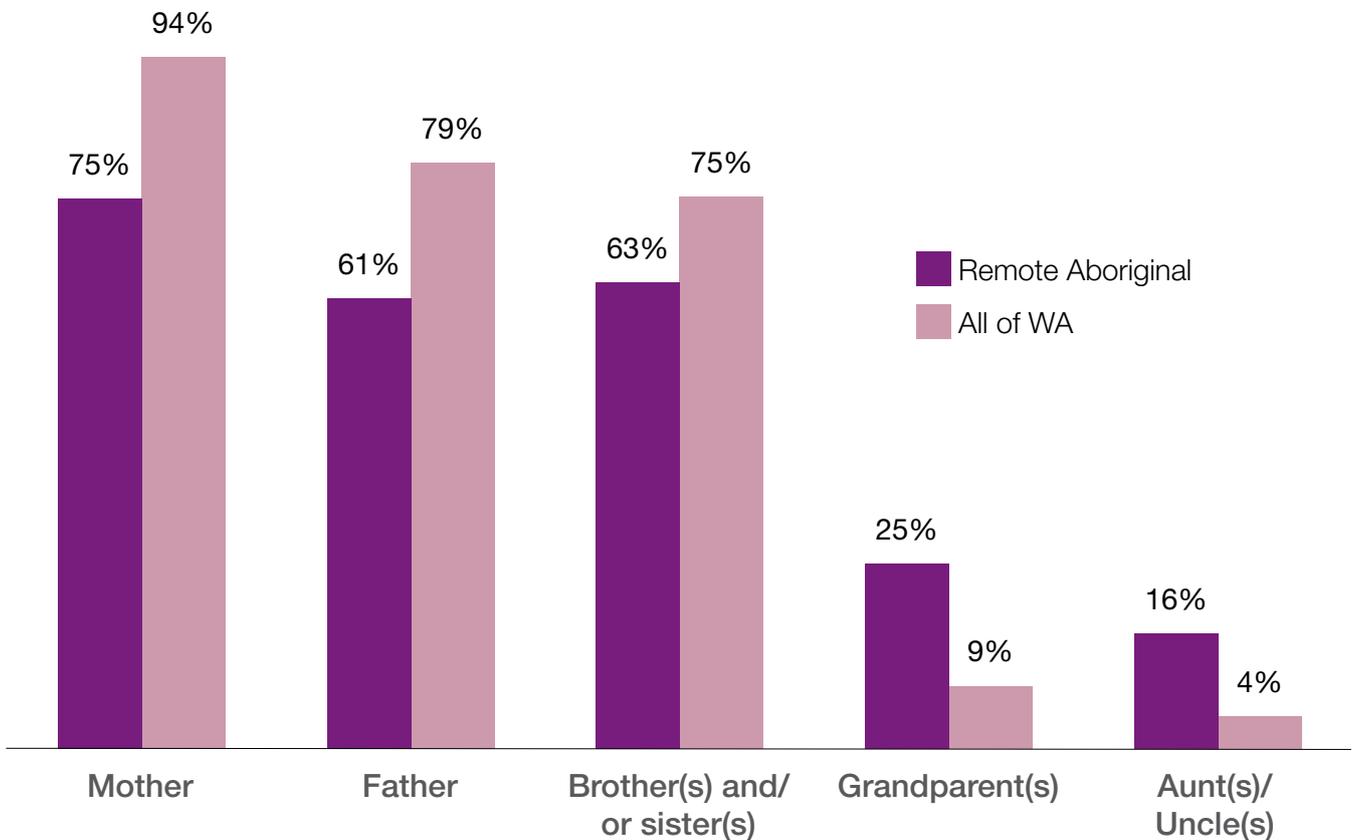
Supportive Relationships

Aboriginal children and young people across WA are more likely to live with extended family members.⁹

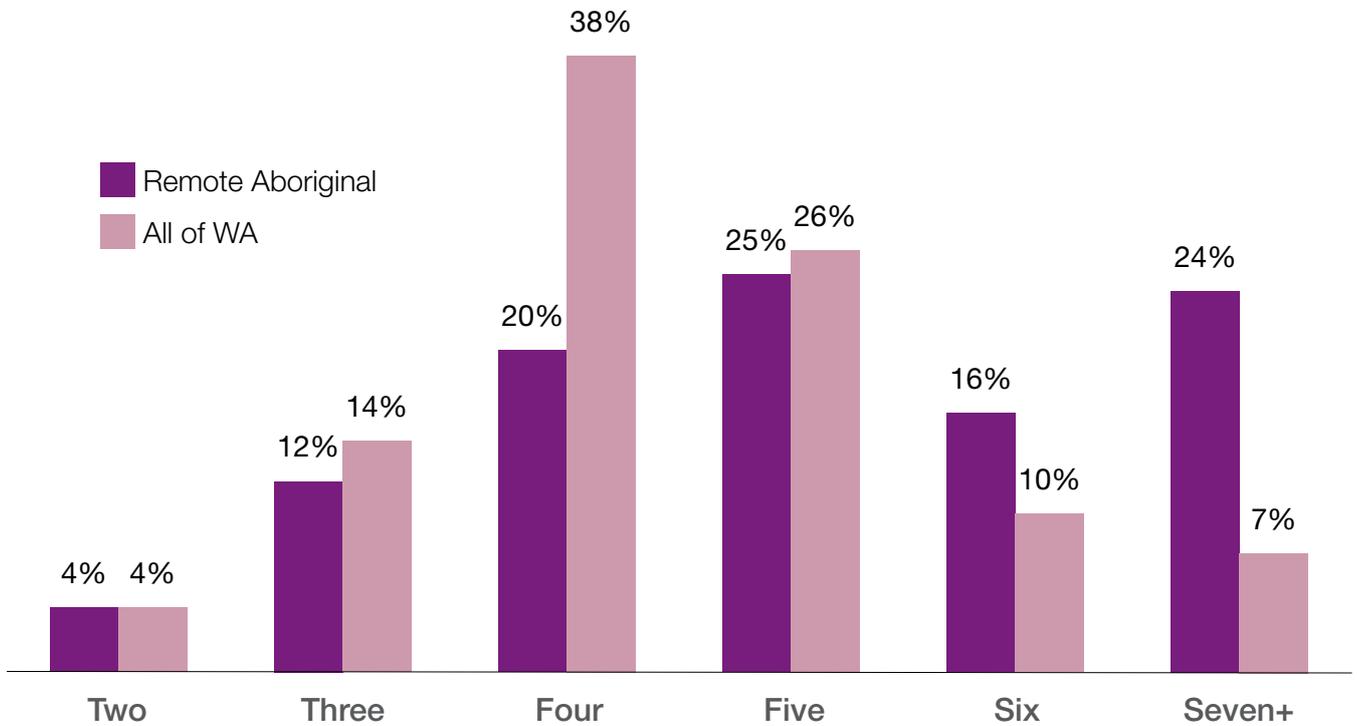
Many Aboriginal families have a more collective approach to child-rearing with extended family members (grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins etc.) and other community members often heavily involved in caregiving and providing support to Aboriginal parents and children.¹⁰ Thus, for many Aboriginal children and young people there are multiple adults who share the responsibility to support and take care of them.

One-quarter (25%) of Aboriginal children and young people reported living with their grandparents and 16 per cent live with an aunt or uncle.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting who they live with in the home where they live most of the time



Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting how many people they live with in the home where they live most of the time



One-quarter (24%) of Aboriginal participants in remote areas live in a home with at least seven other people, compared to seven per cent of participants across all of WA.

Aboriginal children (Years 4 to 6) in remote locations are three-times more likely than those across WA to have moved home two or more times in the past 12-months (36% compared to 11%). Seventeen per cent of secondary school students have done the same, compared to six per cent of secondary school students across WA.

Aboriginal families are often more mobile than non-Aboriginal families with various social and cultural factors impacting these patterns including cultural norms and values regarding kinship and family obligations and maintaining connections to Country.¹¹ Further, due to the more flexible and collective approach to child-rearing, children and young people can move between homes within the same community.

In terms of having supportive relationships within the family:

- three-quarters (76%) of Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations reported their mum or someone who acts as their mum cares about them a lot
- two-thirds (66%) reported their dad or someone who acts as their dad cares about them a lot
- just over one-half (53%) reported that their siblings care about them a lot, while 60 per cent reported that other family members care about them a lot.

Most participants (82%) reported that there is a parent or another adult at home who believes they will achieve good things and 72 per cent said that there is a parent or another adult at home who listens to them when they have something to say.

Similarly, 70 per cent of participants reported that there is a parent or another adult at home who they can talk to about their problems or worries.

“I feel safe with my family and my friends. They help me a lot.”

(female, 13 year-old)

At the same time, 16 per cent of Aboriginal students in remote areas reported that it was not at all true that there is a parent or another adult at home who they can talk to about their problems or worries, compared to 10 per cent of students across WA.

Secondary school students were asked what sources of support they used and found helpful if they had emotional health worries. The top sources of support were parents (85%), other family members (81%) and friends (76%). In terms of more external supports, teachers were the next most called upon (66%) then school psychologist/counsellors (55%) and Aboriginal health workers (54%).

Telephone helplines and online counselling were the least commonly used support (30% used these services).

With regards to what children and young people want from their relationships, it was clear they most want to be asked how they are feeling and be listened to.

“Just checking up on how we feel more often and using our ideas more.”

(male, 11 year-old)

“Make kids feel good about sharing how they feel.”

(female, 12 year-old)

“Ask if the person or people are ok.”

