



Sandwell MBC

# SHAPE

## Survey Results 2024

Final Report

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The SHAPE Survey has been conducted since November 2014, when the SHAPE Programme was first introduced as a child's voice initiative. It is a means to consult with young people on the five SHAPE themes:

- Staying Safe
- Being Healthy
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a Positive Contribution
- Economic Wellbeing

In 2024, the online survey was developed for Primary School children from years 5 and 6 and Secondary School children from years 7 to 13. The link to the survey was distributed to all Primary, Secondary, and Alternative Provisions in Sandwell. The total number of survey participants was 2,751, which is a 12% response rate of all children in years 5 to 6 in primary schools and 6% of all young people in years 7 to 13 in secondary schools. The questions were devised and developed by stakeholders who deliver services to children and young people and broken down further into specific areas.

The main findings from the report portray similar trends to the last few years. Children at a primary school age are enjoying their childhood with time for play and activities with friends and family, however challenges can come when they find themselves a victim of bullying which they fear will continue in their transition to secondary school.

Exam pressure has a detrimental effect on a young person's mental health and wellbeing and therefore schools and organisations need to ensure there is adequate support being offered during exam season.

The increase in access to electronic devices can contribute to the dangers and risks young people face but their lives are encompassed in the world of social media and entertainment online. The evidence does not yet show whether the digital world is altogether harmful or beneficial for children and young people's health.

The perception of Sandwell as a Borough remains negative, due to high levels of crime and uncleanness as well as deprivation. With the ongoing cost of living crisis, young people and their families are experiencing the impact of this on their daily lives. A greater emphasis needs to be made on the positive assets Sandwell has and ensuring regeneration and town plans are responsive to the needs of the future generation, making Sandwell a more attractive place to live for all.

This report provides a detailed account of all the survey results which internal and external stakeholders can utilise to address the needs and issues identified by children and young people. As well as contributing to Sandwell Council's Corporate Business Plan, the survey supports the Council's objective of becoming a child friendly borough by enabling article 12 of the UN Conventions Rights of the Child, allowing children and young people to express their views freely. The Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy, which outlines how the council can involve youth in shaping services and the SHAPE survey, is a key mechanism of participation.

## **2. Objectives and Purpose**

The purpose of the SHAPE Survey is to consult with children and young people in Sandwell ranging from the age of 8 – 18 years. It allows council members, senior leaders, officers and partner agencies to be able to understand the experiences, needs, issues and views of young people in Sandwell.

The information from this study will enable stakeholders to reflect on the services they offer to young people and identify if any changes need to be made based on the consultation results.

National surveys such as Ditch the Label, Make Your Mark and the Ofcom Survey collect data from young people on specific issues like bullying, views on what national changes should be made by Government and media use and attitudes. However, on a local level, the SHAPE Survey offers a cross-section of consultation on a number of topics affecting the lives of young people and is the only survey distributed to every school in Sandwell on a regular basis. This would also allow the survey's quantitative and qualitative results to assist in research at a local, regional and national level.

## **3. Methodology**

There were 2 participant groups for the survey, these included the following:

- Primary School Pupils from years 5 and 6
- Secondary School Pupils from years 7 to 13

An online survey was developed by the Public Health Intelligence Team with the questions formulated by the SHAPE Team and internal and external partners who had an interest in consulting with young people on their services. The 43 questions for primary aged children and 69 questions for secondary aged children were categorised into the following sections to encompass all the SHAPE themes:

- General – demographic information e.g. age, school year, town, ethnicity
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Social media, gaming and communications
- Your local area
- Education & learning
- Play/Youth Activities
- Child's/ Youth Voice & Social Action
- Your Future

The survey was developed with similar questions for the two groups. Many open-ended questions were included to ensure the children and young people were able to express their views and opinions freely. The survey questions can be found on Sandwell Trends (<https://www.sandwelltrends.info/>).

Once the survey was developed and tested, the links were sent to all schools through the regular school's communication bulletin to Head Teachers. Head Teachers were asked to distribute the online survey for pupils in their schools to complete.

There were no restrictions on the types of institution in which the survey was distributed, therefore alternative provisions and Sandwell College were included. There were also no restrictions on the number of pupils who could take part in the survey, per individual school. However, schools were offered the incentive that if 25% of pupils on their school roll completed the survey, they would be provided with their school's individual results. Each participant was also offered the chance to enter a prize draw to win vouchers. The survey was active for 3 months from April 2024 to July 2024.

#### **4. Results**

The total number of participants that took part in the survey was 2751 which is a 141.5% increase compared to the 1139 responses from 2023. The total for each group were as follows:

- Primary school pupils –1248 (12.4% of the borough population in years 5 and 6 based on January 2024 school census)
- Secondary school pupils – 1503 (5.7% of the borough population in years 7 to 13 based on January 2024 school census)

The following pages provide a breakdown of the results of all the surveys based on the topic areas.

It must be noted that the total numbers of respondents per question may vary as all respondents may not have answered every question.

#### **4.1 Limitations**

As the survey is online only, this will exclude any young person who may not be able to use or access technological devices to complete the survey. Every school will use a different approach to their pupils completing the survey and therefore the numbers of responses vary per individual school. Responses from 16 to 17 year olds were low, therefore it must be noted that it is difficult to offer robust conclusions when analysing the results of the survey for this age group.

#### **4.2 Demographics**

##### **4.21 Town**

The participant groups were asked which town they lived in. The breakdown is provided in Figure 4.211. In terms of primary, Oldbury had the highest respondents with 20%, but West Bromwich represented 19% and Wednesbury had 17%, therefore there was a good representation across all towns in Sandwell. Tipton and Smethwick had the least responses with under 10% of the respondents. For secondary, Wednesbury proved to be the highest with 43% of respondents. The results are reflective of the schools within these towns who submitted the highest number of responses.

	Primary	Secondary	Total town	per	Total % of respondents
Oldbury	248	264	512		18.7%
Rowley Regis	177	38	215		7.8%
Smethwick	105	81	186		6.7%
Tipton	68	21	89		3.2%
Wednesbury	218	636	854		31.2%
West Bromwich	234	227	461		16.8%
Other	136	210	346		12.6%
Not Sure	61	17	28		2.8%
Total	1247	1494	2741		100%

**Figure 4.211 – Breakdown of the town by survey respondents**

## 4.22 Schools

Figure 4.221 provides more information about the school responses and participants. It must be noted that 9.72% of primary and 5.8% of secondary preferred not to say if they had a social worker and 7.9% of secondary also preferred not to say if they had a disability.

The report only details the responses of the children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) where the responses are different to the overall survey results.

The percentage of schools taking part in the survey and the number of responses were higher than 2023, with primary schools demonstrating a 5.8% increase from 2023 of the borough population and secondary schools demonstrating a 3.9% increase.

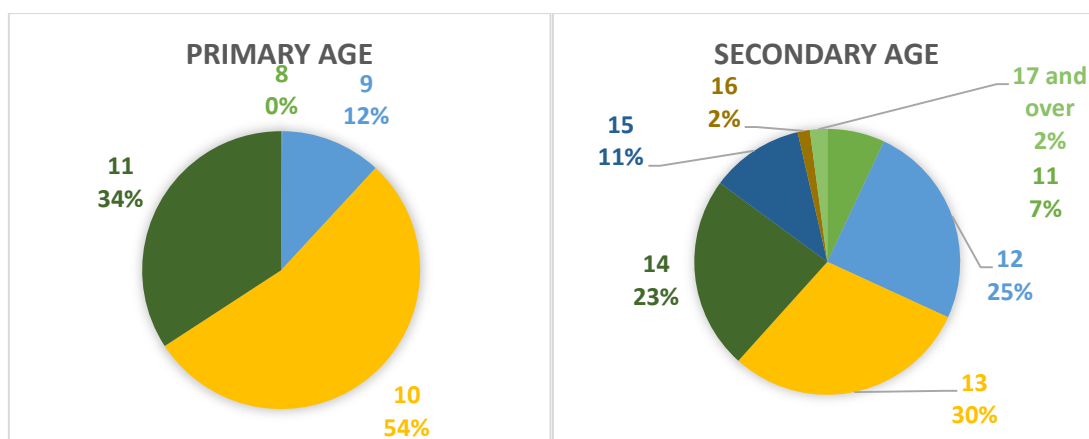
We can be 95% confident that if the survey was repeated again then 95% of the time, the interval of +/- 2.6% for primary and +/- 2.45% for secondary, would contain the true population proportion.

	Primary	Secondary
Total Schools in Sandwell including Special Schools & alternative provision settings	104	145
Number of schools taking part in survey	40 (39%)	31 (45.2%)
Total number of participants	1248	1503
Lowest number of participants per single school	1	1
Highest number of respondents per single school	145	833
Participants with a social worker	98 (7.9%)	74 (5%)
Participants who considered themselves as having a disability	167 (13.6%)	116 (7.9%)

**Figure 4.211 – School respondents and participants**

## 4.23 Age

Figure 4.231 provides a breakdown of the age of the participants. For the primary age the largest category was age 11 years old. For secondary, the largest category was 13 years old. There was representation from all ages however the 16 to 18 age group responses were low.



**Figure 4.231 – Breakdown of survey respondents by age**

#### 4.24 Sex and gender identity

For this year's survey, the secondary age gender identity was broken down into pronouns. The gender identity and ethnicity breakdown are shown in Figure 4.241. The proportion of male to female responses in both age was nearly equal.

Participants	He/Him	She/Her	They/Them	Other	Prefer not to say
Primary	52.6%	46.6%	N/A	0.9%	N/A
Secondary	47.5%	48.8%	0.9%	0.9%	1.9%

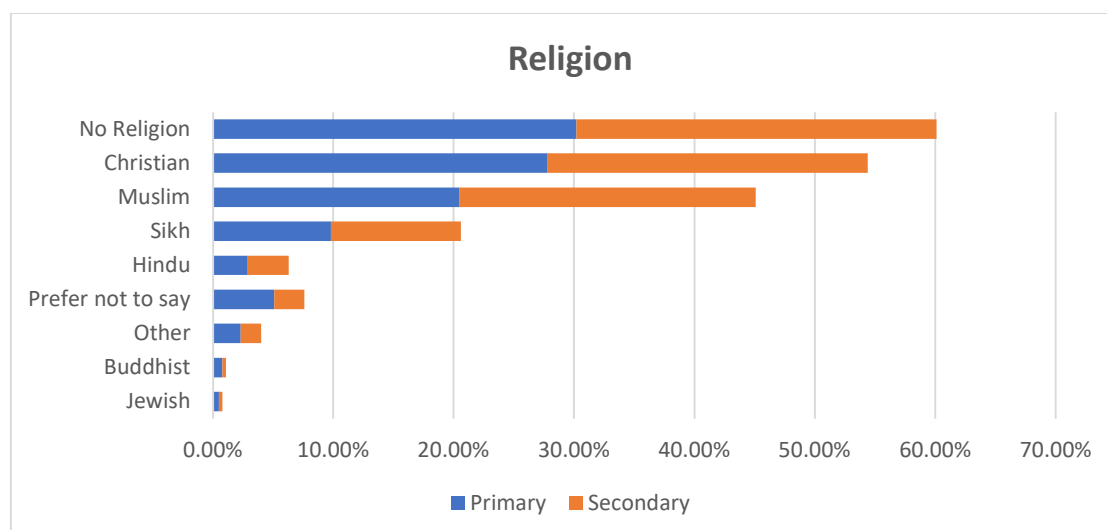
**Figure 4.241 – Breakdown of the survey respondents by sex and gender**

#### 4.25 Ethnicity and religion

Just over half the respondents in primary were white and for secondary, just over half were a combination of non-white, other or prefer not to say.

This year an additional demographic question was asked on religion and figure 4.251 shows over 30% of both age groups do not associate with a religion. Christianity was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most common response.

Participants	White	Gypsy or Irish Traveller or Roma	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other	Prefer not to say
Primary	48.4%	0.5%	9.8%	23.5%	8.5%	4.8%	3.8%
Secondary	45.2%	0.4%	9.5%	32.5%	7.2%	2.2%	1.9%



**Figure 4.251 – Ethnicity and religion breakdown of survey**

## 5 Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing questions covered many different aspects including issues affecting young people and how educational settings deal with this topic.

One of the questions asked consistently in all SHAPE surveys to date is, “What is the top issue affecting young people in today’s society?”. Figure 5.1 shows the top issues from 2015 to 2024. From all the surveys conducted over the years, there are obvious reoccurring themes, with the top 3 issues being: schoolwork and exams, vaping, gangs and youth violence. The next 5 categories are what to do after GCSEs, knife crime, drugs, being bullied, getting a job.

