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healthwatch
Suffolk

My Health, Our Future (Phase 7)

Young people with special educational
needs and disabilities (SEND) in Suffolk

Acknowledgements

The continued support of the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System, and various partners collaborating with young people in Suffolk is essential to the success and achievements of the 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF) programme. Above all, we thank school and college leaders, and students, at the following schools and colleges for supporting MHoF 2023:

- ▶ Abbeygate Sixth Form College
- ▶ Castle Manor Academy
- ▶ Chantry Academy
- ▶ Claydon High School
- ▶ County High School
- ▶ Copleston High School
- ▶ East Bergholt High School
- ▶ Felixstowe Academy
- ▶ Holbrook High school
- ▶ Horringer Court Middle School
- ▶ Ipswich High School
- ▶ Ipswich School
- ▶ King Edward VI School
- ▶ Mildenhall College Academy
- ▶ Newmarket Academy
- ▶ Northgate High School
- ▶ Ormiston Denes Academy
- ▶ Pakefield High School
- ▶ Samuel Ward Academy
- ▶ St Joseph's College
- ▶ Sir John Lemman High School
- ▶ St Alban's Catholic High School
- ▶ Suffolk ONE Sixth Form College
- ▶ Thomas Gainsborough School
- ▶ West Suffolk College
- ▶ Westley Middle School
- ▶ Westbourne Academy
- ▶ The survey was also open to the public, gaining **77** responses.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond and share their experiences with us.

The Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

This report includes reference to, and use of, a widely used measure of wellbeing known as the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS). It was developed by the Universities of Warwick, Edinburgh and Leeds in conjunction with NHS Health Scotland (©University of Warwick, 2006, all rights reserved).

Results related to the use of a shortened format of this scale can be found throughout, and within our section about wellbeing from page 15. For more information about WEMWBS, please visit <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>.

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For more information about 'My Health, Our Future' (MHoF), or to download previous reports and insights, please visit:

www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof

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Introduction – SEND in focus

My Health, Our Future (MHoF) is a unique research programme exploring the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people in Suffolk.

Since 2015, MHoF data has been helping schools, colleges, and integrated care systems to improve support for children and young people. The programme offers reliable insights into the current wellbeing of young people across Suffolk, providing data to support local decision-making about services, attract funding for local support and inform health and care system strategies around young people's health and wellbeing.

The programme has recorded over 55,000 responses from young people on topics like bullying, anxiety, and many other areas. The 'phase seven' survey included a new focus on physical health, prompting young people to share views on topics like sexual health support, and healthy lifestyles.

This report presents findings from phase seven of the MHoF survey, with a focus on respondents who self-identified as having a special educational need or disability (SEND). It is important to note that the survey did not ask about young people's experience of SEND provision, or whether they were accessing SEND support.

This report is a part of a series relating to our findings in 2023/24.

Please [click this link](#) to find our other MHoF phase seven reports.

For more information about the MHoF research programme, and to access our full range of reports and content, visit [this link](#).

Co-production

Each year, the My Health, Our Future' survey is reviewed together with young people, NHS commissioners, schools, colleges and other partners to make sure it remains relevant to local priorities. Most importantly, the co-production of the survey helps us to ensure the survey remains focused on issues that are important to young people.

For phase seven, we began by reaching out to schools and colleges in Suffolk to explore the issues highlighted in previous reports and gain insight into the challenges they face. We also approached local partners (e.g., Public Health Suffolk) to consider insights that may be valuable as they are developing new strategies and services. This led to the addition of new topics in the survey this year.

In addition, we collaborated with our Youthwatch Suffolk network of young people, who highlighted a range of issues they felt could be explored in the survey. Together, we developed new sections addressing LGBT*Q+ issues in relationship and sex education classes, and content about seeking information or support around hormonal changes.

“Us young people rarely get a say in anything important, but it’s about time we’re included in conversations around our own mental and physical health. The survey gives us this opportunity!”

*“From Youthwatch’s contributions to the survey, new topics this year around the effects of hormones, experiences with GPs, and the experience of the LGBT*Q+ community around health were included. Without our involvement, these topics may have been overlooked.”*

– **Youthwatch Member**



The image features a teal-tinted background showing a crowd of people. In the center, a person's hand is raised, pointing upwards. The text "Who took part?" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font. The background is filled with bokeh light effects and a fine dust-like texture.