(male, 12 year-old)

“Being me helpful by asking questions and checking in on everyone every now and then and try to pay attention more to the way they’re acting and be open to people’s thoughts.”

(female, 13 year-old)

“I think it’s important for family members to check in and teachers should be taught to notice when kids aren’t the same.”

(female, 14 year-old)

Although some students said they did not want people asking them about their lives.

“Nothing I don’t want anyone to know what goes on in my life true honest they all just nosy people like mind your own business bruh.” 😂

(male, 13 year-old)

For a small number of students their families were not listening to their concerns.

“Other ways my family could be more helpful is to try and listen and not argue with me about my mental health problems and allow me to go to someone outside our family about my health because what is going on isn’t helping I get told that my mental health isn’t a thing or I am making things up or it is all in my head.”

(female, 14 year-old)

“I probably should ask more people about my mental health but never do because my mother says I’m fine.”

(female, 15 year-old)



Material basics

Aboriginal children and young people are disproportionately affected by poverty. Research using data from the 2016 Census concluded, 31.4 per cent of Aboriginal Australians were living in poverty (50% median income before housing costs).¹²

Aboriginal people living in remote locations are most likely to be living in poverty and/or be socially excluded through limited access to appropriate housing, health services and education.

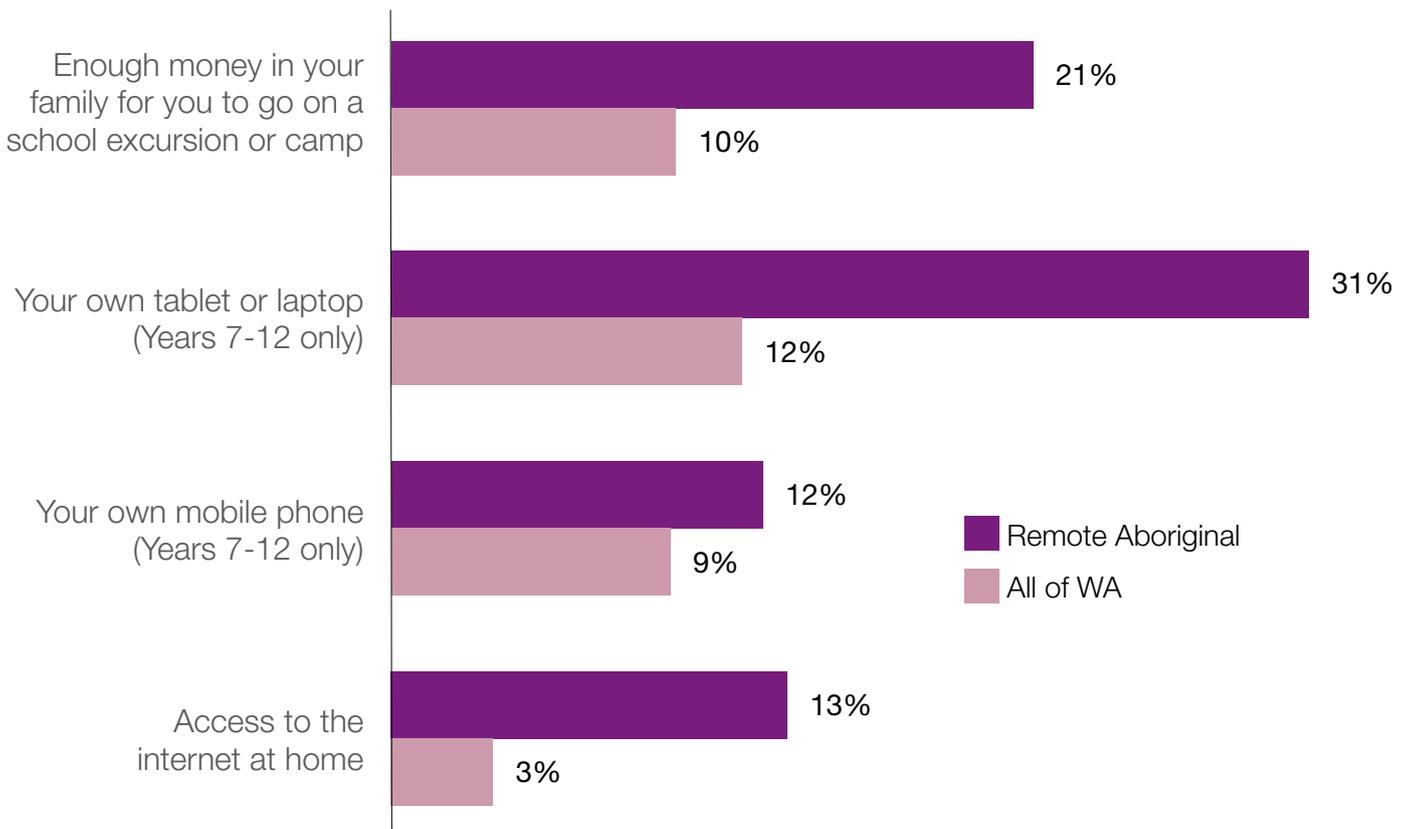
The results from the Speaking Out Survey support these findings.

One-in-ten (10%) Aboriginal children and young people living in remote locations reported that their family does not own a car used for family transport (3% across all of WA). Fifteen per cent of participants reported that there is never or only sometimes enough food to eat at home (9% across all of WA).

Aboriginal secondary school students in remote areas are much more likely to not have a bedroom of their own compared to young people across WA (16% compared to 8%).

Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas are less likely than other children and young people in WA to have a number of other material basics that other children and young people around WA have.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students saying they do not have the following items



Socio-economic disadvantage has multiple impacts on children and young people’s health and wellbeing, including having less capacity to engage in learning, reduced access to good health care and experiences of stress in childhood, that can lead to socio-emotional and behavioural difficulties.¹³

A clear impact of not having access to the internet at home or having your own tablet or laptop is less capability to complete schoolwork and do well in formal learning. It should be noted that four per cent of non-Aboriginal students in remote areas do not have access to the internet at home, which is higher than in metropolitan areas (2%), but still significantly less than the proportion of remote Aboriginal students (13%).

Feeling safe at home

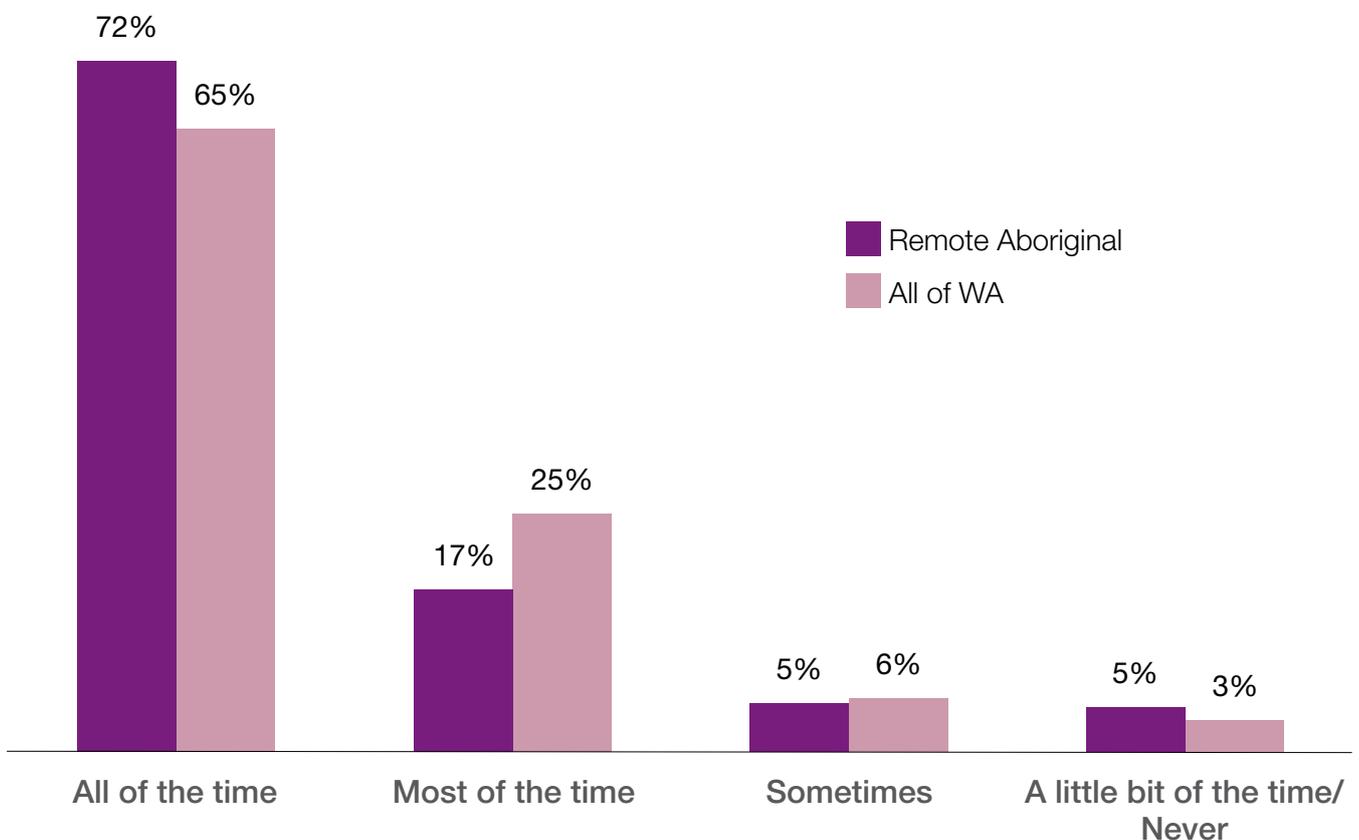
Feeling safe at home is critical for children to develop good mental health, feel able to build positive relationships with others and effectively participate in learning.¹⁴

Most Aboriginal students in remote locations feel safe at home all the time (72%), while 17 per cent feel safe most of the time, 5 per cent feel safe only sometimes and 5 per cent of students reported feeling safe at home only a little bit of the time or never.