	2015	2017	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024
1	School/ college work & exams	What to do after year 11	Knife Crime	School/ College work & Exams	Gangs & Youth Violence	School work & Exams	School work and exams
2	Gangs & youth violence	School work and exams	School/ College work & Exams	Physical Appearance	Knife Crime	Vaping	Vaping
3	What to do after year 11	Getting college course/ apprenticeship	Gangs & Youth Violence	Being Bullied	School/ College work and exams	Gangs & Youth Violence	Gangs and Youth Violence
4	Being Bullied	Gangs and youth violence	Being Bullied	Impact of covid 19	Drugs and substance abuse	Knife Crime	What to do after GCSEs
5	Being Healthy	Nothing worries me	What to do after GCSEs	What to do after GCSEs	What to do after GCSEs Being Bullied	Drugs	Knife Crime
6						What to do after GCSE's	Drugs
7						Getting a job	Being Bullied
8						Being Bullied	Getting a job

**Figure 5.1 – Issues affecting young people from 2015 to 2024 SHAPE survey - Secondary results**



Some of the quotes below are taken from the literal responses as explanations for the choices made and demonstrate that the respondents want to be accepted.

### **School and Further Education**

- *“Because children find it kind of hard to deal with school, education and acceptance and it might be a struggle for them as they are very vulnerable in a big and cruel world”.*
- *“I have made these choices as i constantly worry about getting into the right university and being able to get a good job for me while also being safe from any harm or risks”.*

### **Vaping**

- *“School has the greatest impact, vaping and bullying can happen because of school”.*
- *“Vaping is very common among teenagers and many of them start gangs, others have trouble being accepted because of their appearance or their beliefs”.*
- *“Young people see what other people are doing and they think it is cool to do to show off”.*

### **Crime & Youth Violence**

- *“I’ve made these choices because i think young children are mostly affected by crimes and hate towards them and also many people who have finished school have nothing to do or nothing prepared”. “I think some people don’t get properly supported or are not exposed enough to the real world and don’t know the consequences of their actions”.*

### **General**

- *“Because i think some of these things need to be talked about more and people need to listen to what kids are saying because sometimes they need help with this stuff and people need to recognise that”*
- *“People care about their looks and popularity more than their wellbeing or how they’re mentally doing as they feel the constant need to be accepted into society”.*
- *“Because they all affect your emotions, health and overall happiness how you want to be seen by others and may not affect you but may affect people around you”.*

Figure 5.2 provides the results of children and young people with SEND, who ranked education in the top place and crime related issues ranking below. Becoming an adult also features in the top 8.

	2023	2024
1	School work & Exams	School/ college work & exams
2	Vaping	What to do after GCSEs
3	Gangs & Youth Violence	Knife Crime
4	Knife Crime	Gangs and Youth Violence
5	Becoming an Adult	Getting into trouble
6	What to do after GCSE's	Vaping
7	Getting a job	Drugs
8	Being Bullied	Becoming an adult

**Figure 5.2 – Issues affecting young people from 2023 to 2024 SHAPE survey - Secondary results – children with disabilities**

The trends over the years shown in figures 5.1 and 5.2, demonstrate that some issues remain important for children and young people and are being identified repeatedly over the course of many years. The pressure to fit in appears to result in young people adopting a culture of following their peers into risky behaviours, which is subsequently affecting their health and causing addiction.

They are often not only personal experiences but more of a perception based on what they see and hear from others or social media influences, *“I have made these choices based on my experiences, my friends, family and other people's experiences, what I have heard, been told and seen”*. Therefore, to get an understanding of what affects young people personally, this year another question was added. As this was a free text box, thematic analysis was used to identify the top 8 answers. Figure 5.3 provides the results.

1	Nothing
2	School
3	Exams
4	Family
5	Bullying
6	Appearance
7	I don't know
8	Life After Education

**Figure 5.3 – Issues affecting young people from in their personal life - Secondary results.**

The top answer was ‘nothing’, which was stated in the responses. As with 5.1, School work and exams ranked high as it causes stress and anxiety on young people as some of the responses demonstrate, *“Because I struggled with how much I stress and with my anxiety so when it comes to test my mind goes blank and I forget everything”* and

*“exams and education, the pressure of getting the right grades and getting into a job that will support me both mentally and financially is a major weight on my shoulder as my future is on the line here but how will i balance both grades and my social life if i have to devote my time to get a perfect grade to support me in the long run?”*

Family was noted as a personal issue with relationships with family members not being as good as they would like, with one quote referring to this as “*family politics*”. Cost of living and financial support for families was also raised around this topic area. Bullying and appearance were linked closely together, as appearance is one of the main reasons for bullying taking place, “*Being accepted for who I am and not being outed for my physical appearance or the way I act.*”

In figure 5.4, young people were asked to rate their happiness in different categories. Family, home environment and friends are what both age groups were happiest with. Common themes for least happiness include confidence, appearance, education and opinions being valued. For secondary age, intimate relationships was what they were least happiest with.

	Primary	Secondary
Most Happy	1. Family	1. Family
	2. The home you live in	2. The home you live in
	3. Your hobbies/interest	3. Your friends
	4. Your friends	4. Your hobbies/interest
	5. Your health	5. How safe you feel
Least Happy	1. Your confidence	1. Intimate relationships
	2. Your appearance	2. Your confidence
	3. Your schoolwork	3. Your schoolwork/college work
	4. Your opinions being valued or listened to	4. Your appearance
	5. Community you belong to	5. Your opinions being valued or listened to

**Figure 5.4 Levels of happiness**

A new question was added into this section this year asking how children and young people deal with their worries. A number of age-appropriate options were provided for both age groups to choose from. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 show the results. Both age groups chose the top 3 responses the same with “Do something to take my mind off it” as the top response. It was concerning to see those 83 responses, over 5% of total responses were to “cut or hurt myself”. However, many responses remained positive with activities chosen that are associated with good mental health and wellbeing such as sleeping more and doing some physical activity.



**Figure 5.5 – How do you deal with your worries - Primary**



**Figure 5.6 – How do you usually deal with your worries - Secondary**

One of the top 3 reasons shown in figures 5.5 and 5.6 is “to talk to someone I know about it” and when the young people were asked if they have a problem, who would they talk to, the top responses for both age groups were parent/carer or their friends.

45% of secondary pupils stated that they have lessons to promote emotional health and wellbeing, and 26% stating they didn’t have any and 29% were not sure. Therefore, despite mental health and wellbeing issues being raised throughout the survey, the young people surveyed, still have little knowledge of support mechanisms in school around this topic.

Both groups were asked what would improve their mental health and wellbeing. The most popular ones are listed in figure 5.7. The common one between both groups were having someone to talk to with a number of responses referring to the need to have their voices heard.

For the primary age, they highlighted that helping with the transition to secondary school, which 27% of the children surveyed were not looking forward to, as well as extra support with schoolwork would help them. They also recognised supporting families who may have financial difficulties was important too.

For secondary, there was a focus on their future, exams and schoolwork often came up as an issue. They felt that extra support during exam season would help them, and this supports the evidence provided earlier in the report when young people identified that schoolwork and exams were their top issue. They have also identified that they need more places to hang out. Secondary age, like the primary identified family support for deprivation would help improve their mental health and wellbeing.

For children and young people with SEND, the answers replicated overall responses, however tackling bullying issues came up in both categories.

	Primary	Secondary
1	Having someone to talk to when you have a problem	More support to plan for my future
2	Making my move to secondary school easier	Extra support during exam season
3	Supporting my family to manage money/ financial issues	More places where I can go to hang out with my friends
4	Being able to voice your views and opinions freely *Tackling bullying issues	Having someone to talk to when you have a problem (e.g. a mentor)
5	Extra support with schoolwork	Family support for deprivation (e.g. debt advice, housing) *Tackling bullying issues

**Figure 5.7 –Top 5 responses to “What would improve your mental health and wellbeing?”**

*\*Selected by young people with disabilities*

## 6. Support Services

A range of support services exist in Sandwell and this section of questions aimed to find out whether young people were aware of these services.

Two questions were asked about policing, these were whether the pupils knew who their local/link police officer was, and secondly, would they know how to report a crime. This question was only asked to the primary age group. The results are shown below in figure 6.1.

	Do you know who your local/link Police Officer is?		Would you know how to report something to the Police?	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Yes	29.1%	16.6%	64%	N/A
No	70.9%	83.4%	13.7%	N/A
Not Sure	N/A	N/A	22.2%	N/A

**Figure 6.1 – Knowledge of Policing in local area**

The results show that although that many of the respondents from both age groups were unaware of their local police officer, positively, over 60% are aware of reporting something to the Police for the primary age group.

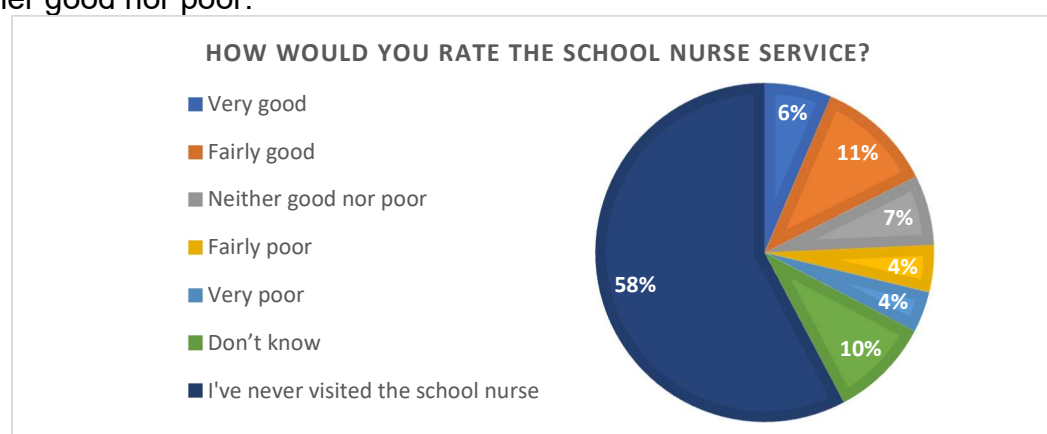
Both age groups were asked questions on the school nursing service. The responses demonstrate the lack of awareness of who the school nurse is for primary aged children and at a secondary age there very little awareness of what the school nurse offers.

	Primary – Do you know who your school nurse is?	Secondary – Do you know what services your school nurse offers?
Yes	32.1%	25.4%
No	39.2%	31.7%
Not sure	28.6%	42.8%

**Figure 6.2 – Results to “Are you aware that your school has a school nurse?”**

For the secondary students’ further questions were asked about the school nursing service. Of the 30% that had visited a school nurse 28.1% accessed them through a drop in session at school.

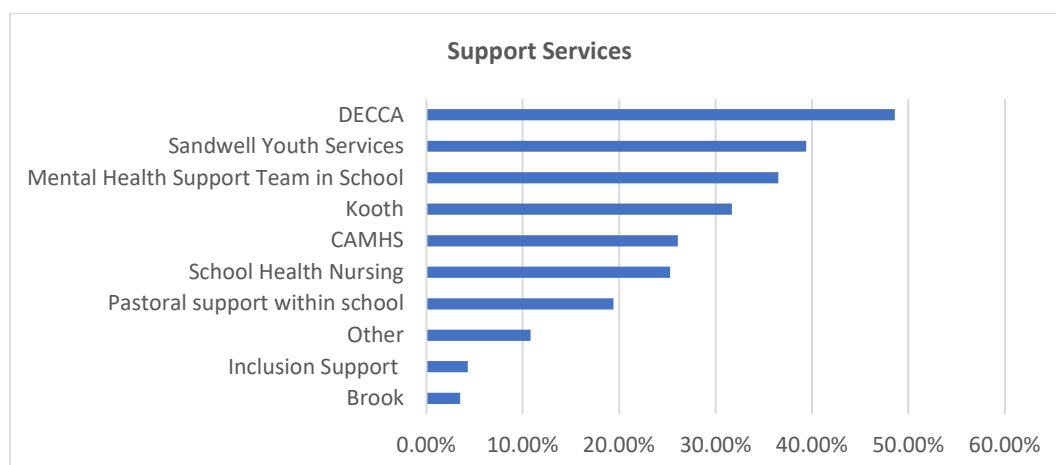
When rating the school nursing services, figure 6.3 shows the students who visited the school nursing service, 41.8% rated it as very good or fairly good, 22.8% didn’t know how to rate the service, 19.7% rated it as fairly poor or very poor and 15.7% rated as neither good nor poor.



**Figure 6.3 – How do you rate the school nursing service?”**

In Sandwell, there are a range of services available to support your emotional health and well-being. The secondary pupils were asked which services they were aware of. In figure 6.4, DECCA is the support service young people are most aware of, followed by Youth Services and Mental Health Support Teams. Young people in the “other” category predominantly stated that they were not aware of any support services or had stated their ‘parents’. Those that did put services down named: Childline, Sandwell Hospital, Holiday Activities and Food, Kaleidoscope, Murray Hall, Speak out Button, Umbrella and Mermaids.