Who took part?

Sample summary

13,084 responses were recorded. Of these, **2,120** responses were from young people with SEND. That is **16%** of our total sample.

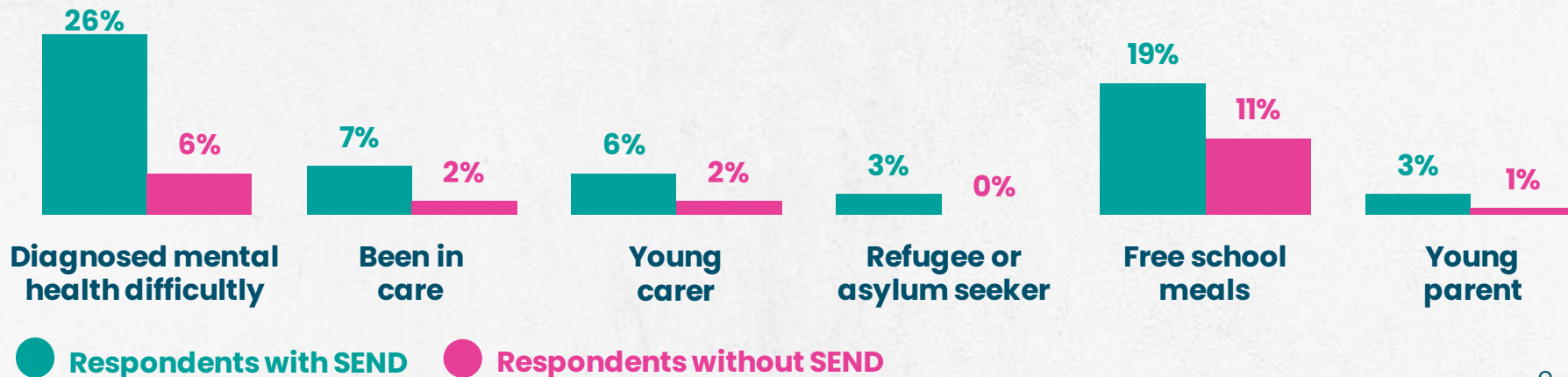
- These young people self-selected statements that read “I have autism, Aspergers syndrome or ASD”, “I have ADHD”, “I have a disability”, and “I have special educational needs”.
- Most SEND responses were from young people in Year 7 to Year 11 (**73%/1,557**). A further **23% (498)** were from students in Year 12 and Year 13. There were also a small number of responses from university students and young people not in mainstream education.
- The largest proportion of SEND students were **male (48%/1,010)**. This was followed by **42% (888)** of female students, and **7% (141)** of people who preferred to describe their gender another way.
- A quarter (**26%/543**) of SEND students identified as LGBT*Q+.

Year Group	Count	%
Year 7	335	16%
Year 8	373	18%
Year 9	391	18%
Year 10	300	14%
Year 11	158	7%
Year 12	288	14%
Year 13	210	10%
University	2	0%
Not in education	3	0%
Home schooled	2	0%
EOTAS	2	0%
No answer	56	3%

Additional support needs

Students could also identify with several 'additional support needs' in the MHoF survey (e.g., being a carer). These are a series of unique factors that have previously been shown to influence the subjective wellbeing of students responding to the survey.

- Students with SEND were more likely to report having an additional support need. A **quarter (543)** said they had a diagnosed mental health difficulty, compared to **6% (676)** of students without SEND.
- **Over half (51%/ 1,073)** of students with SEND identified with two or more additional support needs. This is compared to **2% (219)** of students without SEND.





Our Results

Wellbeing (SWEMWBS)

In general, young people's average wellbeing has increased after record low scores for the last two years. However, scores for SEND students showed no meaningful difference.

- The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale was used to measure wellbeing. Students respond to seven statements and receive a score ranging between 7 and 35. A higher score indicates better wellbeing.
- **12,959** students responded to the SWEMWBS questions. Young people with SEND have a lower wellbeing scored (poorer wellbeing) than students without SEND, and a national average recorded in 2020.