These results are similar to students across the whole of WA.

Most Aboriginal students (Years 4 to 12) said their family gets along well or very well (79%), while six per cent said their family gets along badly or very badly.

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



Around one-in-five (18%) participants reported they worry a lot about someone in their family fighting, this was significantly greater for children in Years 4 to 6 where 36 per cent worry a lot about this (8% of secondary school students). Further, 17 per cent of participants worry a lot that someone in their home or family might hurt somebody (All of WA: 9%). Again, this was greater for primary school students.

Students were asked open text questions about feeling unsafe.¹⁵ It should be noted that responses like the following about feeling unsafe in the home were reported by many children and young people from a diverse range of backgrounds across WA.

“When people are at my house and drinking and I feel like they are going to hurt me and when I’m at my dads or mums friends house that I don’t know.”
(female, 10 year-old)

“Mostly when my parents aren’t home and I’m all alone even when I have my brother with me I still feel a little worried and... most of all I’m worried about if my parents will break up and if they will die and have no one to look after me and I get sent to a orphanage.”
(female, 10 year-old)

“Feel anxious about people inside the house, afraid they will hit me.”
(male, 12 year-old)

“When I’m home alone or when my brother has friends over.”
(female, 14 year-old)

“Sometimes when I am sleeping as we have loud neighbours so I am unable to hear if there are uninvited people in our yard or front area.”
(female, 14 year-old)

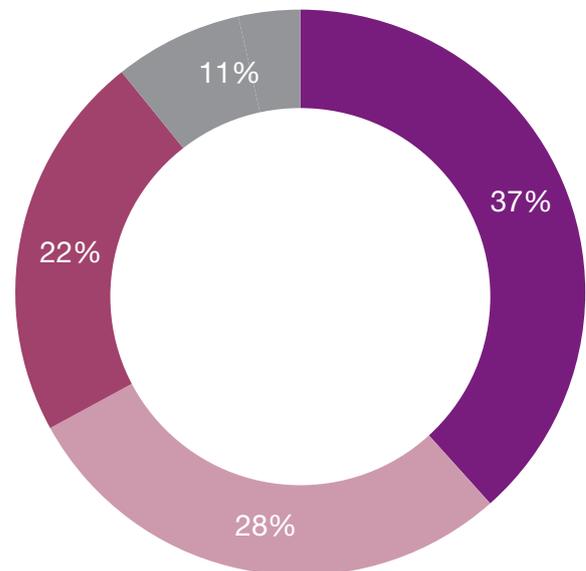
“When my parents fight. When my step dad gets a bit angry when he doesn’t get his smokes of beers.”

(female, 11 year-old)

Feeling safe in the community

The majority of Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations feel safe in their local area either all of the time (37%) or most of the time (28%). While one-in-ten (11%) students feel safe in their local area only a little bit of the time or never.

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



All of the time
 Most of the time
 Sometimes
 A little bit of the time/Never

Note: Option ‘prefer not to say’ has been omitted and therefore the percentages do not add to 100.

Female children and young people were more likely to feel unsafe in their local area. Female secondary school students were much less likely than their male peers to feel safe all the time in their local area (male: 40%, female: 23%). The observed gender difference was consistent with the results for all of WA.

Two-in-five (41%) Aboriginal students in Years 9 to 12 in remote locations have been hit or physically harmed on purpose in their lifetime (all of WA: 44%). Similar proportions of male and female students reported this.

The most common places where this occurred were at home, at school, hanging out in a public place and at a sports event.

Participants were provided with the opportunity to explain what made them feel unsafe, the responses of Aboriginal students in remote areas were similar to students across WA.

“Old men walking behind me for ten mins straight, and the dark.”
(female, 12 year-old)

“All the crimes that are happening in this town and aren’t being dealt with e.g. robberies car burnings mugged injured.”
(male, 14 year-old)

“People fighting all the time. Very loud neighbours. People across the road blasting loud music and police sirens all the time.”
(male, 14 year-old)

“Walking from home to work by myself.”
(female, 15 year-old)

“All the people who walk around the town fighting people for no reason.”
(female, 16 year-old)

“Being put into unsafe situations and environments, when people around me are on the influence of alcohol and drugs.”
(male, 17 year-old)

When asked about what they would like to change in their local area, a number of students talked about making their town safer and cleaner. This was particularly reported by students in Broome.

“The amount of kids that fight and shame people and think their the boss mostly in parks/public areas.”
(female, 12 year-old)

“The rubbish/glass on the streets.”
(female, 12 year-old)

“The graffiti is everywhere I would like to get rid of it.”
(male, 12 year-old)

“That there would be no glass on the road.”
(male, 13 year-old)

“People walking on my street at night yelling. People drunk on my street. Lots of dogs barking and getting out and running after you. Gangs on my street.”
(female, 13 year-old)

“Give more places and people for young people to go to when they’re feeling unsafe.”
(female, 15 year-old)

“School puts a lot of expectations on us and gives us a lot of work and often times not [a] lot of time to actually finish it before we have to turn it in.”

(male, 13 year-old)

3.5 Learning and participating

Attendance

Most Aboriginal Year 4 to Year 12 students in remote areas (65%) feel that it is very important to be at school every day. This was greater than the proportion of students across all of WA (54%).

At the same time, a significantly greater proportion of Aboriginal secondary school students in remote areas have been suspended from school than students across the state (remote Aboriginal: 38%, All of WA: 15%). This is consistent with results across WA where Aboriginal students are much more likely to say they have been suspended from school than non-Aboriginal students (33% compared to 13%).

Evidence suggests that suspensions and exclusions can have unintended consequences of further entrenching problematic behaviour, as extended time away from school can result in students falling further behind and becoming even more disengaged.¹⁶

Despite most Aboriginal students recognising that it is very important to be at school every day, over one-third (37%) of Aboriginal students in remote areas had waggged school in the past year, compared to 15 per cent of students across the state.

These results are consistent with attendance rate data. Attendance rates for Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations are significantly lower than those for non-Aboriginal children and young people.¹⁷ Reasons for not attending school are complex and can include school not seeming relevant or culturally engaging, issues of poverty and family stress, families' attitudes towards the education system and family members' health concerns.^{18,19}



Liking school and sense of belonging

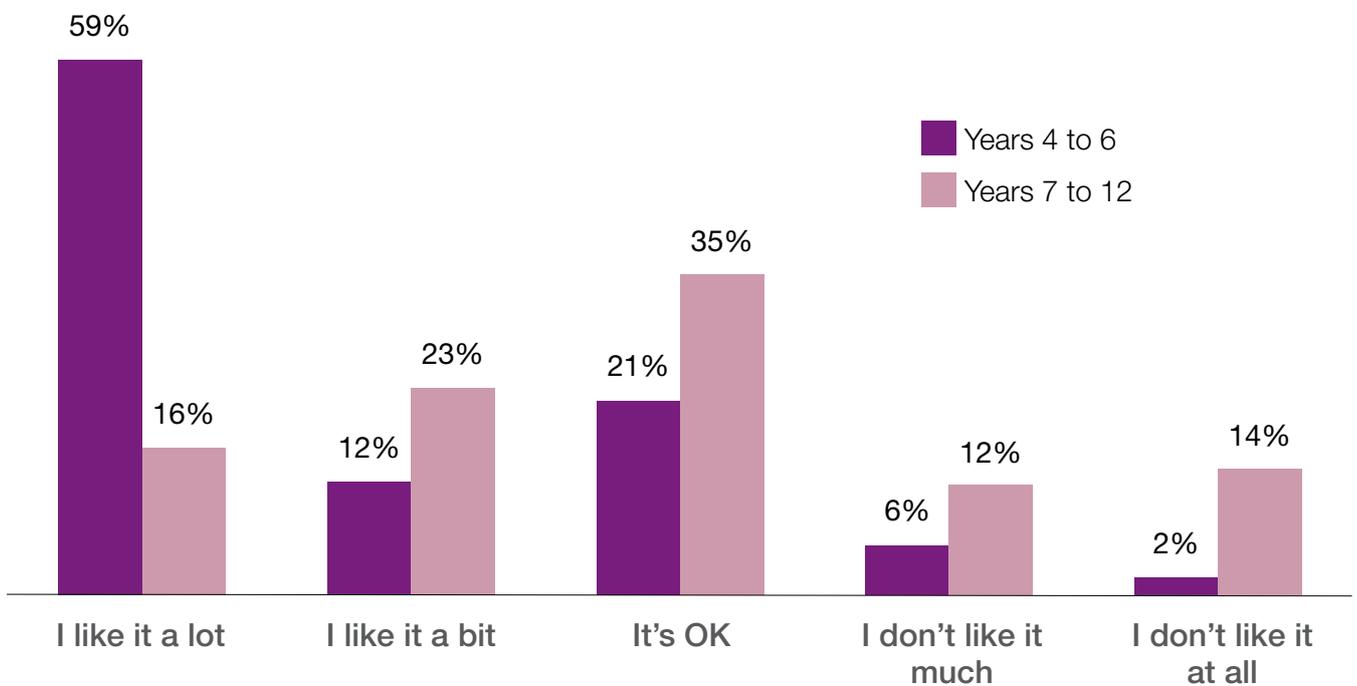
Children and young people who feel a sense of belonging at their school and like attending school are more likely to have greater attendance rates, engagement in learning and ultimately better academic outcomes.