For children and young people with SEND, the top 3 support services they were aware of were: Mental Health Support teams in school, DECCA and CAMHs (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services).



**Figure 6.4 – Which support services are you aware of?**

## 7. Substance Use

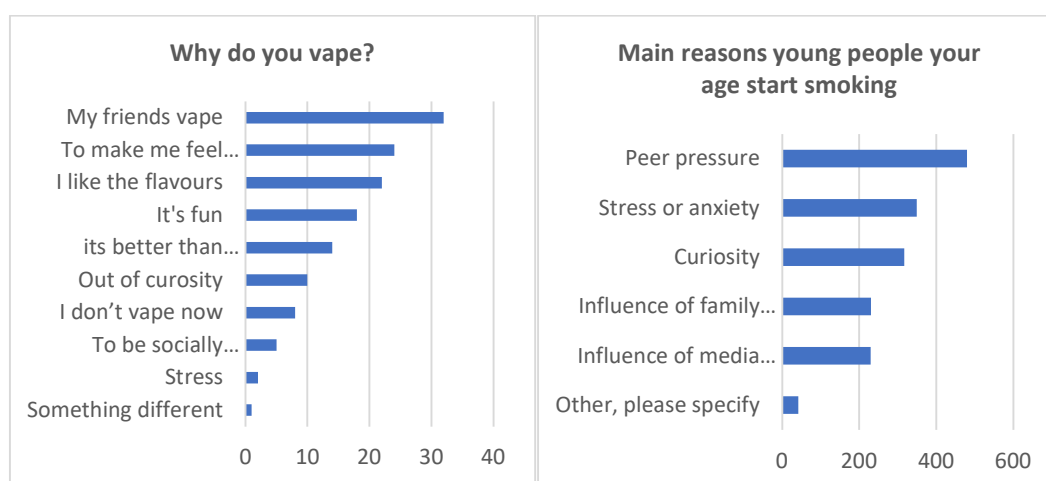
Questions about substance use were asked to those young people who were in year 9 or above in secondary schools, 669 young people in total. Figure 7.1 shows the percentage of young people who used the substances.

Substances used	% of participants
Have you ever had an alcoholic drink?	28%
Have you used a vape/e-cigarette?	13.9%
Have you ever smoked?	4.2%
Have you ever taken drugs?	2.2%

**Figure 7.1 – Substance use**

Of the children and young people with SEND from the total respondents, 47.5% had consumed an alcoholic drink, this equates to 16 of the respondents of which 9 had alcohol once or twice. Only 4 had smoked, 10 had used an e-cigarette and 2 had used drugs.

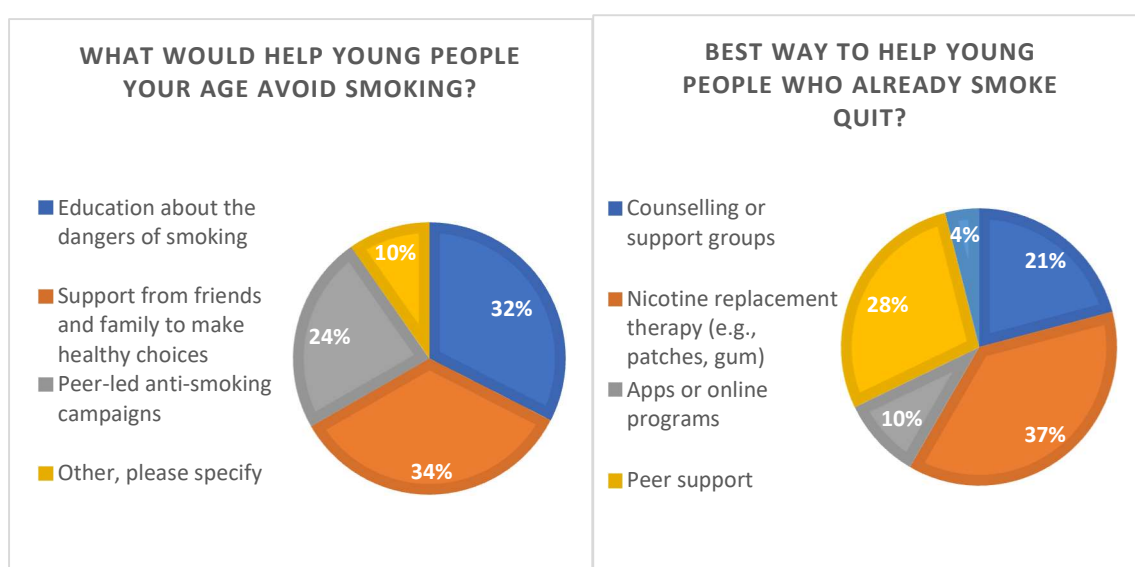
Further questions were explored with smoking and vaping. Figure 7.2 shows the main reasons stated for starting smoking to be peer pressure, stress or anxiety and curiosity. The main reasons for vaping were friends vape, vaping made them feel better and they liked the flavour.



**Figure 7.2 – Main reasons for smoking and vaping**

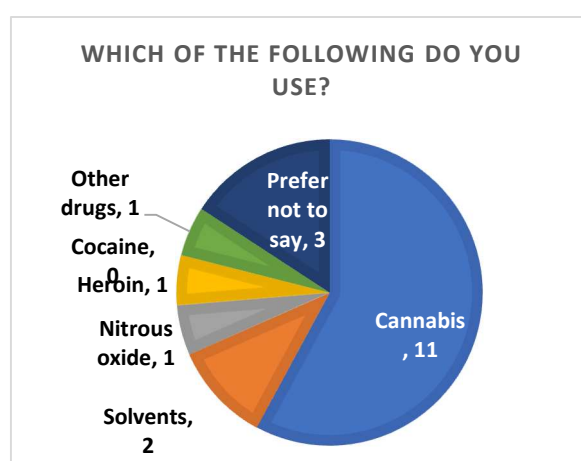
When asked if young people got their cigarettes from a store, from someone else or a family member, the most popular answers was from someone else, closely followed by from a store.

When considering prevention methods for smoking young people, the 2 popular answers, getting over a third of responses for both, were to get support from friends and family to make healthy choices and then education on dangers of smoking. The 46 respondents who stated other, chose methods such as banning smoking and stricter regulations. The respondents stated the best method to help young people quit smoking was through nicotine replacement therapy followed by peer support. These results can be seen below in figure 7.3.



**Figure 7.3 – Smoking Prevention and Treatment**

Figure 7.4 shows, of the 15 who had consumed drugs, 11 claimed they had taken cannabis (weed, grass, dope, pot, marijuana), 3 preferred not to say and the rest to the other drug types. Cocaine was not stated as one of the drugs used.



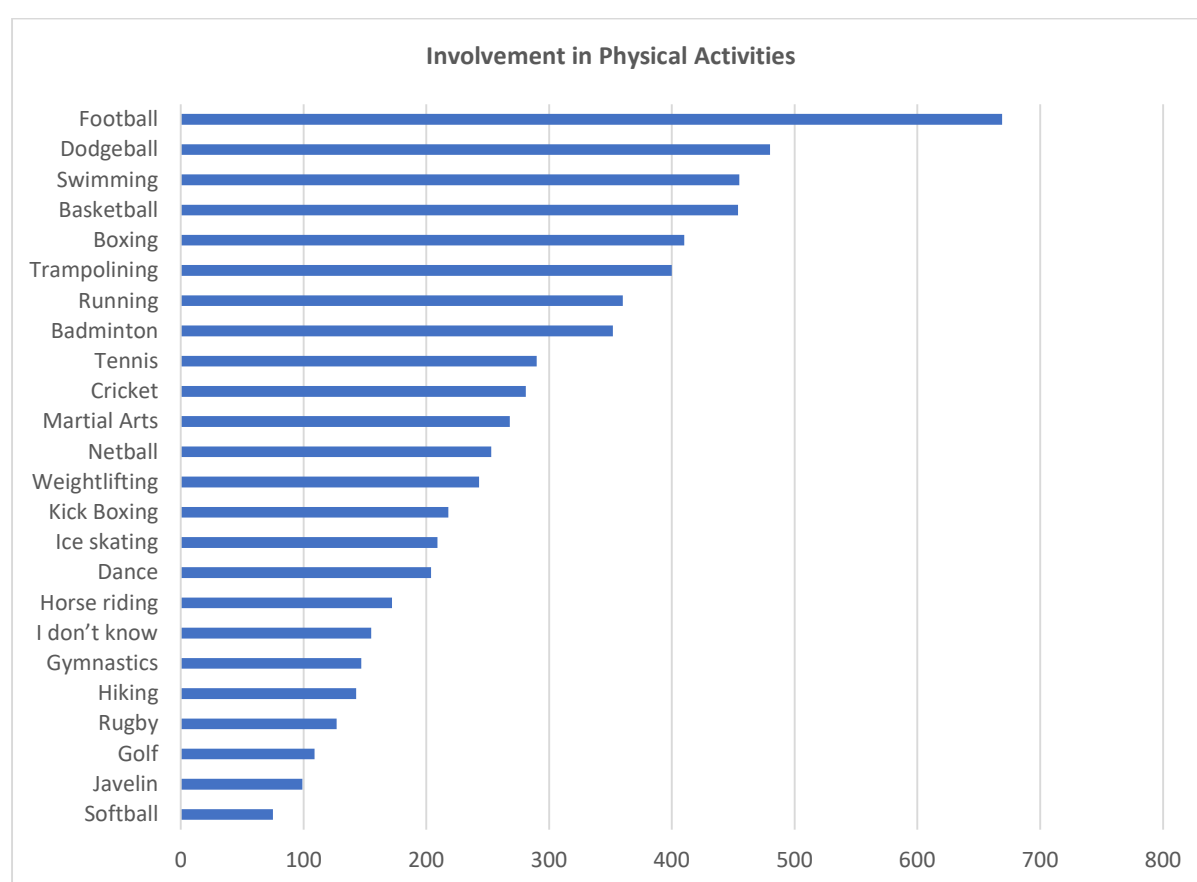
**Figure 7.4– Types of drugs**



## 8. Keeping Physically Fit and Healthy Eating

The young people in secondary school were asked if they like to take part in PE/sporting/physical activities in and/or out of school. 19.7% did not liking taking part in sporting activities. Reasons provided were due to medical issues, PE was boring, and some felt they were not good at it, a couple also felt insecure and there were also references to bullying and being made fun of. Of those who did not like taking part in PE or sporting activities, 8.9% were children with disabilities.

They were also asked what sporting activities they would like to be involved in or out of school. Figure 8.1 shows that football like last year was the most popular responses, with dodgeball, swimming and basketball following. Children with disabilities also chose boxing as one of their preferences.



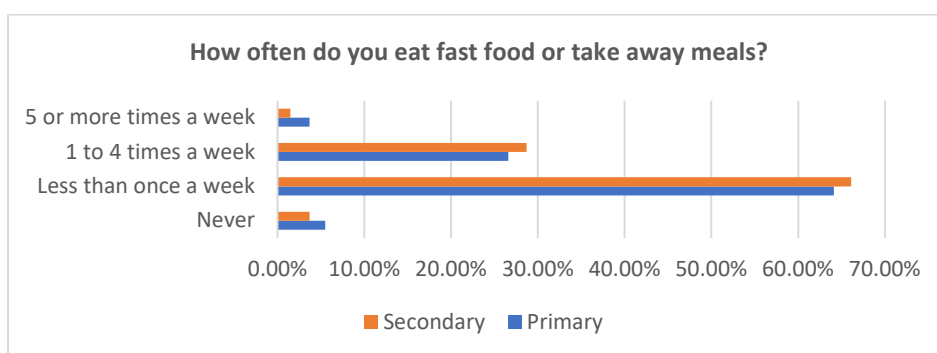
**Figure 8.1 – Involvement in Physical Activities**

Figure 8.2 shows that when asking why they exercise; the top reasons ranked, for both age groups were to get stronger and to help with long term health conditions. For the secondary age group, losing weight ranked third overall, whereas for primary, it was to improve their mood. The 'other' category that primary children chose included reasons such as to stop being angry and be themselves, whereas secondary outlined reasons such as its fun, improving their sporting performances and feeling good about themselves.

Primary	Secondary
To get stronger	To help with long term health conditions e.g. diabetes
To help with long term health conditions e.g. diabetes	To get stronger
To improve my mood	To lose weight
To have better stamina	To improve my mood
Other	To have better stamina
To lose weight	Other
To look good	To look good
To make more friends when you take part in activities	To make more friends when you take part in activities
To get more energy	To get more energy

**Figure 8.2 – Responses to “Why do you Exercise?”**

A new question around fast food was included in this topic area, this year, to understand the amount of fast food or takeaway meals consumed by children and young people. The results are shown in figure 8.3 and are similar for both age groups with them stating less than once a week followed by 1 to 4 times a week.