Please note:

Our 2023 SEND grouping is inclusive of additional vulnerabilities not available to students in the 2022 survey. They were "I have autism, Asperger's syndrome or ASD", and "I have ADHD". The proportion of SEND students in 2022 was **13%**, whilst the proportion in 2023 was **16%**.



Suffolk (2023)

- **20.5** (Respondents without SEND)
- **19.0** (Respondents with SEND)

National NHS data

- **24.6** (2020)



28%

of young people with SEND
felt optimistic about their
future 'rarely' or 'never'.

Happiness (the GCI)

Developed by the Children's Society, the Good Childhood Index (CGI) is a short questionnaire that can be completed by children themselves. It is used to measure wellbeing overall and in relation to 10 aspects of life.

Students were asked how happy they are with:

- ▶ Their relationships with family.
- ▶ The home they live in.
- ▶ How much choice they have in life.
- ▶ Their relationships with friends.
- ▶ Things they have (like money and things they own)
- ▶ Their health
- ▶ The way they look.
- ▶ What may happen to them in the future.
- ▶ School
- ▶ The way they use their time.

Students' responses to the ten aspects of life included in the index amount to an average happiness score. Scores below the midpoint (0 to 4) on the 0 to 10 scale are considered to have low wellbeing for the various aspects of life included in the index.

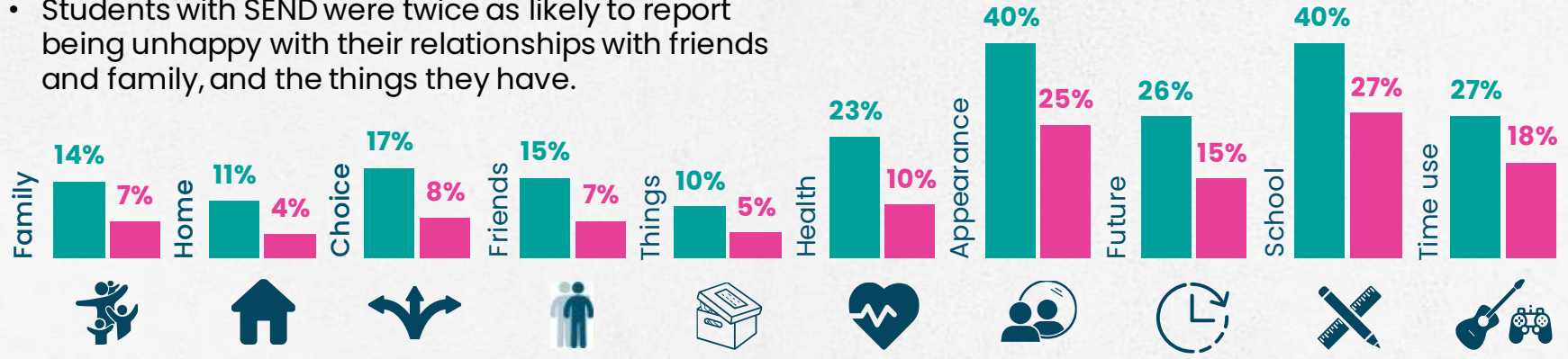
For more information about the CGI, please visit

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/good-childhood-index>.

Happiness (GCI)

The Good Childhood Index (GCI) was used to measure young people's happiness in relation to ten different aspects of life. The graph below shows the proportion of young people with SEND scoring below the mid-point on the 0-10 scale, compared to peers without SEND. These students would be considered as having 'low wellbeing'.

- Students with SEND were more likely to score below the mid-point (0-4), which suggests they were more unhappy across all domains.
- Students with SEND were twice as likely to report being unhappy with their relationships with friends and family, and the things they have.
- Students with SEND are more than twice as likely to report being unhappy with their choices in life, and their health.