One-third (32%) of Aboriginal students in remote areas like school a lot and 19 per cent like school a bit, while 30 per cent say that it is OK. One-in-five (19%) don't like school much or at all.

Primary school students (Years 4 to 6) are significantly more likely to like school a lot than those in secondary school. In primary school, less than one-in-ten (7%) students said they don't like school, whereas in secondary school one-quarter (26%) said they don't like school.



Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting how they feel about school

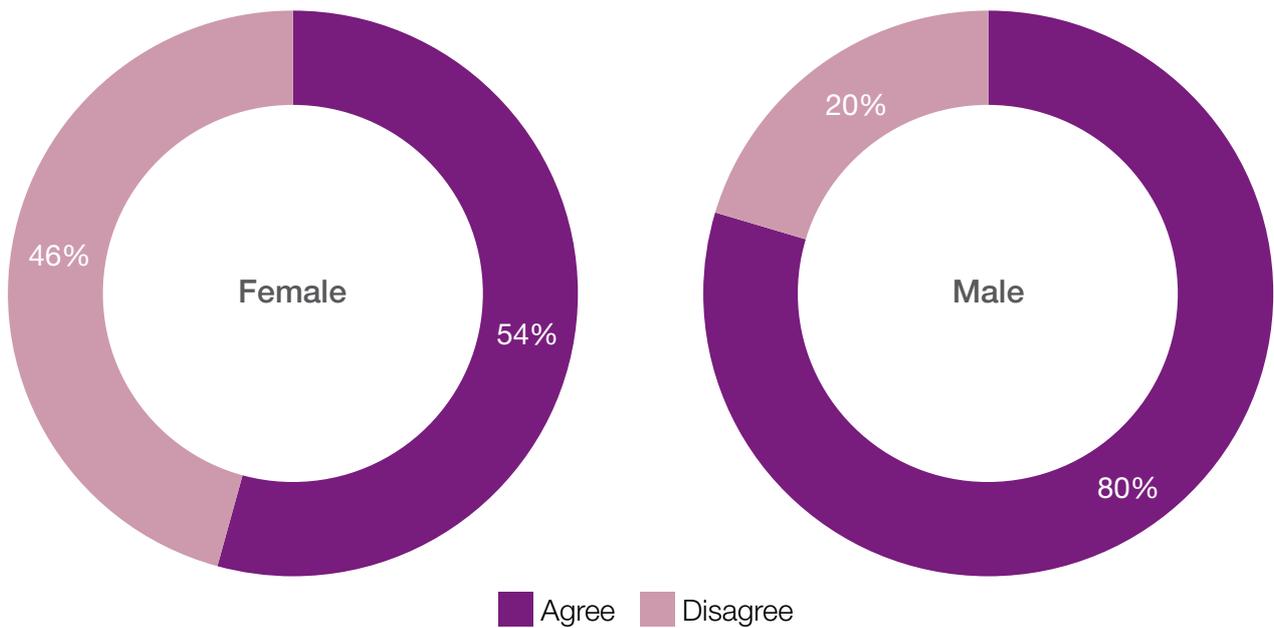


In primary school, 94 per cent of students reported that they like learning at school, while in secondary school only 67 per cent of students reported this. In secondary school one-third (33%) of students do not like learning at school. These results are consistent with the results across the state.

Two-thirds of secondary school students feel like they belong at their school (strongly agree: 25%, agree: 42%), while one-third do not feel like they belong (strongly disagree: 9%, disagree: 24%). Female students were more likely to not feel like they belong.

These results are consistent with the results across all of WA.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing that they feel like they belong at their school



Most participants reported they usually get along with their classmates (55%) or sometimes get along with them (36%).

Most participants said that it is very much true (42%) or pretty much true (30%) that there is a teacher or another adult at school who really cares about them.

Similarly, most participants felt that there is a teacher or another adult at school who believes they will achieve good things (very much true: 48%, pretty much true: 34%).

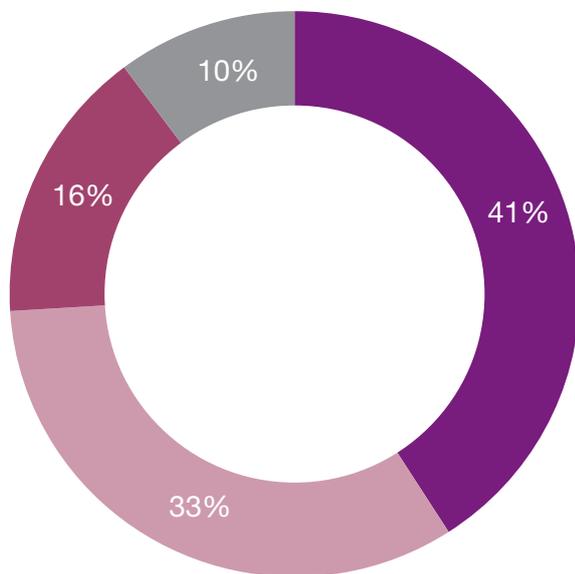
“When people are yelling or arguing even teachers yelling at students makes me feel frightened.”

(female, 14 year-old)

Feeling safe at school

Most Aboriginal students in remote areas feel safe at school either all of the time (40%) or most of the time (33%), while 16 per cent feel safe sometimes and 10 per cent feel safe only a little bit of the time or never.

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



All of the time
 Most of the time
 Sometimes
 A little bit of the time/Never

Note: Option 'prefer not to say' has been omitted and therefore the percentages do not add to 100.

These results are similar to the results for students across WA.

Female students in secondary school are more likely than male students to feel safe only sometimes or less.

Over one-third (36%) of Aboriginal students in remote areas have been bullied by students from their school.

Female students are much more likely to have been bullied (either cyber-bullied, physically bullied or both) than their male peers (47% compared to 23%).

For most of these students, the bullying occurred at school or online and for some it occurred on the way to school, at home or somewhere else.

Around one-half of the Aboriginal students who had been bullied in the last three months had been teased about their cultural background or the colour of their skin.

"I think the commissioner could try stop bullying other people on the internet and in real life because bullying is not good for anybody because it hurts their feelings and them self that's why I would really appreciate if the commissioner would do that for me and the people around us."

(female, 10 year-old)

"I have trouble fitting in, staying fit, being equal to others, i get teased for my size and looks, I have anxiety and depression."

(female, 12 year-old)

"Racism, homophobia and sexism are some of the many troubles that students all over Western Australia experience, whether they be gay, gender diverse, black or just living as a woman."

(student who selected 'in another way', 12 year-old)

"...help students who are getting bullied and not just brush them off, not force students to talk, help in the school yard if there's a fight, listen to the students when they have a problem, not just say to everything "just give it a week it'll blow over" actually communicate with the parents about things going on in school."

(female, 15 year-old)

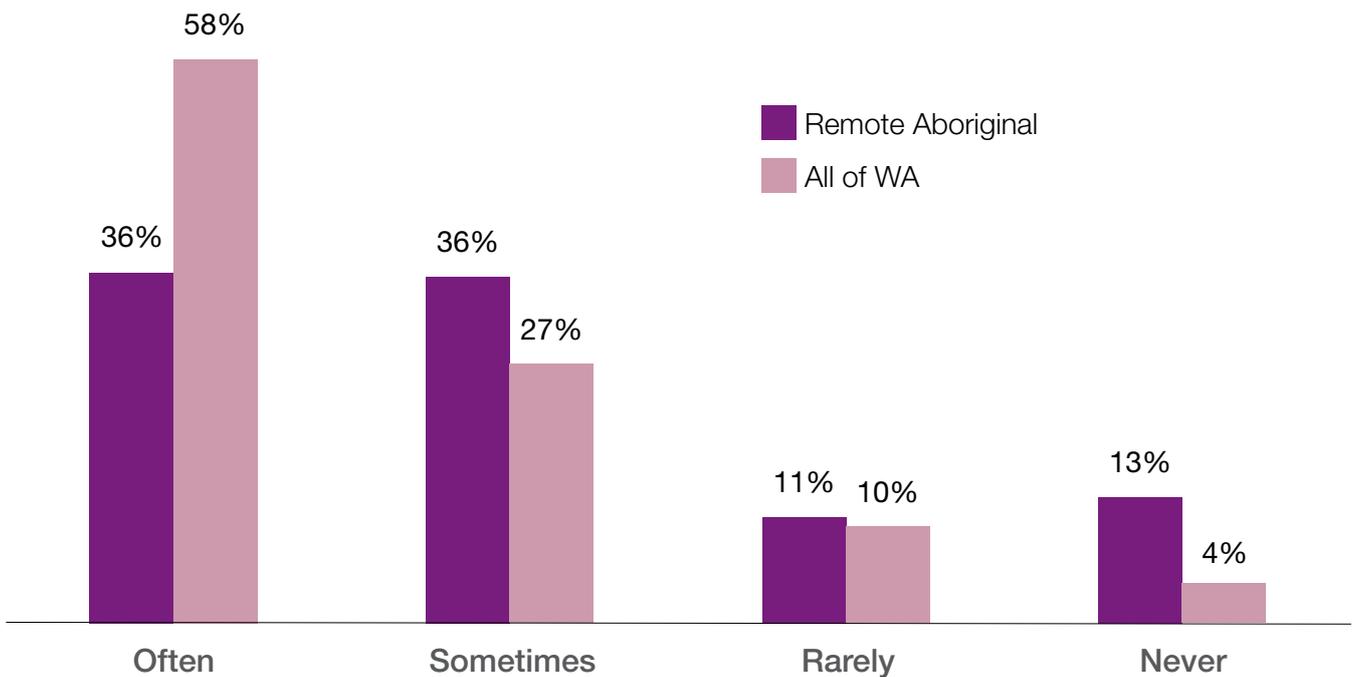
Achievement

In general, Aboriginal secondary students across the state are less likely than non-Aboriginal secondary students to feel like they are doing well at school (in terms of school results). One-quarter (25%) of Aboriginal secondary students in remote areas reported that they are doing above average at school, while 45 per cent said they are doing about average. One-in-five (20%) said they are achieving below average at school (all of WA: 13%).