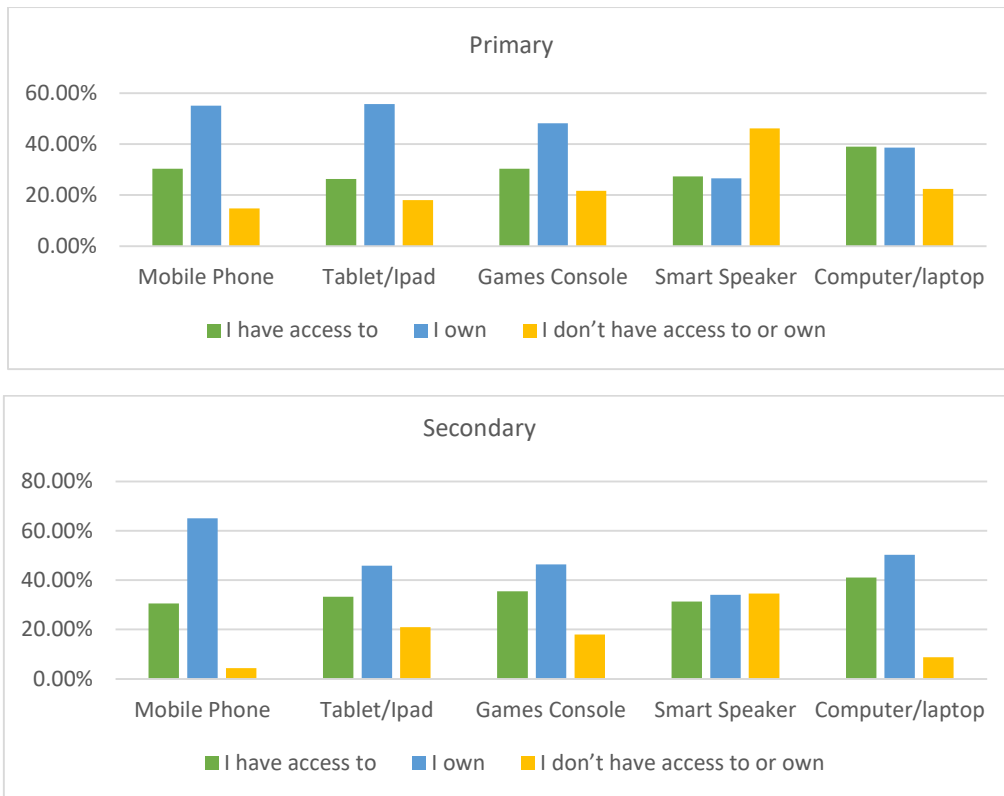
**Figure 8.3 – Fast food or take away meals**

## 9. Electronic Communications

The following series of questions focuses on internet, social media channels, usage, gaming and communications.

### 9.1 Electronic Devices

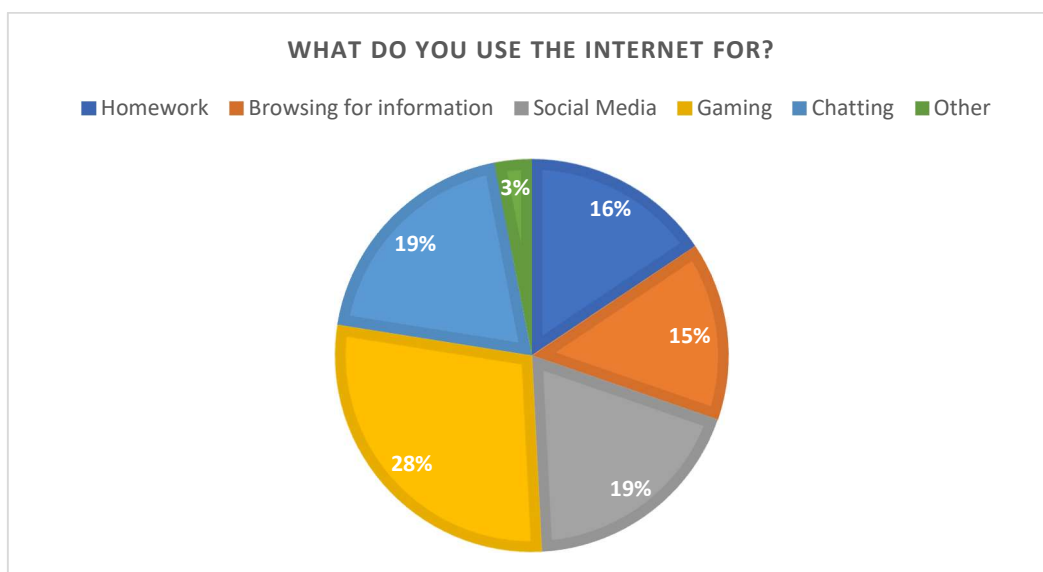
This year’s survey includes a new question on the use of electronic devices. Figure 9.11 shows over 75% of primary and secondary school children either own or have access to a mobile phone, tablet or ipad, games console and a computer or laptop. 53.9% of primary have access to a smart speaker and 65.4% of secondary age.



**Figure 9.11 – Smart electronic devices**

## 9.2 Internet

When primary school children were asked what they used the internet for, figure 9.21 shows that it is widely used for a number of reasons beyond schoolwork. The most popular answer is gaming at 28%. Chatting and social media are next followed by homework and browsing the internet. This demonstrates that the internet is increasingly becoming a communication tool rather than a research tool for young people.



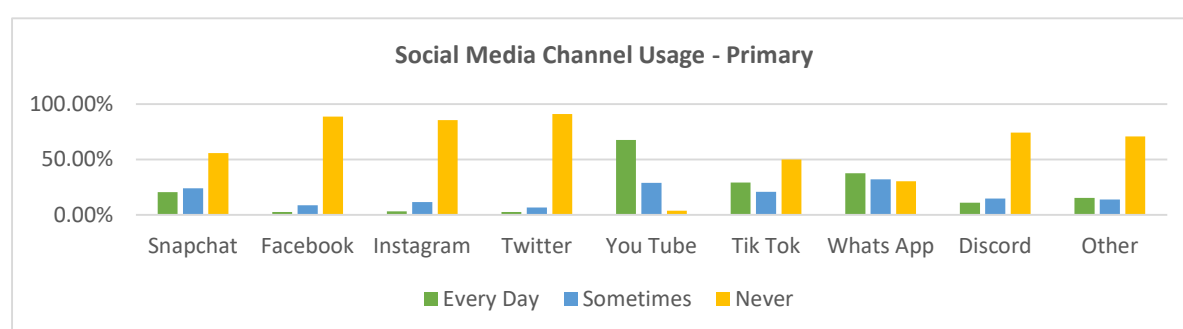
**Figure 9.21 – What do you use the internet for?**

25.1% of primary chat to people they have never met, online and 34.7% of secondary age young people do. Many of the reasons provided by both age groups, for chatting to people they don't know was for gaming, they know their friends or to make new friends.

Many of both primary and secondary age students did state they were aware of the dangers online and hence would not provide any of their personal information to them, "I want to play with someone when I'm lonely. But I DO NOT give out personal information."

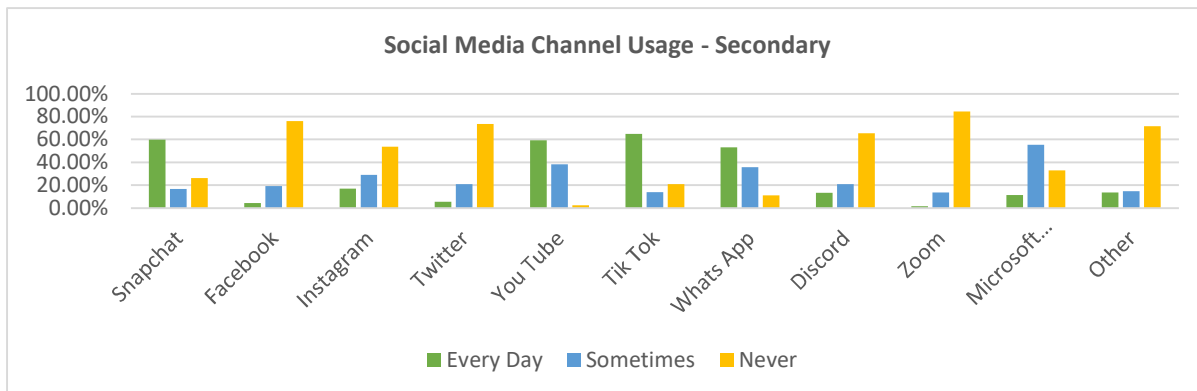
### 9.3 Social Media

When asked about social media platforms and applications, figure 9.31 shows primary age children stated the most popular channels were YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok and Snapchat, with the most popular reason for using them being chatting, watching videos and messaging. It is positive that there are some channels this age group are not using, such as Instagram, which is heavily underused by this age group. This is positive as most social media channels have age restrictions, which are beyond the primary age.



**Figure 9.31 – Social media and App usage - Primary**

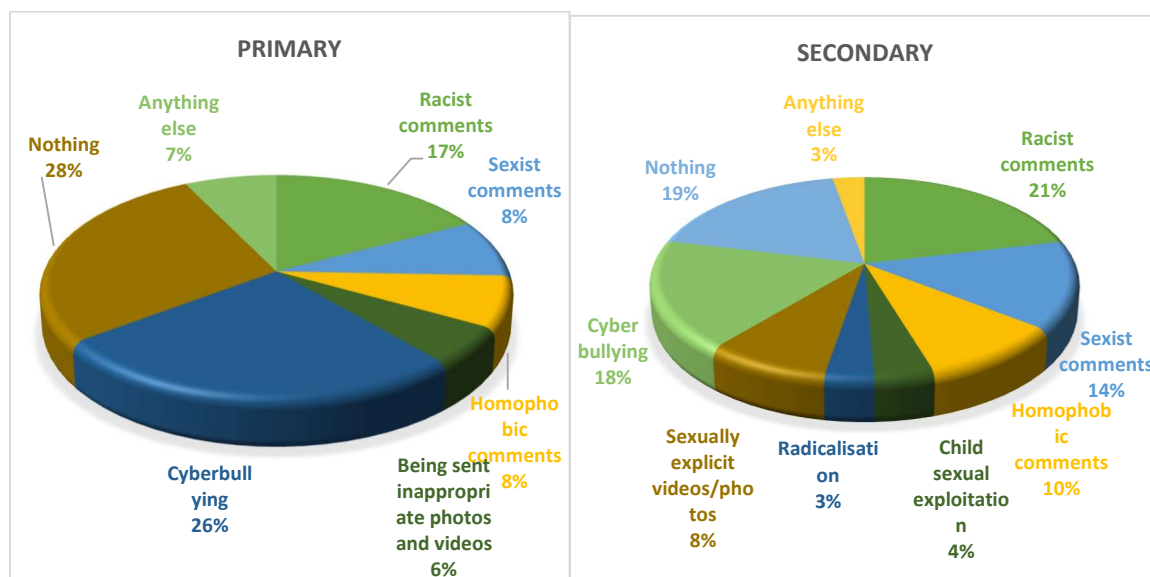
For secondary young people, figure 9.32 shows the most popular channels are the same as primary, when totalling the response rates for using the channel every day and sometimes. Therefore, the most popular are: You Tube, Whats app, Tik Tok and Snapchat, for chatting, watching videos and messaging. As schools often use Microsoft Teams for homework allocation, the channel is used sometimes by many young people. The popularity of social media channels is always changing. There continues to be a decline in Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. The channels chosen as the most popular are the ones where there is an instant messaging service or videos for entertainment purposes.



**Figure 9.32 – Social media and App usage - Secondary**

Young people were asked what issues they experienced online from various options. It must be noted; the primary age group had a limited choice compared to the secondary age group. In figure 9.33, for the primary age group, issues encountered were significantly high with cyberbullying, with 26%. What was positive was the highest response from primary age children was that they do not encounter any issues online, 28%. The next highest response was 17% for racist comments.

At a secondary age, this year, racist comments come out the highest at 21%, followed by 19% with nothing and 18% of responses were cyberbullying. Although these were the responses which occurred the most, all the other options were selected by young people too, these included sexist comments, homophobic comments, sexually explicit videos/photos, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.



**Figure 9.33 – Issues experienced online**

## 9.4 Gaming

Gaming for primary age children is hugely popular as demonstrated in other sections of the survey. For primary aged children a games console is used for gaming followed closely by mobile phone but for the secondary age group it was the other way round.