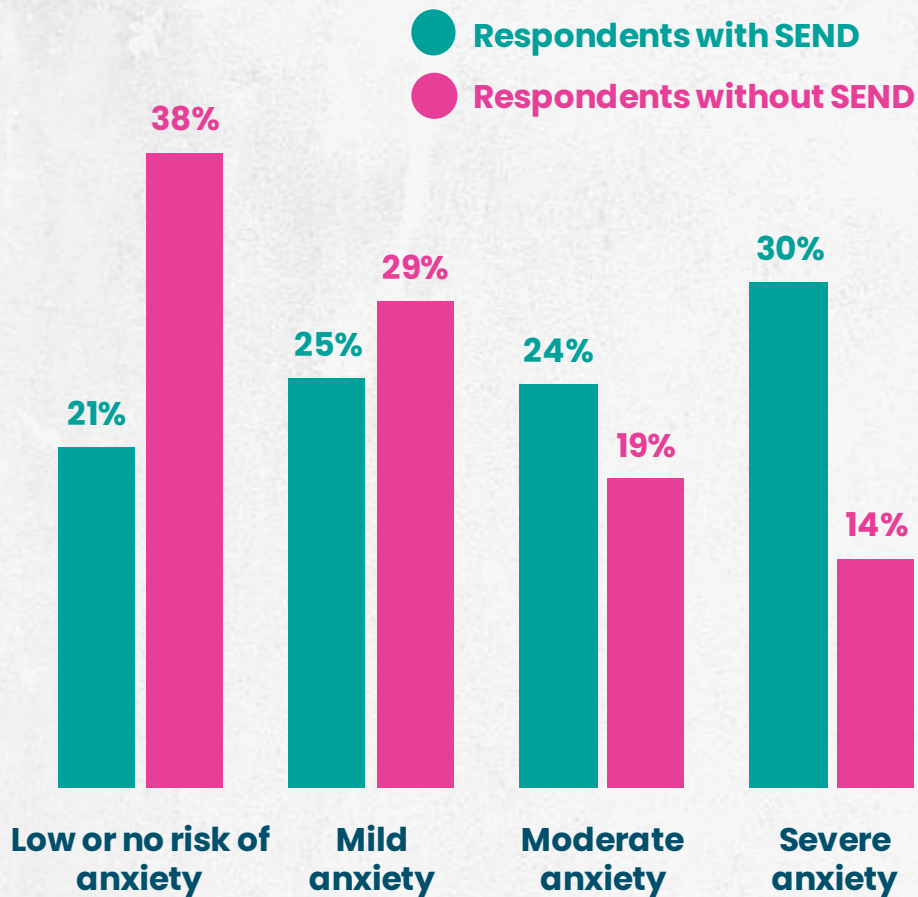
● Respondents with SEND ● Respondents without SEND

Anxiety(GAD-7)

Around 1 in 5 (21%) young people with SEND had 'low' or 'no risk' of Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

The Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7) presents students with seven statements to identify probable cases of Generalised Anxiety Disorder. From their average scores, students can be categorised as having 'mild', 'moderate', or 'severe' anxiety.

- **12,148** students responded, including **1,950** students with SEND.
- The graph shows the percentage of students within each anxiety category.
- Students with SEND were slightly more likely to fall within the 'moderate' to 'severe' anxiety categories (**55%/1,068**), compared to **32% (3,311)** of students without SEND.



What would help?

We asked: 'Would you find any of these helpful in your school or college?'

- **12,137** students responded to the question, including **1,957** students with SEND. The response choices were recommendations proposed by young people in the 2022/23 MHoF (Phase Six) survey regarding what could be improved.
- The most favoured suggestion for improvements in school or college for students with SEND was to have more awareness of mental health among staff and students (**49%/ 952**). This was followed by the need for more information about support options and where to access them (**43%/ 833**).
- Over a quarter of students with SEND expressed interest in guest speakers with expertise in mental health (**27%/ 525**), and breakfast clubs providing nutritious foods (**26%/ 622**).

Statements	SEND	Not SEND
Access to counsellors/ someone to talk to	41%	33%
Guest speakers with knowledge about mental health	27%	26%
More awareness of mental health among staff and students	49%	43%
More information about support options and where to access them	43%	37%
More frequent lessons on mental health	35%	31%
More time to discuss mental health	39%	33%
An after school or breakfast club that provides healthy food	26%	24%
School lunches to offer healthier options for food	32%	34%
More after school activities (sports, music, art, dance)	42%	45%



22%

Of students with SEND did not have someone at their school or college they could talk to about their mental health.

Someone to talk to

Young people were asked who they would most likely talk to at their school or college.