Most Aboriginal students in remote areas reported that they get help from teachers if they need it almost always (31%) or sometimes (56%). Less than one-in-ten (8%) said they almost never get help. In contrast, 15 per cent of students across WA feel like they almost never get help when they need it.

At the same time, a lower proportion of Aboriginal students in remote areas, than across the state, have parents or family who ask them about their schoolwork or homework.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting their parents/someone in their family ask about their schoolwork or homework



Note: Option 'I'm not sure' has been omitted and therefore the percentages do not add to 100.

“If I don’t feel like I have a connection with the teacher, I don’t feel encouraged to work harder and when I’m not interested in something it’s hard for me to focus...”

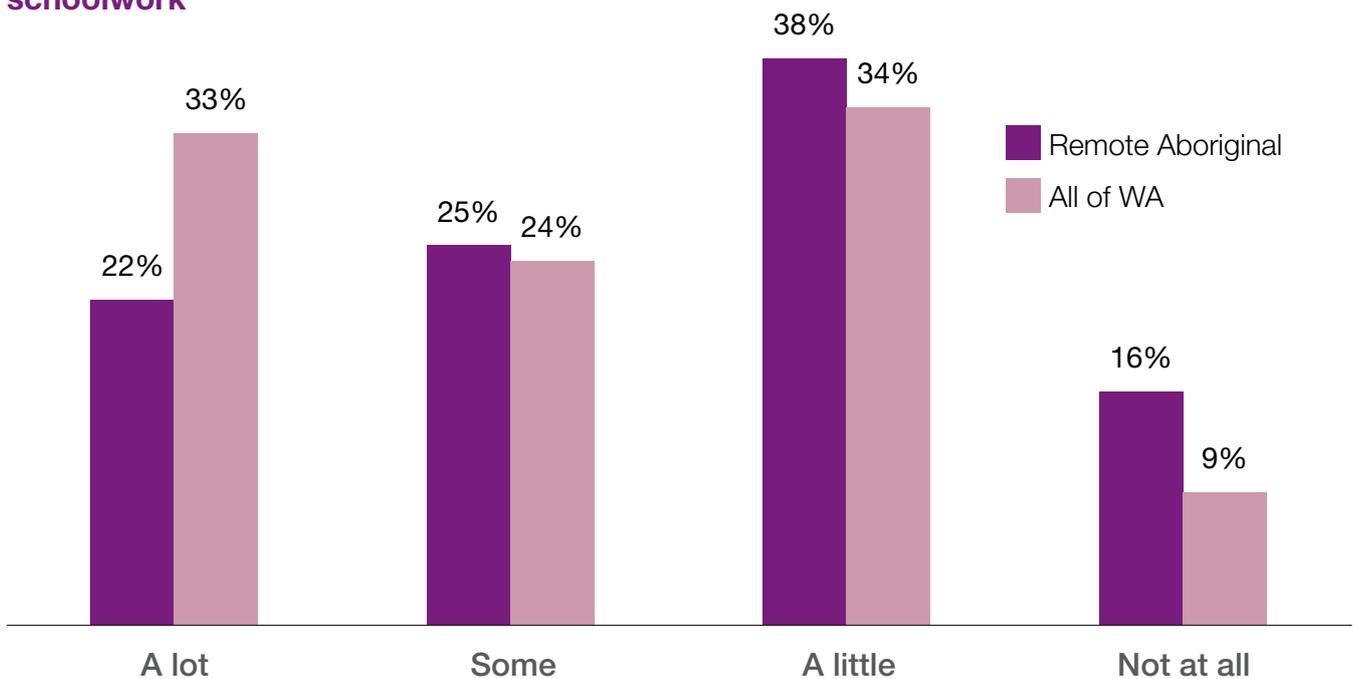
(female, 14 year-old)



Diagram about culture prepared by young people in the Kimberley with their teacher.

Aboriginal secondary school students in remote areas are less likely than students across the state to feel a lot of pressure about schoolwork.

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting how stressed they feel about schoolwork



Nevertheless, many students reported feeling pressure from school in the open text comments.

*“Teachers yell, presser you sometimes.”
(female, 12 year-old)*

*“That were not perfect, and that students try their hardest, but some won’t get good grades, and that’s still ok.”
(student who selected ‘in another way’, 12 year-old)*

*“Because the stuff they give is hard and then if you have an assignment it stresses you out because you wanna pass and get it in on time.”
(female, 13 year-old)*

*“Too much of the work is being given out at the same time, maybe the teachers can evenly distribute the homework throughout the terms. Homework is always due in the same week, given out in the same week and most students don’t have enough time to complete it.”
(female, 13 year-old)*

*“I think the main reason for this is that we all worried to fail a subject and that due to this we won’t be able to get a job.”
(female, 14 year-old)*

*“School work is hectic, a lot of kids don’t understand what we’re supposed to be learning.”
(female, 15 year-old)*

*“It’s very pressuring and sometimes there’s a lot of it. Maybe there’s teacher who aren’t the best and can’t get the help they need. I also think a lot of people are too afraid to speak up.”
(student who selected ‘in another way’, 15 year-old)*

*“Chill out on the homework, omg they overload us giving out 10 sheets a class.”
(male, 16 year-old)*

*“There is a lot of pressure for them to do well. Especially for the older years, getting into university via ATAR is a big expectation.”
(female, 16 year-old)*

Transition from school and independence

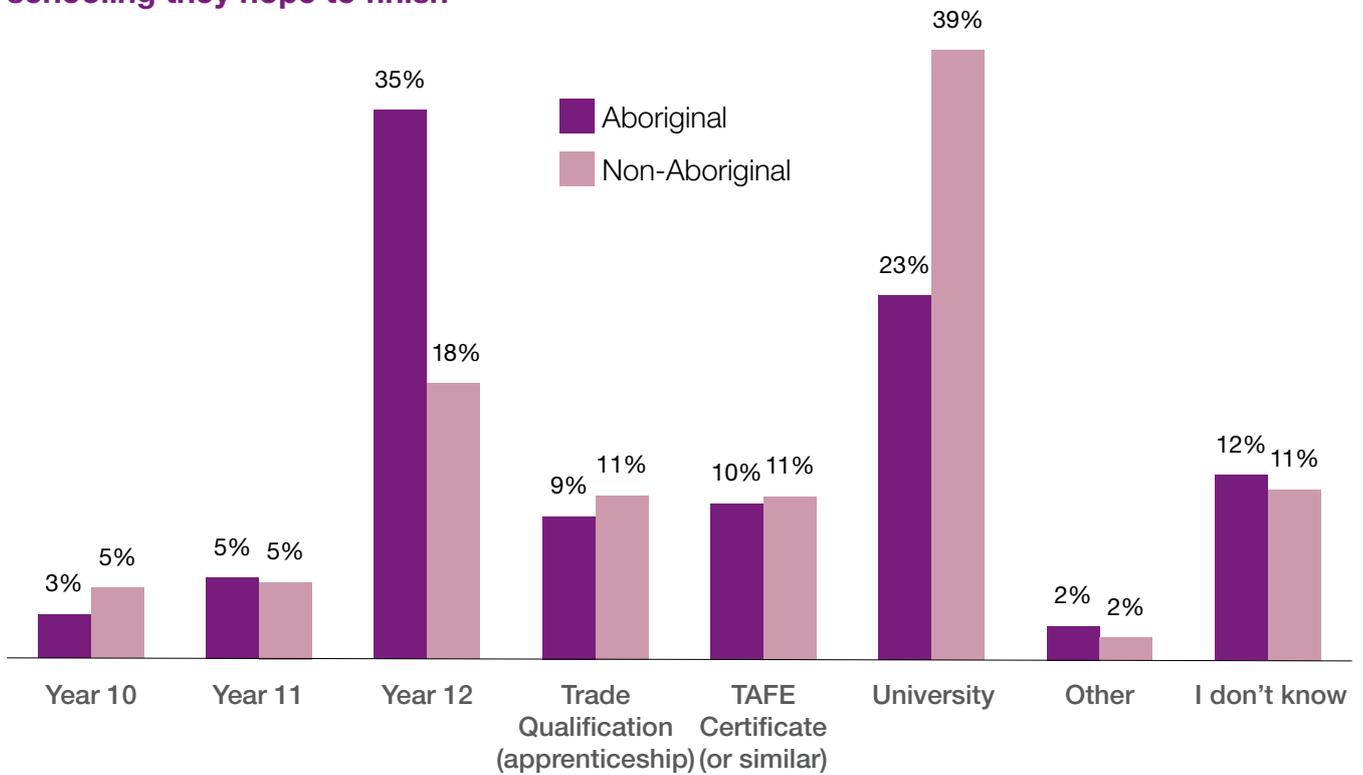
Most secondary students felt they were learning things at school that would help them in the future (very much true: 29%, pretty much true: 44%). These results correspond with the responses from students across the state.