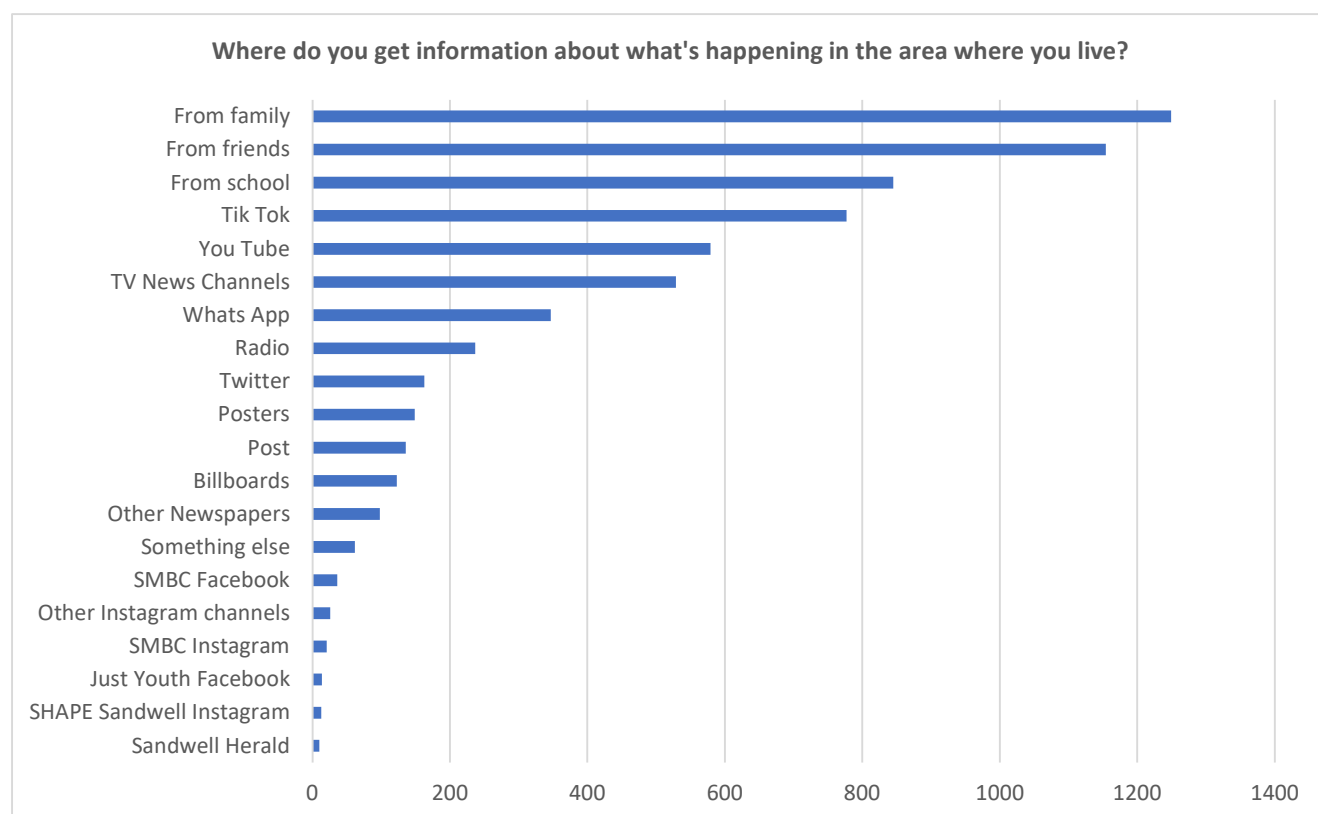
The young people were asked what games they play. Figure 9.41 shows the results, for both age groups Roblox was the most popular with Fortnite, Minecraft and FIFA also featuring in the top 5 for both age groups.

Ranking	Primary	Secondary
1	Roblox	Roblox
2	Subway Surfers	Fortnite
3	Minecraft	Minecraft
4	Fortnite	Fifa
5	Fifa	Call of Duty

**Figure 9.41 – Popular Games**

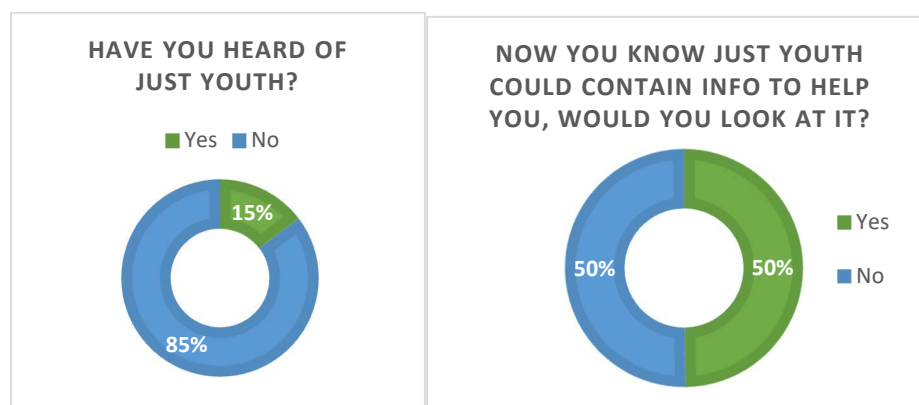
## 9.5 Communicating Information

Young people access information from family and friends, so mainly word of mouth. School was mentioned as the third option, as figure 9.51 shows. The next two choices were Tik Tok and You Tube, which as presented in section 9.3, were the most popular social media channels.



**Figure 9.51 – Responses to preferred communication methods**

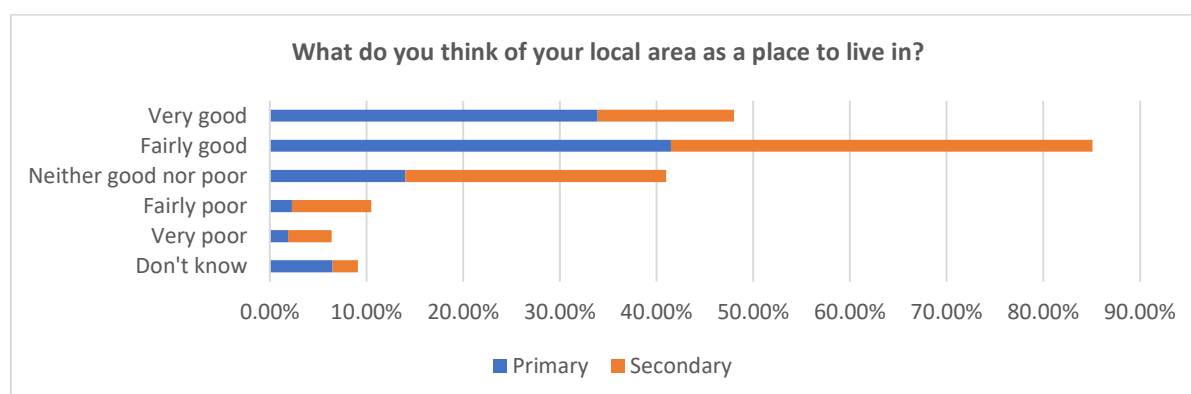
32% of young people access the council's social media channels. Figure 9.53 shows, only 15% had heard of Just Youth, however when the survey respondents were provided the link to the Just Youth website [www.justyouth.org.uk](http://www.justyouth.org.uk), 50% of them stated, once they knew what information was contained on the website, they would look at it, which demonstrates the fact that once the website is promoted to young people and they have knowledge of what information it contains, they are more likely to visit the site.



**Figure 9.53 – Just Youth**

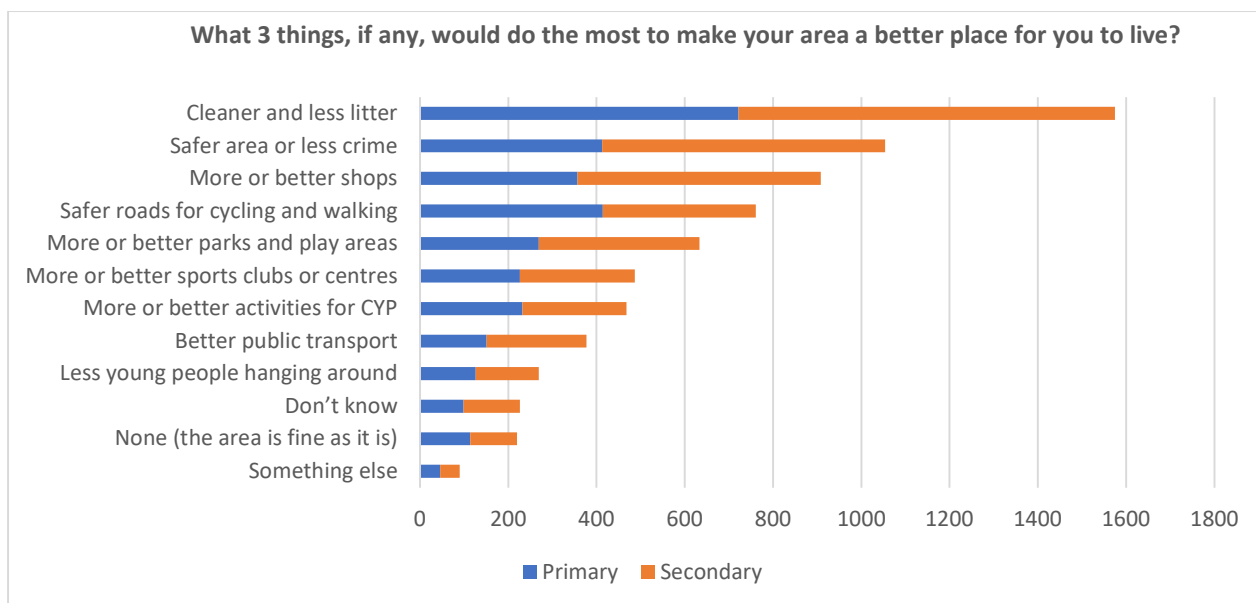
## 10. Local Area

Figure 10.1 shows generally young people think their local area is either very good or fairly good. Opinions shift slightly at secondary age to be less favourable. These results are also reflective of previous years.



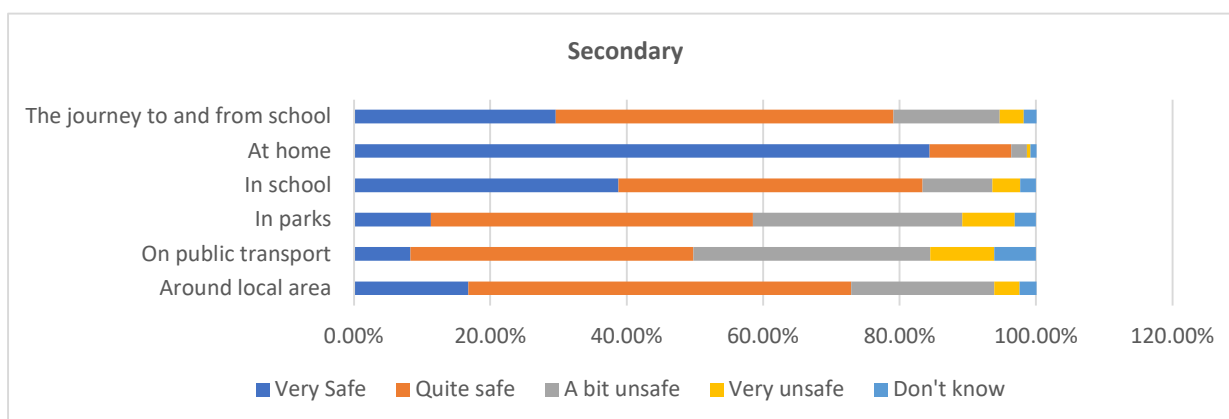
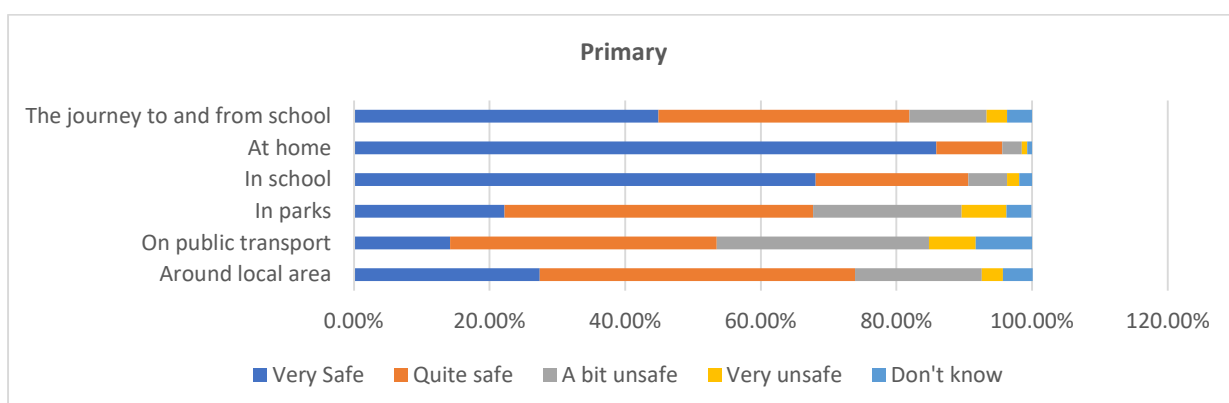
**Figure 10.1 – Local area as a place to live in**

Figure 10.2 shows the primary age group, the 3 things they felt would do the most to make their area better are: clean and less litter, safer area or less crime and safer roads for cycling and walking. For the secondary age, they agreed with the area being cleaner and less litter and safer area or less crime, but their third choice for their area was more or better shops.