- Both students with SEND (**40%/ 780**) and students without SEND (**44%/ 4,499**) were most likely to want to talk to another student about their mental health. This was followed by talking to a teacher.
- Both students with SEND (**7%/ 140**) and students without SEND (**7%/ 719**) were least likely to want to talk to school nurses.
- A **quarter** of students with SEND would not seek out anyone to talk to.
- The findings highlight the importance of raising awareness of mental health among young people and ensuring they are informed about where to find support when needed.

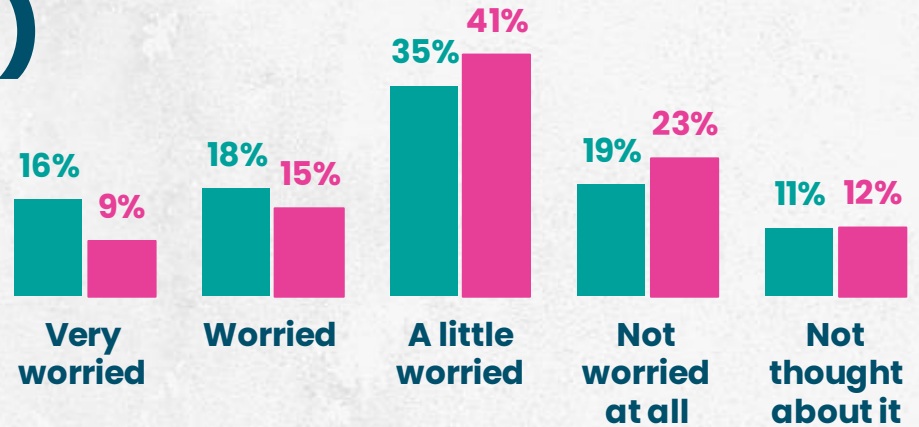
	SEND	Not SEND
Teacher	29%	26%
School nurse	7%	7%
Mental health support team	17%	14%
Another student	40%	44%
Student support	12%	8%
Personal progress tutor	13%	11%
Pastoral staff	11%	9%
Other/Someone else	21%	17%
No one	25%	24%

Cost of living (CoL)

Students with SEND were more likely to express they were 'very worried' or 'worried' about the cost of living.

1,935 students with SEND responded, of which:

- **35% (685)** were 'a little worried' about the potential impact of the cost of living on them, and their families. This is compared to **42%** (4,175) of students without SEND.
- **34% (664)** were either 'worried' or 'very worried' about the cost of living, compared to **22%** (2,231) of students without SEND.
- **19% (364)** did not express any worry at all regarding the cost of living, compared to **24%** (2,420) of students without SEND.



● Respondents with SEND ● Respondents without SEND

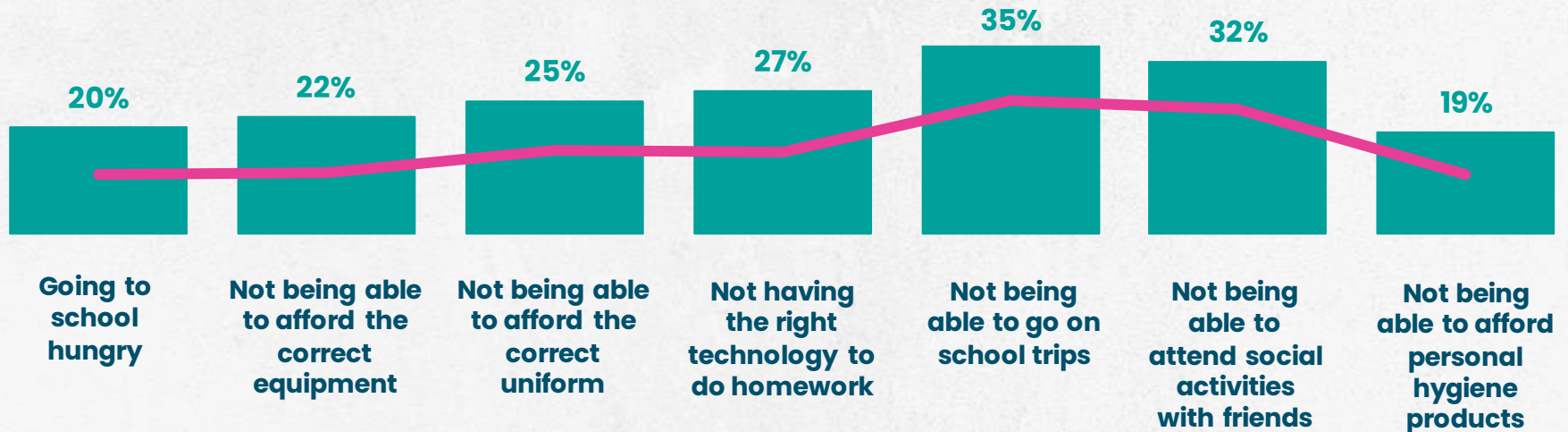
More than
a third

of students with SEND were either 'worried' or 'very worried' about the impact of the rising cost of living on their lives, and the lives of their families.