Aboriginal students in remote areas are less likely than non-Aboriginal students to want to go onto further education after secondary school. One-third (35%) of Aboriginal secondary school students in remote areas hope to finish Year 12 and do not plan to go onto any further study. One-in-five (19%) would like to pursue a TAFE certificate or a trade qualification and 23 per cent would like to attend university (39% of non-Aboriginal students in remote areas).

“I feel very stressed at school sometimes because I feel like if I’m not doing enough to please my parents they are gonna be disappointed in me.”

(female, 13 year-old)

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students in remote areas reporting what level of schooling they hope to finish



One-quarter (26%) of Aboriginal secondary school students in remote areas have a regular part-time job, while 27 per cent worked during school term or in the holidays. These results correspond with the responses from students across WA.

In terms of having independence and being allowed to do things on their own, the participant responses were similar to the overall results across the state.

Three-quarters of participants (73%) were allowed to go places other than school on their own (all of WA: 75%).

One-third (35%) of Aboriginal young people in remote areas are allowed to go out at night in their local area. Male young people were much more likely to be allowed to go out alone at night than female young people (male: 49%, female: 22%). The gender difference was consistent with the results for all of WA.

Most Aboriginal secondary school students reported being involved in making decisions in their life (strongly agree: 36%, agree: 45%). Although female young people were less likely to strongly agree with this statement. Again, the gender difference was consistent with the results for all of WA.

“I would like for them to actually pay attention and listen not just think because they are an adult that they can just talk over us and tell us what we can and can’t do.”
(female, 14 year-old)

“Listen to kids more, because ultimately if you’re trying to help kids you can’t make decisions without their input you don’t know their feelings because you aren’t them.”
(female, 15 year-old)

4



Remote Aboriginal students' extension project

**"I liked doing the
survey. Thank you
for coming... I am
feeling good."**

(male, 10 year-old)

4 Remote Aboriginal students' extension project

During 2021 and 2022, Lotterywest funding was used to extend the Speaking Out Survey to additional cohorts including more Aboriginal children and young people in remote communities, children and young people with disability (outside of mainstream education) and home educated students.

The purpose of these extension projects was to provide more children and young people with the opportunity to have their say and allow the Commissioner to report their views and experiences accordingly. This was deemed particularly critical to ensure the views of diverse children and young people's were heard to help shape the response and recovery to COVID-19 in 2022 and beyond.

The Remote Aboriginal students' extension project was initiated to engage more directly with children and young people in remote communities. The Commissioner's staff visited an additional eleven schools in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields to pilot a modified version of the Speaking Out Survey questionnaire with 327 Aboriginal children and young people. These schools were selected through a (non-random) convenience sample.

The results presented here are not representative of Aboriginal students in remote locations. However, they do provide additional insight into the views and experiences of these participants, many of whom live in very remote locations in WA.

In the extension survey, participants were asked two open text questions. One asking for their views on the survey and a second asking students who said they felt unsafe to explain what made them feel unsafe.

Open text responses were received from 164 students participating in the extension survey. Of the students who completed the extension survey, a number reported they really enjoyed doing the survey and appreciated the opportunity.

*"Thank you for asking me I enjoyed it."
(female, 9 year-old)*

*"All of those questions were easy."
(male, 9 year-old)*

*"Hoo ever did this is amazing."
(male, 9 year-old)*

*"I liked the survey and it is very good."
(female, 10 year-old)*

*"No thanks thank you for letting me in the survey." 😊😊😊
(female, 10 year-old)*

*"I really enjoy the survey thank you."
(female, 10 year-old)*

*"No thank you for everything I feel like nobody can judge me when I was doing this."
(female, 12 year-old)*

*"Thanks survey for coming to our school."
(female, 13 year-old)*

*"It was so eazzy."
(male, 14 year-old)*

*"I would like to say thank you."
(male, 16 year-old)*

While, one student remarked on the number of personal questions:

*"That there is heaps of personal questions."
(female, 13 year-old)*

For further discussion of the survey process refer to **Section 4.3** below.

4.1 Profile of participants in the extension survey

A total of 327 Year 4 to Year 12 students from 11 schools across the Pilbara, the Kimberley and the Goldfields participated in the SOS21 remote Aboriginal students' extension survey.

Just over one-half (53%) of the students were in secondary school (Years 7 to 12) and 47 per cent were in primary school (Years 4 to 6). Over one-half (56%) of participants identified as a girl, 43 per cent as a boy and one per cent selected the option that they describe themselves 'in another way'.

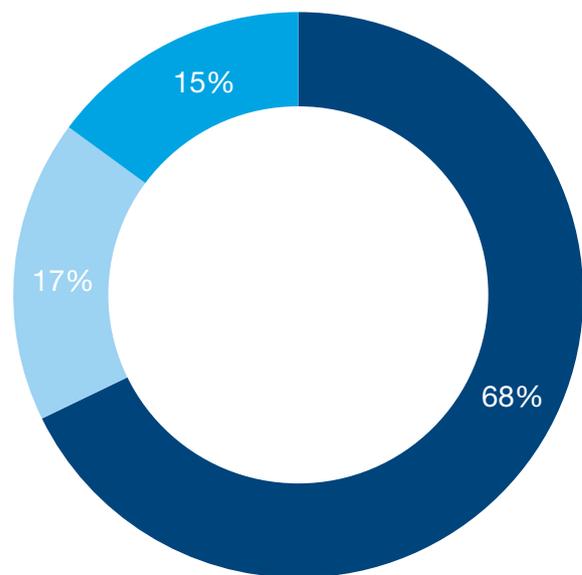
Most participants (87%) reported they speak English at home, while 26 per cent said they [also] speak another language. The other languages spoken included Kriol, Ngaanyatjarra, Arrente, Nyangamarta, Filipino and Thai.

With regard to speaking an Aboriginal language, 52 per cent of Year 4 to Year 6 students reported they speak an Aboriginal language a lot or some, while 45 per cent of secondary students reported the same. Only 12 per cent of Year 4 to Year 6 students and 15 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported not speaking an Aboriginal language.

4.2 Summary of results COVID-19

Two-thirds (68%) of the participants in this survey reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected their life in a bad way, while 17 per cent reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their life in a bad way and 15 per cent did not know.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting whether COVID-19 had affected their life in a bad way



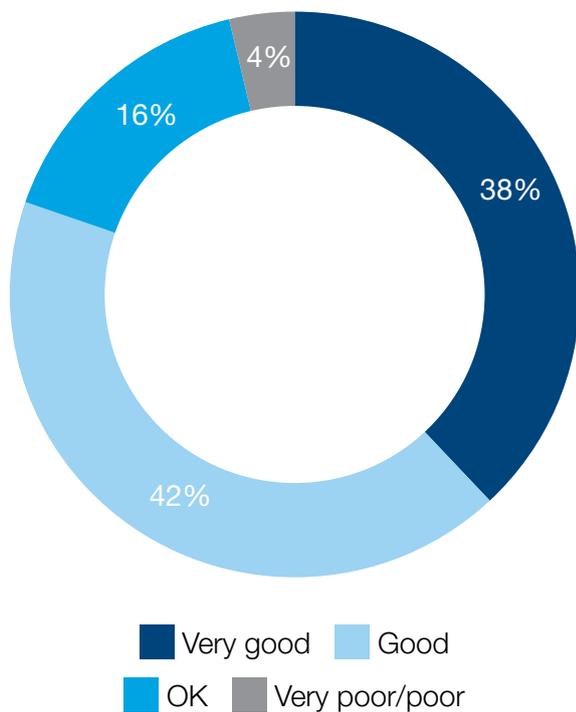
■ No ■ Yes ■ I don't know

At the same time, one-half (53%) of the participants said that when they think of COVID-19 they feel worried, while one-third (33%) said they do not feel worried.

Healthy and connected

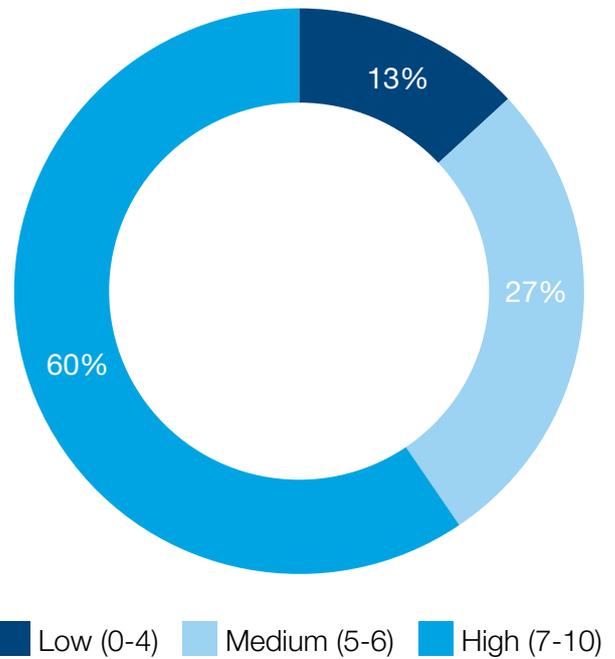
Of the students surveyed, most reported that their health is very good or good (80%), while one-fifth reported their health was OK or poor/very poor (20%).

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



More than one-half (60%) of participating Year 7 to Year 12 students rated their life satisfaction as between 7 and 10 (out of 10), 27 per cent rated their life satisfaction as between five and six, and 13 per cent rated their life satisfaction as low (0 to 4).