**Figure 10.2 – Making the area a better place**

Figure 10.3 shows both primary and secondary age felt very safe or fairly safe at home and in their school environment. The two areas with the lowest results were in parks and public transport. In parks, 67.7% of the primary age group felt safe or fairly safe compared to 58.5% for the secondary age group and for public transport, 53.5% of the primary age feel safe or fairly safe compared to secondary age group with 49.8%.



**Figure 10.3- Safety in places**

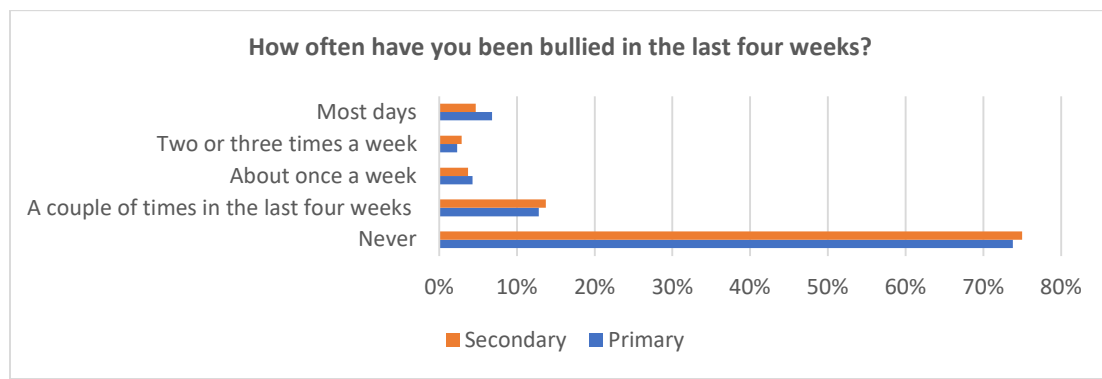


## 11. Education & Learning

Figure 11.1 shows how often young people have been bullied in school/college in the last 4 weeks. 26.2% (329) of primary school children have been bullied in the last 4 weeks and 25% (375) of secondary school young people. There has been an increase over the years in these figures, particular for the secondary age group.

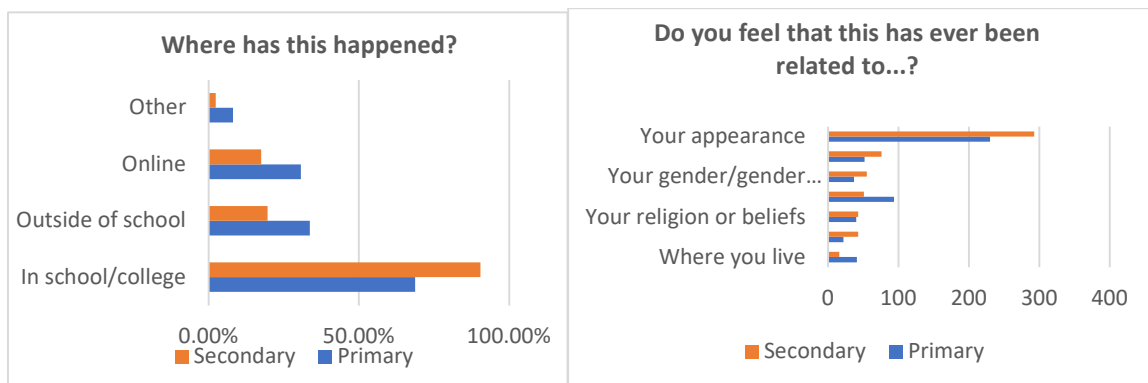
Around 13% were bullied in both age groups just a couple of times in the last 4 weeks and 6.8% from primary and 4.7% from the secondary age group were bullied most days, accounting to 85 children from primary and 71 from secondary.

For young people who considered themselves to have a disability, at a secondary age, 46.5% (42 young people) had been bullied in the last 4 weeks and 42.6% (71 young people) of primary age. 13.5% (12) young people from the secondary age group have been bullied most days and for primary 12% (20) young people.



**Figure 11.1 – How often have you been bullied in school/college in the last four weeks?**

For both age groups the bullying incidents take place mainly in school/college and the primary reason for the bullying incidents is appearance. The results are shown in figure 11.2.



**Figure 11.2 – Bullying Incident**

64% of primary school children felt their school deals with bullying very well or quite well but only 48.2% of secondary pupils felt that their school dealt well with bullying issues.

Those who had experienced bullying had the choice to explain their experience. Although not everyone was willing to share their stories, of those that did, many gave

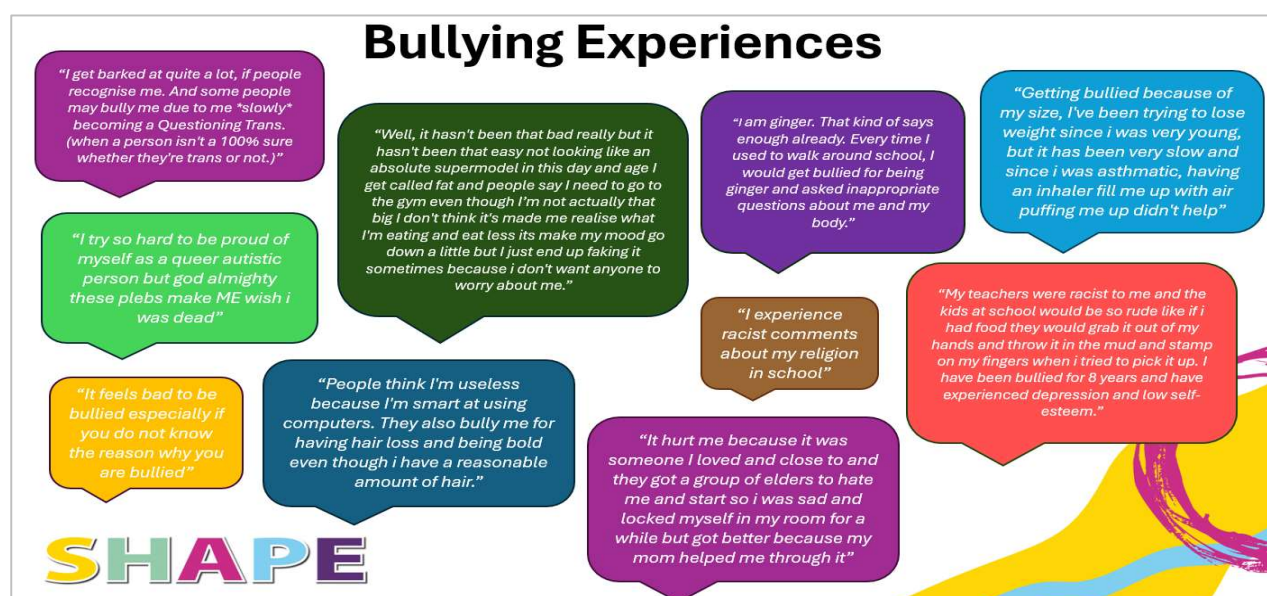
mixed accounts and themes. Primary aged children were more open and transparent with the stories, some of which could be described as concerning, in terms of what they have had to encounter, *“I have been told to kill myself and i have been fat shamed I have been bullied for being bullied I have been called worth nothing I have told to jump of a bridge I have been beaten bloodily for asking for someone not to bully me”*.

Personal situations have been targeted, such as their socioeconomic status *“being called a monkey and getting myself being called poor because of the flat i live in”* or their religion, *“I was bullied when I was in year 5 and i got told that Indians shouldn’t be here and that ‘i belong in a toilet’ because I am brown, I was also told that I should go back to where I belong.”*

After enduring such incidents at a primary age, continuing to get bullied at a secondary age, would be even more difficult, *“It was awful, I cried everyday as I never really had a good time at primary or year 7, year 8 hasn’t been too bad though. I started hating myself, still do but not as much”*.

At a secondary age, the young people reflected in their experiences more on the impact that the incidents had had on their mental health and wellbeing, rather than the actual incident itself, *“I’m constantly on edge and feel insecure to the point I now starve myself to feel accepted”*. There are some young people, who although it affected them, also address their coping mechanism, *“You feel lifeless and feel as if you don’t mean anything, best thing that I do is ignore the person(s) as they don’t know you, so you don’t have to think about it.”*

Figure 11.3 shows some more quotes from stories young people have shared across both age groups.



**Figure 11.3 – Being a victim of bullying**

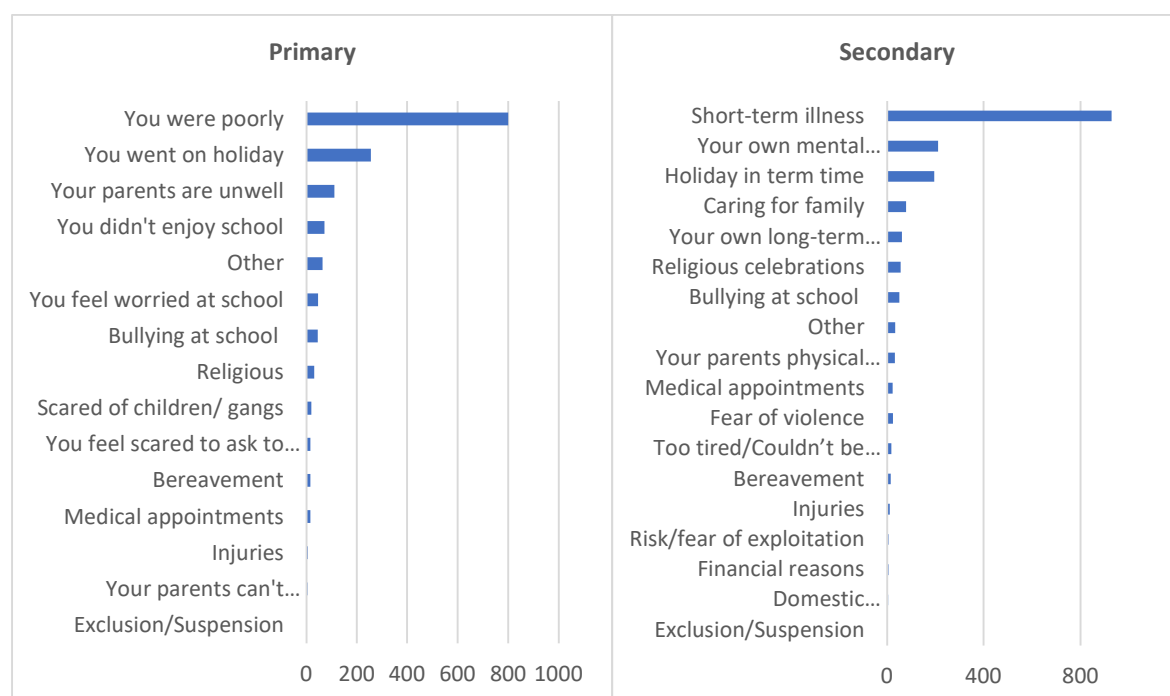
Of the secondary age group 57% are coping well with levels of school/college work, these figures are an improvement from last year’s results of 53%. Of the 19% from secondary who said they were not coping well stated that they could be supported to improve this through additional support with exams including structured revision time,

less focus on homework and allowing more time to revise instead, realistic timescales for completing homework and more support from teachers to explain the topics and provide students with a better understanding.

Of the 89 children and young people with SEND, only 28.1% (25) was coping well and 44.9% (40) were not coping well with their school/college work. They also wanted more support, with a few students stating they need support with their disabilities, *“more things like fidgets to help me focus”*.

78% from primary and secondary age groups were absent from school in the last 12 months. For and young people with SEND, the figure was higher at 81.4% for primary and 84.3% for secondary.

The top reasons for absences can be seen in figure 11.5 with the highest being for short-term illness, followed in primary with holidays in term time and, secondary with mental health and anxiety issues.



**Figure 11.5 – Reasons for time off school**

The primary age group were asked about transition to secondary school and whether they are looking forward to it. 27% stated they were not looking forward to going. Reasons provided were being scared of meeting new people, *“I am really scared about talking to people I don't know, and it scares me a lot”*, as well as the fact that secondary schools are a lot bigger than their primary schools.

The issue of bullying also appeared again. Those who were being bullied, have mixed feelings, with most having a more positive outlook, *“To get away from all the bullies in my school and all the mean and nasty kids.”* or feel they have older siblings who can protect them, *“because my brother is there and if anyone tries to bully me ill just call him”* and they can start a new chapter in their life. However, others are still nervous or *“scared”* due to the experiences they have faced and lack of confidence. A few children

still feel they will continue to get bullied, *“my school bullies are going to the same high school as me”*.