What are you worried about (CoL)?

The graph below shows the percentage of students who said they were worried about a number of statements 'now' or for 'the future'.

- Students with SEND were more likely to report feeling worried about all of the statements, compared to students without SEND.
- The primary concern for students with (35%/ 613) and without SEND (25%/ 2,300) was about their ability to go on school trips.

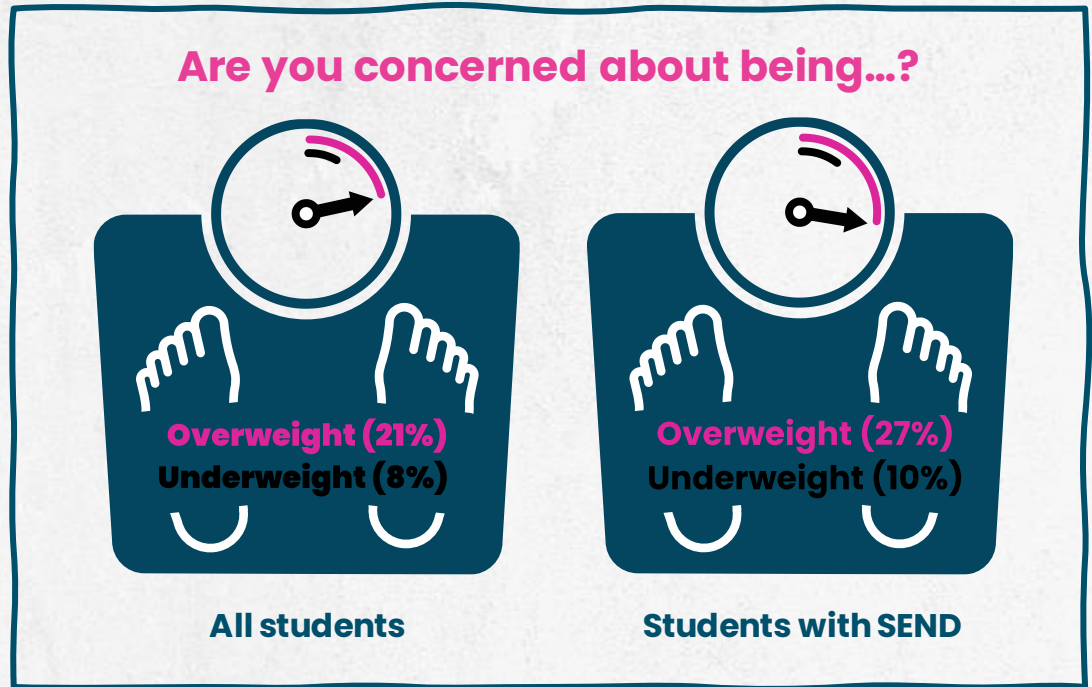


● Respondents with SEND ● Respondents without SEND

Healthy lifestyles

We asked young people whether they were concerned about being over, or under, weight. A total of **11,831** people responded to the question, including **1,918** students with SEND.

- Students with SEND were more likely to worry about their weight (**37%/717**, compared to **27%/2,689** of their peers).
- **38% (728)** of students with SEND had no worries regarding their weight, compared to **47% (4,660)** students without SEND.
- **27% (525)** of students with SEND and **19% (1,930)** without SEND were concerned about being overweight.
- **10% (192)** of students with SEND and **8% (759)** without SEND were concerned about being underweight.



Managing weight

We asked young people about what could help them to manage their weight.