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students rating their life satisfaction



Similarly, while 80 per cent of children in Years 4 to 6 said they feel good about themselves [always], only 47 per cent of the Year 7 to Year 12 participants said they feel good about themselves [always], while 47 per cent said they feel good about themselves sometimes.

These results correspond with the responses of remote Aboriginal students in the main survey.

In the extension survey, two-thirds (68%) of Year 4 to Year 6 students reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night, while 8 per cent reported going to sleep after midnight.

Less than one-half (46%) of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported usually going to sleep by 10pm on a school night, with 26 per cent going to sleep between 10pm and midnight and 20 per cent reporting they usually go to sleep after midnight.

In terms of connection to culture and community, most (80%) of the participants know their family's country and of these, 86 per cent spend time there. Two-thirds (65%) of participating students do cultural or traditional activities with their family.

Almost three-quarters (73%) of participants feel like they belong in their community, while seven per cent felt they do not belong. Similarly, 73 per cent of respondents like where they live. For both these questions, a greater proportion of children in primary school (Years 4-6) than in secondary school responded positively, this is consistent with the responses from Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in the main survey across WA.

More than two-thirds (68%) of children in Years 4 to 6 reported that there are fun things to do where they live, while less than one half (49%) of secondary school students said this. This is consistent with the responses from all students (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in remote areas.

"I love Porthedland because I have friends to play with and a dirt bike I can ride and also it's great to live up hear."
(male, 11 year-old)

"I like the people at my school and I love how I have people always by my side but the thing in hedland is there is people that aren't the nicest I wish that could change."
(male, 11 year-old)

"[I would like] Muntjac nights Disco Drop in centre Basketball Play at the studio. Go bush and cultural activities."
(female, 12 year-old)

"We need a youth worker to take us bush, to the sandhill. It's boring in the holidays and some kids run amuck so they need more fun things to do."
(female, 15 year-old)

“[I would like a] Youth centre or drop in centre with games. Do more culture and go out bush.”

(male, 13 year-old)

In terms of connection to country, two students were clear about their views on environmental issues in their area.

"We do not want a dam in Fitzroy, because it will ruin camping trips and the community and special spots and the community might lose faith in government if that happens."
(male, 11 year-old)

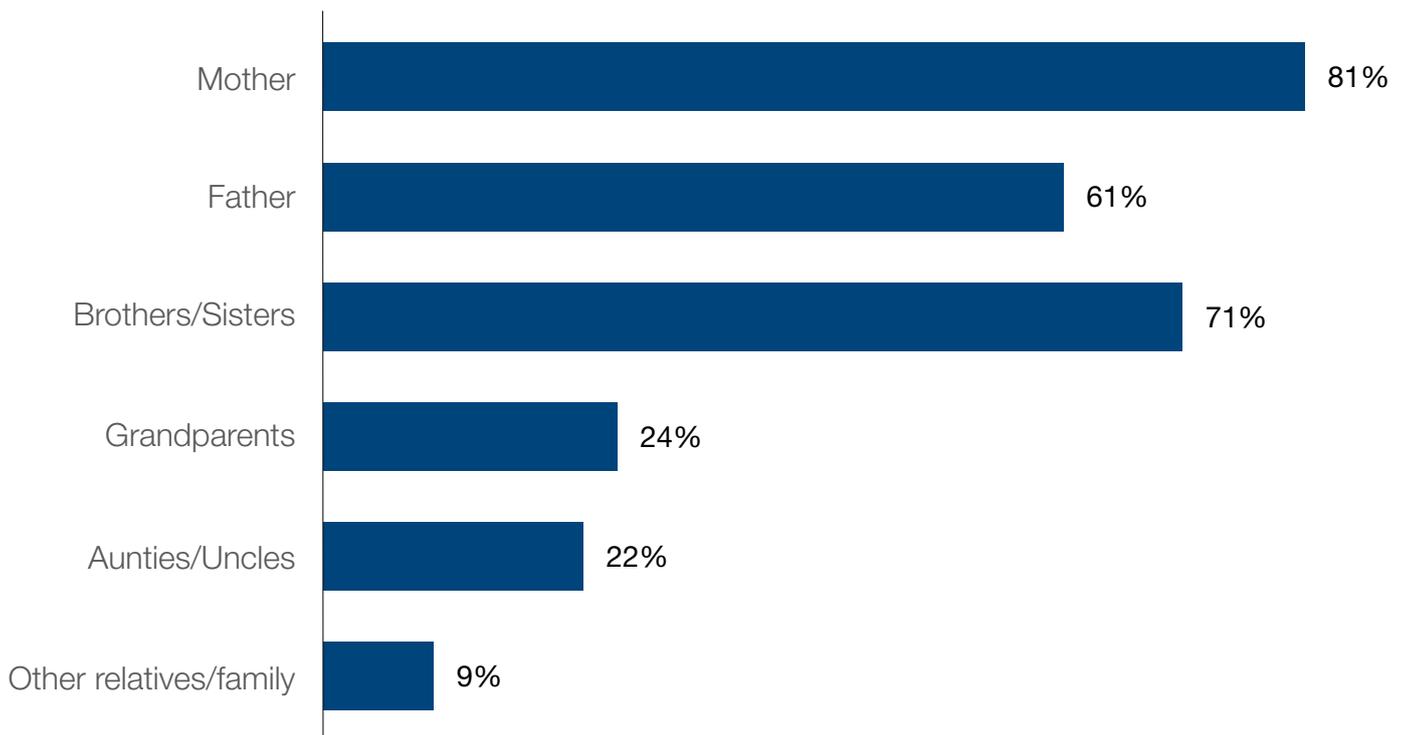
"I would really like the premier to stop fracking and to put a stop to the plans of damming the Fitzroy river because this and the whole Kimberley is a very important part of aboriginal people for way longer than settlement!"
(female, 16 year-old)



Safe and supported

While most respondents live with their mum (81%) and/or dad (61%), one-quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they [also] live with their grandparents and 22 per cent reporting they live with an aunt or uncle and nine per cent live with other relatives or family members.

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting who they live with in the home where they live most of the time



More than one-quarter (27%) of respondents live in a home with seven or more other people.

Almost one-quarter (23%) of the respondents have moved home two or more times in the past 12 months.

In terms of having supportive relationships within the family, almost all (89%) respondents reported their mum cares about them, around three-quarters said their dad (75%) and their siblings (76%) care about them, and over 60 per cent said this for their aunties/uncles (61%) and grandparents (63%).

I love my family. ❤️
(female, 14 year-old)

Three-quarters (76%) of participants reported their family believes they will achieve good things. Just over one-half (53%) said they can talk to their family about their problems or worries [always], 31 per cent said they can talk to them sometimes. Almost one-in-five (17%) said they can't talk to their family about their problems or worries.

Three-quarters (76%) of participants [always] feel safe at home, 22 per cent feel safe at home only sometimes and 3 per cent [never] feel safe at home.

“Somethings that make me feel unsafe is when my mum and dad fight or when me and my brother fight and when the people next door are fighting.”

(female, 12 year-old)

Participants were asked in an open text question: *What are some of the things that make you feel unsafe?* The following responses were provided and it should be noted that similar responses were reported by many children and young people from a diverse range of backgrounds across WA.

“When my brother make me Scared.”

(female, 9 year-old)

“When my perents fight. I don’t like when my brother hits me.” 😞

(female, 10 year-old)

“When my family has a fight or a argument.”

(male, 11 year-old)

“When some of my brothers friends come to play video games or when some grown men visit my home to see my father.”

(student who selected ‘in another way’, 16 year-old)

Participants in this survey generally felt safe in their local area with 58 per cent reporting they felt safe [always] and 37 per cent reporting they felt safe sometimes. Six per cent said they never feel safe in their local area. Male young people (Years 7 to 12) were more likely to report feeling safe than their female peers.

“When on walking home and there a man alone is his car driving past me I get scared and start walking faster and look behind me just in case they don’t turn around.”

(female, 9 year-old)

“People across the my house because I have a very popular park across the road to my house the people mainly grown ups are very mean to me.”

(female, 9 year-old)

“There is a dog in my neighbours house that they let out sometimes when I’m ridding to school and the dog is not friendly.”

(male, 10 year-old)

“When kids stolen cars When people dink in the community. When people fighting.”

(female, 11 year-old)

“Drunk people threatens me.”

(male, 11 year-old)

“People around my home area have been breaking in to houses lately.”

(female, 13 year-old)

“Druggies. People who yell out to me. Getting cat called.”

(female, 14 year-old)

“Rapist like when your walking to you mates house.”

(female, 15 year-old)

More than three-quarters (77%) of participants said that if they were feeling really worried or unsafe there was an adult they could talk to. One-in-ten (10%) said there wasn't an adult they could talk to and 13 per cent said they didn't know.

Learning and participating

More than one-half (56%) of respondents like school [always], 34 per cent like school sometimes and 11 per cent don't like school.

"School would better if I could play with toys. More cultural stuff."

(female, 9 year-old)

Most students (61%) said that they like learning at school [always], while 29 per cent said they like it sometimes. One-in-ten (10%) students said they don't like learning at school. Students in secondary school were less likely to like learning than those in primary school.

A majority of secondary students (60%) agreed that they are learning knowledge and skills that will help them in the future, 14 per cent disagreed and 26 per cent did not know.

Overwhelmingly, participants reported that they get along with the classmates at least sometimes (97%). However, the data suggests that female students in secondary school are less likely than male students to report that they get along with their classmates.

Most students (61%) reported that they feel safe at school [always] or sometimes (30%). Participants in secondary school were less likely to feel safe than those in primary school, and female students were much more likely to report not feeling safe.