There were also references made about parents and what stories they have heard from them, *“no because my mom went to the school I’m going to, and she said the school has lots of fights there and lots of silly teens and she says I’m shy and quiet and tries to help with my confidence”*.

Some children didn’t get the school they wanted, *“I didn’t get the secondary that I wanted, and I got a school that was an hour away walk and my mum has really bad pain in her legs, and it is tough for my mum to walk that far as she doesn’t have a car”*.

Of the children and young people with SEND, 32% were not looking forward to going to primary school. The reasons were similar to those mentioned above however there were a few references made based on the disabilities, *“I am waiting for an EHCP and an appeal for my high school place as I’ve been given a school I don’t want to go to”* and *“Because of the mental disabilities I could have.”*

The secondary age group were asked a few more questions about their education. Figure 11.6 shows that 49% felt like a valued member of their school/college community which is a higher figure than last year at 40%. community with 35% stating they were not sure and 16% stating they did not feel a valued member. Those that felt valued were for the roles they held in school

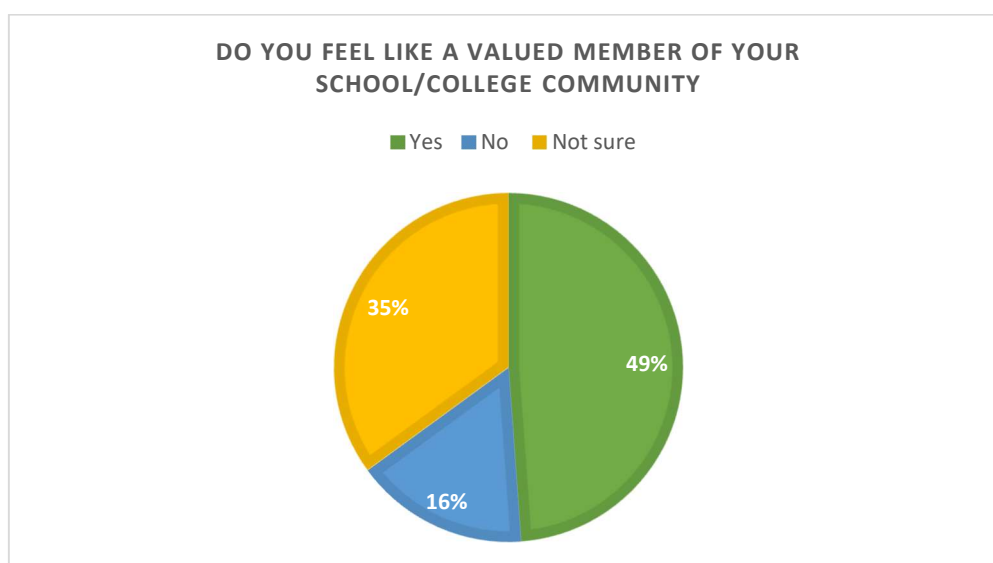
Those who did feel valued were appreciated by teachers, get rewarded, are respected and listened to, are asked to represent the school, *“I am a role model to people as I am a student ambassador that deals with the safety, environment and bullying in our school. I also have lots of friends from all different year groups.”*. School for many also provided a sense of security, *“my school makes me safe and makes me feel special”*.

For those who didn’t feel valued, it was because they were unknown in the school, they may not be the ones who have a role, such as an ambassador or they are don’t misbehave, so they are often unseen, *“I’m literally a background character”* and *“I’m nobody”* and *“I’m not very well known by teachers but naughty kids at my school are very well known”*. The young people also feel they do not get recognised for their achievements and are not appreciated, *“I just don’t get recognised for my achievements and when I do people mock me”*. Young people referred again to bullying, *“I get bullied and discriminated but I am the one who always takes the blame”, others felt they haven’t been treated fairly”*.

The young people who were not sure, didn’t think being valued was something they needed to be happy, *“I believe I don’t need to be majorly valued in school to be happy”*, whereas others knew it was likely they were not going to be valued by everyone, often saying their friends valued them, *“I might be valued by some people, but not by others”*.

Of the 89 children with disabilities, the figures were much lower, with only 28.1% feeling like a value member of their school/college community and 37.1% feeling like they were not. When looking at the reasons why, many statements were made about not being listened to, *“Nobody listens or pays attention to me”*. The other statements were focussed on their own personal circumstances whether that was their mental

health and wellbeing or reference to their disability, *“Only just came back after 8 weeks off with mental health issues”* and *“can’t talk freely about my disability”*. There were also some references made to how they are treated in school, *“Nobody listens or pays attention to me”*.

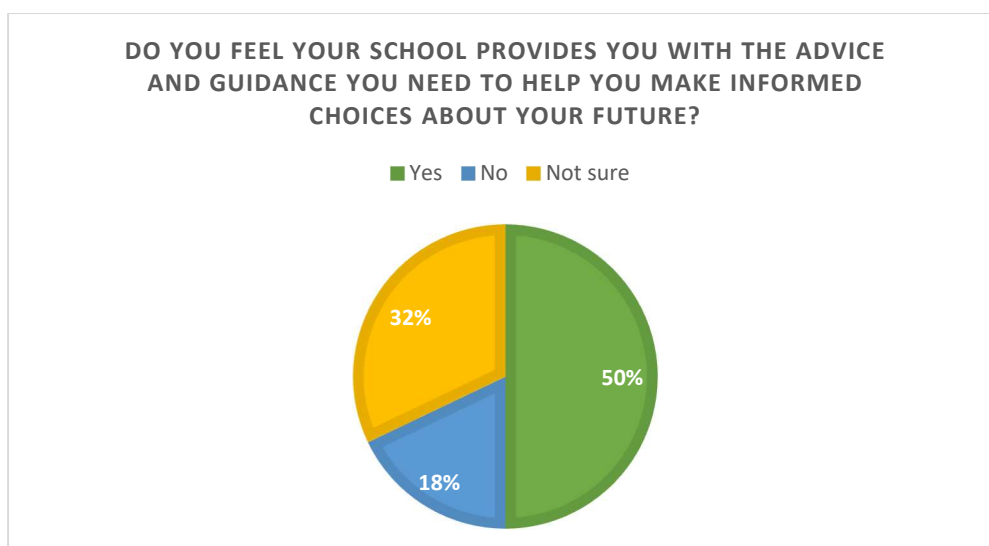


**Figure 11.6 – Do you feel like a valued member of the school/college community?**

Figure 11.7 shows that 50% of secondary age pupils felt their school provided them with the advice and guidance they needed to make informed choices about their future, with 32% stating they were unsure and 18% felt they didn’t provide the advice and guidance on post-16 options. Those who felt they were not offered advice and guidance stated they were not told anything about jobs or taxes, what to do after GCSE’s and living independently. *“We don’t learn how to do taxes or know how much we would need for a house deposit”*. A few responses referred to their parents offering more support than the school, *“I mostly get help from my parents not school for choices in my future”*.

Those who were not sure, stated that schools sometimes offer advice and guidance but not all the time or as they were in KS3 rather than 4 they had not been privy to this information yet *“As I am in a younger year and are not required to know this yet”*.

Those that did offer good advice often had tools like PowerPoints, assemblies, videos *“They send us informative videos that help us, and they conduct assemblies just to give us more info”*. They also offer days in schools where they can get advice on guidance on careers and their future, e.g. *“Step Up for Life days”* and some adults can be helpful in supporting them such as the Careers Officer or team.

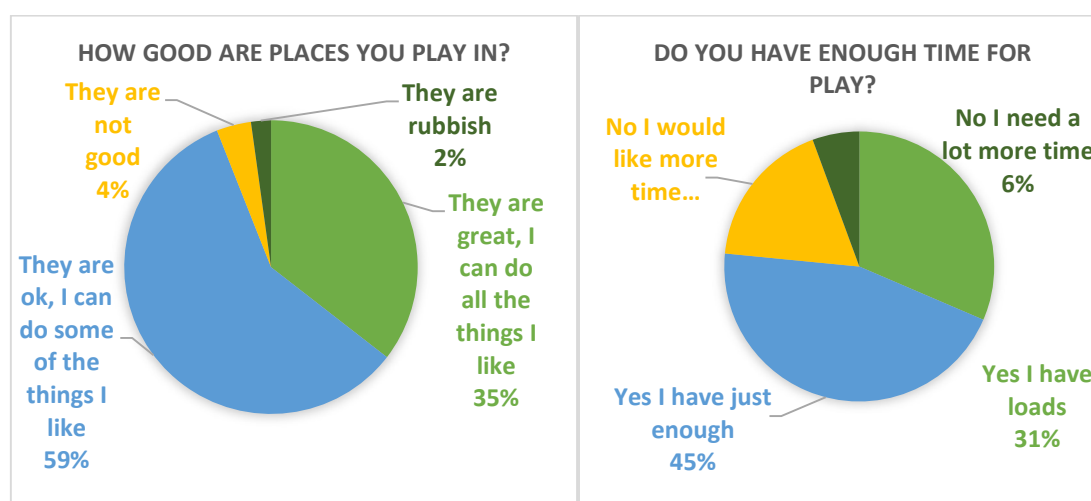


**Figure 11.7 – Advice and guidance from school to make informed choices**

They were also asked if there were any skills not taught in school which they would like to learn about. As many survey results have shown in the past, life skills, money management and taxes were things they wanted to learn about, but self-defence was another popular answer.

## **12. Children and Young People Activities**

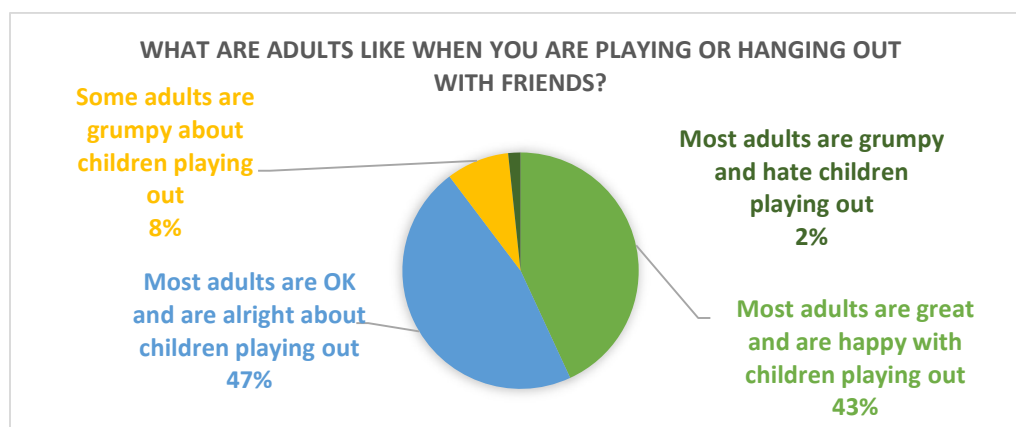
This section focussed on activities for children and young people in Sandwell. Figure 12.1 shows that at a primary school response to play, 35% of children thought the places in Sandwell were great and they could do all the things they like, 59% said they were ok and they could do some of the things they liked. Only 6% thought they were not good or rubbish. In terms of having enough time to play, again the responses were very positive with over 70% stating they had loads or just enough time to play.



**Figure 12.1 – Places to play & activities in your area**

The responses shown in figure 12.2, also are positive. Children at the primary school age were also asked about what adults are like when they are playing outside and

90% stated they were great and happy or ok, with only 10% stating they felt adults were grumpy.