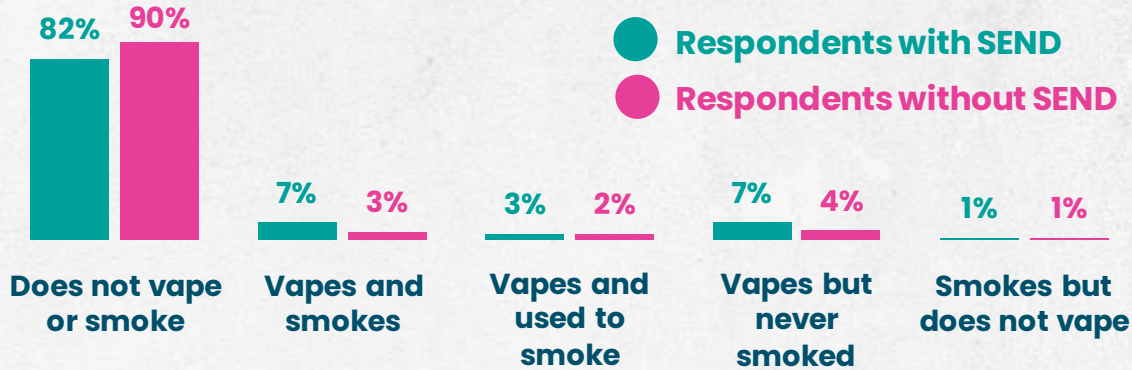
The table right shows the percentage of students that were concerned about their weight, and their preference of things that could help them to manage their weight.

- The most favoured response for both students with SEND (**32%/ 222**) and students without SEND (**36%/ 962**) was information about losing or gaining weight. This was closely followed by information about healthy diets.
- Students with SEND were more likely to indicate information about sporting activities, services in their local area, improved access to sporting activities, and having someone to talk to could help them to manage their weight, compared to students without SEND.

Help to manage weight	SEND	Not SEND
Information about losing or gaining weight	32%	36%
Information about healthy diets	30%	31%
Information about exercise and sporting activities	26%	27%
Improved access to sporting activities	24%	22%
Information about services in my local area to help manage my weight	14%	10%
Someone to talk to about my weight	19%	15%
Something else	12%	12%

Vaping

In the UK it is illegal to sell vapes to under 18s. However, data shows that the number of children and young people using vapes is rising. In total, **11,758** people responded to our question, of which **1,897** were students with SEND.



- **17% (327)** of students with SEND vape, compared to **9% (945)** of students without SEND. Most indicated that they liked the feeling it gives them.
- Students with SEND were more likely to say they were addicted to vaping, compared to students without SEND (**38% vs. 28%**). They were also more likely to say vapes are easier to get than tobacco cigarettes (**17% vs. 8%**), and my friends do it (**28% vs. 22%**).



7% said they vape, but never smoked.

Sexual health

We asked young people in Year 9 and above about their awareness of iCaSH – a service that provides for all aspects of sexual and reproductive health, including contraception, STI testing and treatment.

7,264 people responded to the question, including **1,196** students with SEND.

- Students with SEND were slightly more likely to say they were aware of iCaSH, compared to students without SEND (**18% vs. 17%**).

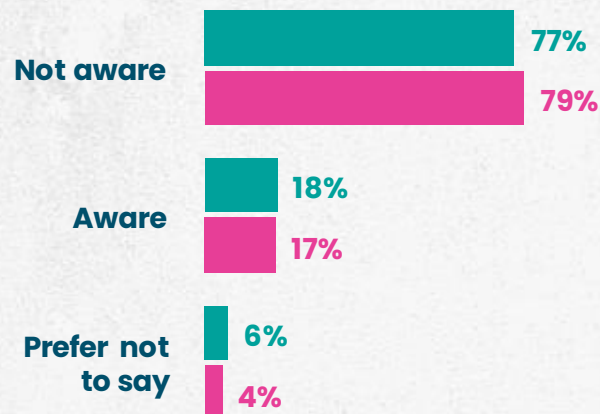
We also asked students what would prevent them from accessing a sexual health service.

- The most common response among students with SEND (**40%/ 463**) and students without SEND (**36%/ 2108**) was feeling embarrassed. This was closely followed by not knowing where a sexual health clinic was near them.

Just
in
16



Students with and without SEND (in year 9 and above) were aware of **iCaSH** services and support.