One-half (49%) reported they have not been bullied by students at their school, while 38 per cent have been and 12 per cent don't know if they have been. Male and female students reported similar levels of bullying.

"I get bullied from the boys."

(female, 11 year-old)

"I feel sad because people tease me."

(male, 11 year-old)

"I get bullied from other kids even my best friends."

(female, 12 year-old)

"The school need to expell girls that constantly fight."

(female, 13 year-old)

Most students (65%) said there is a teacher who really cares about them, 9 per cent said there is not a teacher who really cares about them and 26 per cent did not know.

Female secondary school students were less likely than their male peers to feel this way, with only 41 per cent reporting there is a teacher that really cares about them and 20 per cent saying there is not a teacher that really cares about them (40% did not know).

One-third (34%) of secondary school participants hope to finish Year 12 and do not plan to go onto any further study. Sixteen per cent would like pursue a TAFE certificate or a trade qualification, while 20 per cent would like to attend university. These results are comparable to the main survey results for Aboriginal students in remote areas, and consistent with the main survey results these students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students in remote areas to want to go onto further education after secondary school.

In the extension survey, questions about independence and decision-making were not asked, however the following comment was received in the open text responses.

"Let kids speak without fear, they have the rights to and know stuff adults don't."

(female, 15 year-old)

4.3 Remote Aboriginal students' extension survey process

The Speaking Out Survey was designed to capture and report the views of a representative sample of children and young people in WA, as such a single survey questionnaire is employed for all students across the state. Therefore, as part of this extension project, the Commissioner explored whether Aboriginal students in remote areas may find a modified and shorter survey more accessible than the full Speaking Out Survey. This was in recognition that for some Aboriginal children, particularly those in more remote locations and for whom English is their second language, the standard survey questionnaire may be overly long and include some unfamiliar concepts.

A modified version of the questionnaire was developed and discussed with the children and young people and where possible, Aboriginal school staff, their family members and their communities.

The modifications included changes to language and phrasing to avoid urban-centric concepts and reducing the overall number of questions and responses to allow a greater number of students to fully complete the survey. The modifications were made based on feedback from regional Aboriginal participants of the main sample and the Commissioner's experience of conducting surveys with children and young people in remote locations.

For the SOS21 remote Aboriginal students' extension, a non-random sample of schools in the Kimberley, the Pilbara and the Goldfields were selected. The schools and their communities were approached, and the survey processes and survey questions were discussed.

Once the school and community had agreed to participate, staff from the Commissioner's office visited schools and spoke to teachers, parents and other community members, as appropriate, before conducting the survey with the children and young people. Through this consultation process, some additional questions were excluded from the survey for certain schools as they were deemed not culturally appropriate.

As with the main survey, opt-out consent procedures were adopted, where parents and caregivers could withdraw consent for their child to participate, however written parental consent was not required for students to participate. Children and young people provided their explicit consent to participate.

At the start of each survey session, students were advised that they could decide freely whether they wanted to do the survey and could stop the survey at any time if they wanted to without providing any reasons.

The Commissioner's staff were available to answer questions about the survey, help students understand any unclear language and provide other general support as required. In most instances Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, Education Assistants or Aboriginal Language Teachers supported students to complete the survey, while being careful not to influence their responses.



4.4 Learnings from the process

One goal of the extension project was to explore whether modifying the standard SOS survey would make it more accessible for Aboriginal students in remote locations who may speak a language other than English at home and for whom the questions may be not culturally suitable and/or urban-centric. While the survey tool was not a perfect fit for all participants, overwhelmingly children and young people showed eagerness to take part and the vast majority found the process accessible.

Analysis of completion rates showed that:

- 93 per cent of children and young people in the extension survey completed at least **90 per cent** of the survey, compared to only 53 per cent of remote Aboriginal students in the main survey.
- 95 per cent of children and young people in the extension survey completed at least **80 per cent** of the survey, compared to 89 per cent of remote Aboriginal students in the main survey.

It should be noted that a key aspect of the survey is that participants can skip questions that they do not wish to answer. Therefore, a low 'completion' rate, does not mean the students did not get to the end of the survey, but could mean they skipped a number of questions during the survey.

The higher completion rate is likely because students in the remote extension had intensive support from local Aboriginal language translators and Aboriginal school staff to complete the shorter modified survey.

As highlighted in this report, the quantitative results from the modified survey were broadly similar to the results for remote Aboriginal students in the main survey. This suggests that the main survey questionnaire and process is relatively robust for Aboriginal students in remote areas and can provide a reasonable estimate of their views and experiences.

Nevertheless, through discussions with the community, family members and the children and young people who participated in the extension survey the Commissioner identified the following possible variations for future surveys:

- In some communities, parents and the school community may be keen to discuss the survey purpose and survey questions in more detail before they will be comfortable with their children completing it.
- For some parents and community members the questions regarding sexual health may be considered culturally inappropriate. In the future, consideration could be given to whether these questions are excluded from the survey for those young people.
- Aboriginal children and young people who speak a dialect or language other than English would, in some instances, benefit from culturally appropriate, trained interpreters to support meaningful participation in the survey.

The Commissioner will consider this in planning for future surveys.

As with any survey of children and young people, the opinions of parents and communities is important, however the goal is to provide the children and young people with a voice and the opportunity to have their say.

5



Conclusion

5 Conclusion

This report highlights that most Aboriginal children and young people in remote areas feel safe, have good relationships with their friends and family, and enjoy going to school. They show strength and resilience, often in the face of inter-generational trauma and poverty.

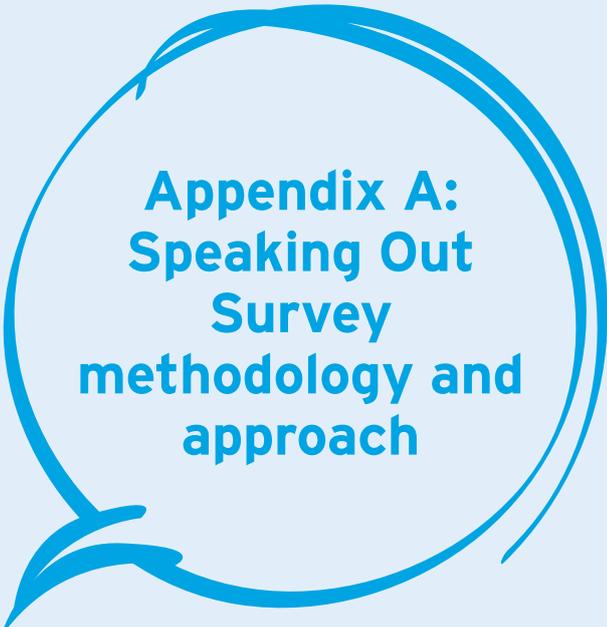
Many continue to experience significant material disadvantage which can have multiple impacts on their health and wellbeing, including greater barriers to engaging in learning and less access to quality and culturally safe health care than most other children and young people across WA.

There is limited data available relating specifically to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in WA, including data which is disaggregated at regional and local levels. This lack of information presents a challenge to policy makers and service providers undertaking evidence-based decision making. It is important that data sources be improved given the diversity of Aboriginal cultural groups and living circumstances across WA.

Listening to the voices of children and young people through their self-reported views is essential to understanding and monitoring their wellbeing. The Commissioner is committed to working with Aboriginal communities, families and children and young people to continually review the Speaking Out Survey process to ensure it is accessible and empowering for all children and young people in WA.

The Speaking Out Survey provides invaluable feedback for decision-makers and service providers within WA to enable them to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people.





Appendix A: Speaking Out Survey 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). This 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.

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 had 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.

In the main SOS21 sample, Aboriginal students across WA are represented in SOS21 in proportion to their population. The survey was not designed to provide representative estimates for Aboriginal students in remote areas, however, with a relatively large sample size, the results outlined in this report provide a good indication of the views and experiences of these children and young people.

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.

As in 2019, opt-out consent procedures were adopted for the main survey, where parents and caregivers were notified about the survey and could withdraw consent for their child to participate. Written parental consent was not required for students to participate.

SOS21 had separate surveys for Years 4 to 6 and Years 7 to 12. For Years 4 to 6 (primary school), the maximum total number of questions asked of a student was 119; for Years 7 to 12 (secondary school), there maximum total number was 203 questions. The survey employed standard survey response filter mechanisms.

In response to student feedback from SOS19, SOS21 included additional open text questions about essential wellbeing topics such as mental health and safety.

The survey was implemented online through a customised survey platform. The survey is anonymous, with the students not providing their name and only some basic demographic information, such as age, year level, gender and Aboriginal status.

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.

References

- 1 The determination of which schools are remote is based on the WA Education Department census data. Under this system, schools in Broome are classified as remote, while schools in Kalgoorlie or Albany are classified as regional. This principally aligns with the Australian Bureau of Statistics remoteness areas.
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- 6 This is not necessarily using marijuana themselves, but possibly being at a party, in a house etc. where marijuana is consumed.
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- 13 Warren D 2017, *Low income and poverty dynamics: implications for child outcomes*, Australian Institute of Family Studies and Department of Social Services.
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- 16 Graham LJ et al 2022, *Overrepresentation of Indigenous students in school suspension, exclusion, and enrolment cancellation in Queensland: is there a case for systemic inclusive school reform?*, *The Australian Educational Researcher* [Preprint].
- 17 Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority 2022, *National Report on Schooling 2021 – Student Attendance dataset*, ACARA [website].
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**The health
and wellbeing of
Aboriginal children
and young people
in remote WA**

Insights from the 2021
Speaking Out Survey



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