● Respondents without SEND

● Respondents with SEND

Sexual harassment

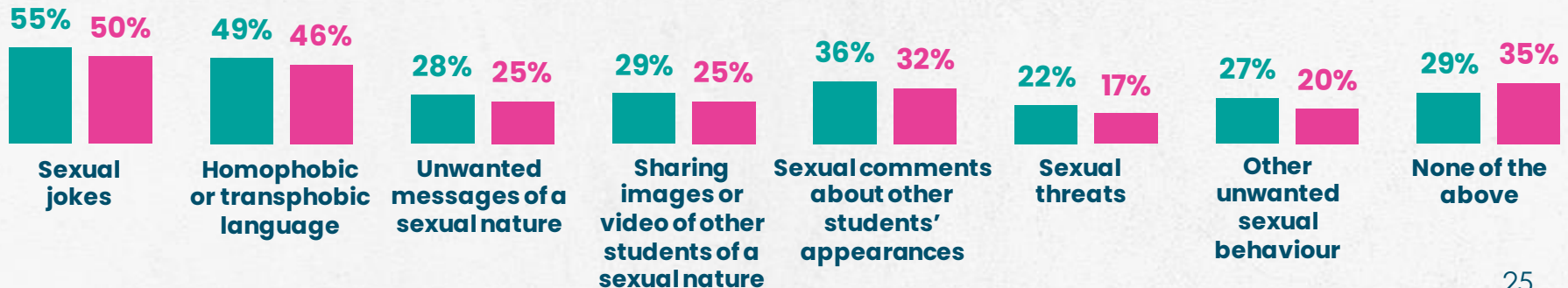
Students with SEND were more likely to have heard or seen sexual harassment in their school/college.

Between **8,449** and **7,444** students responded to questions in this section, including **1,218** students with SEND.

- **61% (850)** of students with SEND had seen or heard sexual harassment at their school or college, compared to **56% (3,957)** of students without SEND.
- Over a quarter of students with SEND had seen or heard other unwanted sexual behaviour at their school or college, compared to students without SEND (**27% vs. 20%**).



- Respondents without SEND
- Respondents with SEND



Relationship and sex education (RSE)

Students were asked whether they had received information about the following RSE topics and whether this information was at the right time or what they wanted to know.

I haven't received information about...	SEND	Not SEND
Gender Identity	36%	31%
Sexual Orientation	29%	25%
Healthy relationships and consent	13%	10%
Options for contraception	21%	16%
Sexually transmitted infections	20%	16%
How to look after my sexual health	30%	24%

- Most students had received information about RSE topics. However, SEND students were more likely to say they had not received this information compared to peers.
- **30% (343)** of SEND students indicated they had not received information about looking after their sexual health, compared to **24% (1,420)** of students without SEND.
- Whilst many students received information about RSE topics, this information was often not at the right time - or it was not what they had wanted to know. This was more likely to be the case for students with SEND.
- **20% (229)** of SEND students said the information on sexual orientation was not at the right time or what they wanted to know, compared to **13% (788)** of peers.

Hormones

We sought to understand if young people felt they had received enough information about physical and emotional changes to expect during puberty. The questions on hormonal changes were designed with the support of Youthwatch Suffolk.

- Most students had received information about the physical and emotional changes their body may experience during puberty. However, students with SEND were slightly more likely to say they had not.
- Some students had not always received enough information at the right time for them. This was more likely to be the case for SEND students.
- **40% (724)** of students with SEND were given information about emotional changes to expect, but it was not enough or at the right time.

Physical changes	SEND	Not SEND
I haven't received information about this	11% (188)	8% (717)
I was given information, but it wasn't enough or at the right time	35% (611)	30% (2763)

Emotional changes	SEND	Not SEND
I haven't received information about this	15% (275)	11% (1059)
I was given information, but it wasn't enough or at the right time	40% (724)	34% (3175)



This report has been produced to support the ongoing development and implementation of children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing support in Suffolk. It will be publicly available on the Healthwatch Suffolk website. It will also be made available to Healthwatch England, and bodies responsible for the commissioning, scrutiny or delivery of local health and care services.

We confirm that we are using the Healthwatch Trademark (which covers the logo and Healthwatch brand) when undertaking work on our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

If you require this report in an alternative format, please contact us on 0800 448 8234 or by email to info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk.

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