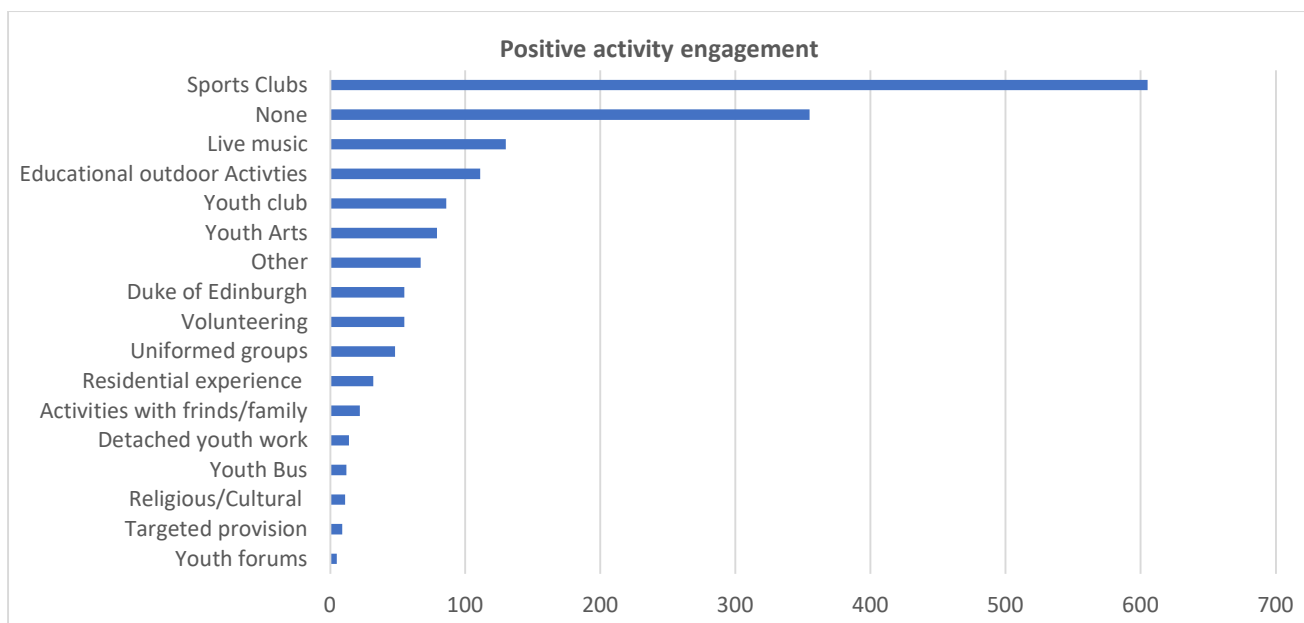


**Figure 12.2 – Adults behaviour to children playing**

Sandwell Council offered the Holiday Activity and Food Program (HAF) for the last 3 years, which was funded by the Department of Education. It is a free programme offering meals and activities to children during the school holidays. Children who are aged 4 to 16 who are eligible for free school meals and those with low to medium levels of special educational needs and disabilities were eligible. The secondary age group were asked if they were aware of the HAF programme, but only 11% were. The figures were slightly higher for children and young people with SEND, of which 14.6% were aware of the program. However, the HAF programme had seen large numbers of young people attend the activities, particularly during the summer months.

At a secondary age, young people were asked what positive activities they engage with after school or during the holidays. They were provided with a list of choices to choose from. The results are shown in figure 12.3. Sports clubs were the most popular type of activity young people engaged in. The other activities varied with lots of different options chosen. However, the second highest response was none, demonstrating that many young people at a secondary age do not participate in any positive activities outside of the school setting.





**Figure 12.3 – Positive Activity Engagement**

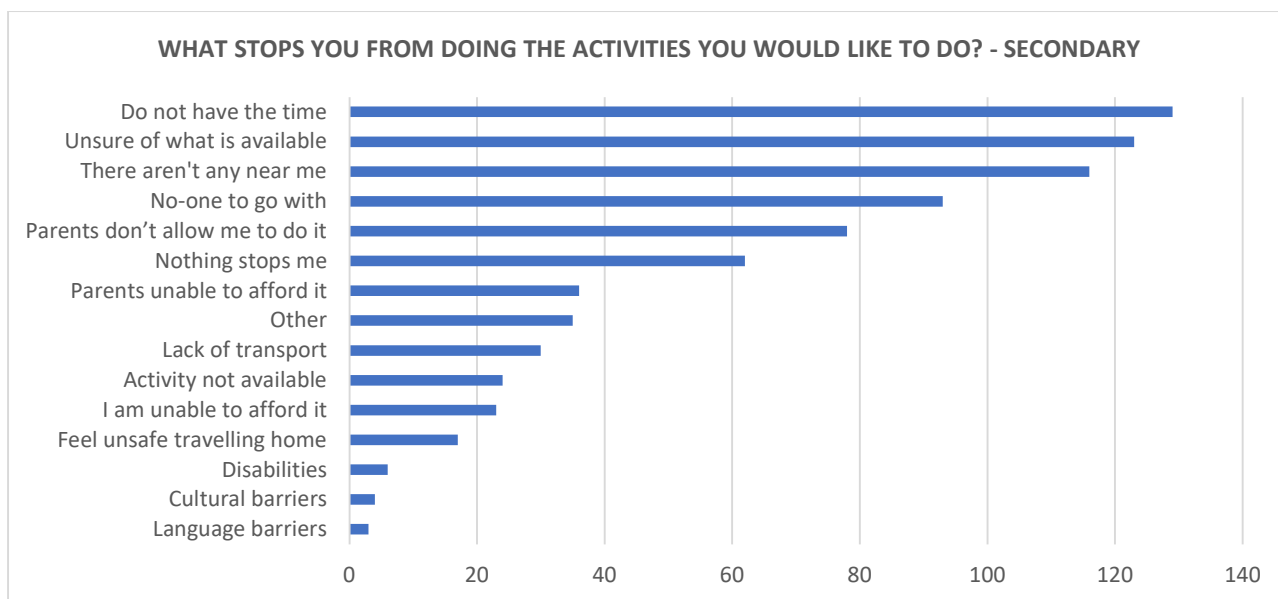
Those that did state “none” were asked what would encourage them to attend activities in the school holidays. Many responses stated “nothing” for reasons such as they were not interested, preferred using their holiday to relax, sleep and stay at home or preferred being indoors. Those that did suggest some ideas, stated they would only go if their friends were taking part in activities, they were fun, cheap or free, included a money or reward or simply because they were bored at home.

The young people who stated other made reference to doing no activities, helping family members, self-defence, holidays, looking after their animals, gaming, horse ridings and cadets.

When asked what other activities they would like to do, many could be categorised in the options already listed and included several sports. Other activities listed were martial arts, kick boxing, ice skating, going to the gym and leisure activities such as bowling, going out with friends and gaming.

Although Sandwell offers a wide range of activities for children and young people, services would like to increase the uptake. Therefore, the survey contains a question regarding the barriers to young people accessing activities. Figure 12.4 shows the results. The young people do not have the time, they are unsure of what is available and there are not any activities near them.





Those who stated the activity wasn't available, were asked, what activity would they like to do, the responses included ice hockey, boxing for boys only, cricket, fencing, arts and crafts, residentials and trips, gymnastics, volleyball, badminton, martial arts, figure skating, musical theatre and aerial hoop.

Those who stated “other” said they “*can’t be bothered*”, they didn’t have the confidence to go or had social anxiety, “*I don’t know I just feel like my appearance isn’t fit for activities*”, found the activities boring or due to their personal family circumstances, “*My mom and dad broke up and they live 45 minutes away from each other so they both can’t take me*”.

Both age groups were asked what improvements, or new developments would they like to see in Sandwell, shown in figure 12.5. There were common themes such as less crime, less litter and better or more shops, better and safer roads, which correlate to the answers provided in Figure 10.2 in the Local Area section of the report. In terms of new developments, more parks, better housing and more football clubs have been stated.



**Figure 12.5 – Responses to “What improvements or new developments would you make to Sandwell?”**

### 13. Child's Voice

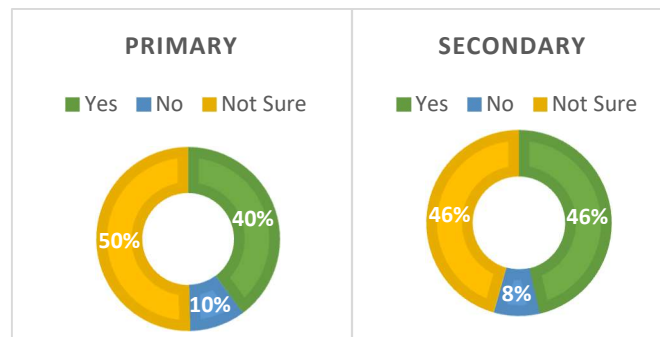
The children and young people were asked about child's voice and their opportunities for democracy.

Of the 1254 primary aged children, 976 (77.8%) knew about their school council. 136 (13.9%) were involved in their school council. 76.5% felt their school council was making a difference. Of the 1498 secondary aged young people who answered this question, 829 (55.2%) knew about their school council. However, only 75 young people (9%) were involved in their school council and only 60% of these felt the school council was making a difference. The results can be seen in figures 13.1.

	Primary	Secondary
Awareness	78%	55%
Involvement	14%	9%

**Figure 13.1 – School Councils**

Of the 840 young people who were not involved in their school council, only 40% claimed there was a way of still having their voice heard. 60% were not sure or thought there was no way of having their voice heard. This equates to 40% of the overall respondents. Of the 754 young people who were not involved in their school council, only 46% claimed there was a way of still having their voice heard. 54% were not sure or thought there was no way of having their voice heard. This equates to 26.9% of the overall respondents. Results are shown in figure 13.2.



**Figure 13.2 – Having your voice heard**

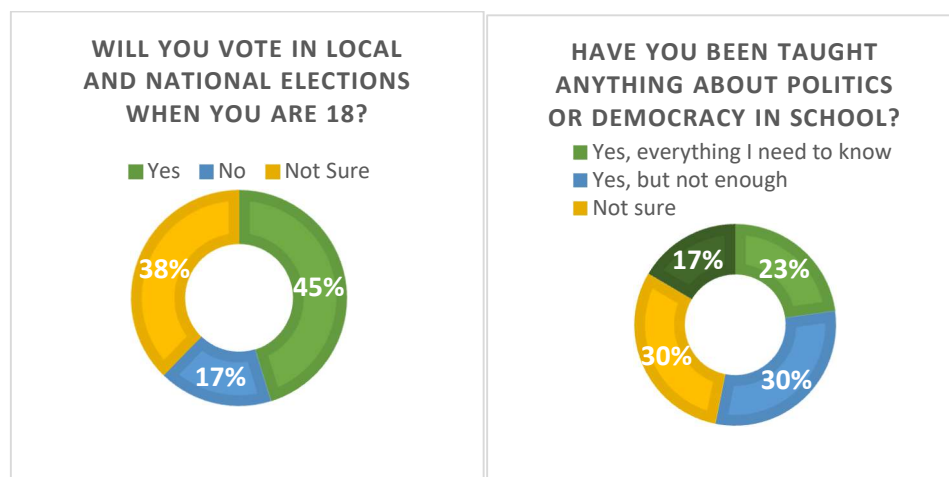
The primary aged children stated the way they had their voices heard, if they were not in a school council was through their teachers or other adults in school and speaking up, surveys such as SHAPE, boxes in classes "worry box" or "pupil voice box" and speaking to their school council representatives. Speak out button" talking to friends or head of sixth form or other ambassadors in school. Those who stated "no" for not having their voices heard were asked how they would like this done, a few suggestions were made including an "idea box", school assemblies, or just having the mechanism to be able to talk to someone in school, even "the school football team" was mentioned!

The secondary age group who answered "yes" provided answers were similar to primary, with a few other methods such as, "R u ok card", "Speak out button" talking to friends or head of sixth form or other ambassadors in school. Those who stated "no" for not having their voices heard were asked how they would like this done, a few

suggestions were made including an “*idea box*”, “*personal tutor*” or just having the mechanism to be able to talk to someone.

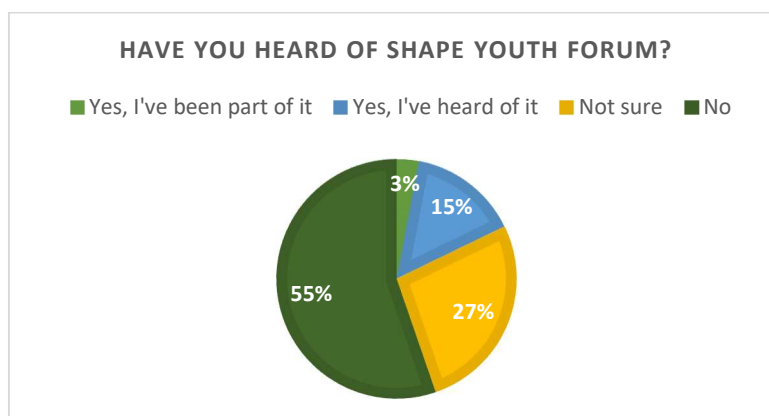
A new question introduced last year was on voting in the local and national elections. Figure 13.3 provides the results. Of the secondary age group who were asked this, 45% stated they would vote because “*it’s important*” and they should have their voices heard. Of those who stated “*no*”, which was 17%, was due to them not being interested in politics, or feeling that it would not make a personal difference, “*I don’t care enough cuz even if I don’t vote there will always be more people to vote*”. Of the 30% who were not sure, this was predominantly due to not thinking about it yet as they were younger and do not have a great understanding of politics, “*because I don’t understand enough about it yet*”.

Over 50% stated they had been taught about politics in school but 30% of these felt it was not enough. A third were not sure if they had been taught about politics and 17% stated they had not been taught.



**Figure 13.3 – Voting in local and national elections**

17% of respondents had either been part of SHAPE Youth Forum or had heard of it as shown in 13.4. Although 55% had not heard of the forum, it was positive that 227 young people expressed an interest in joining SHAPE Youth Forum.



**Figure 13.4 – SHAPE Youth Forum**

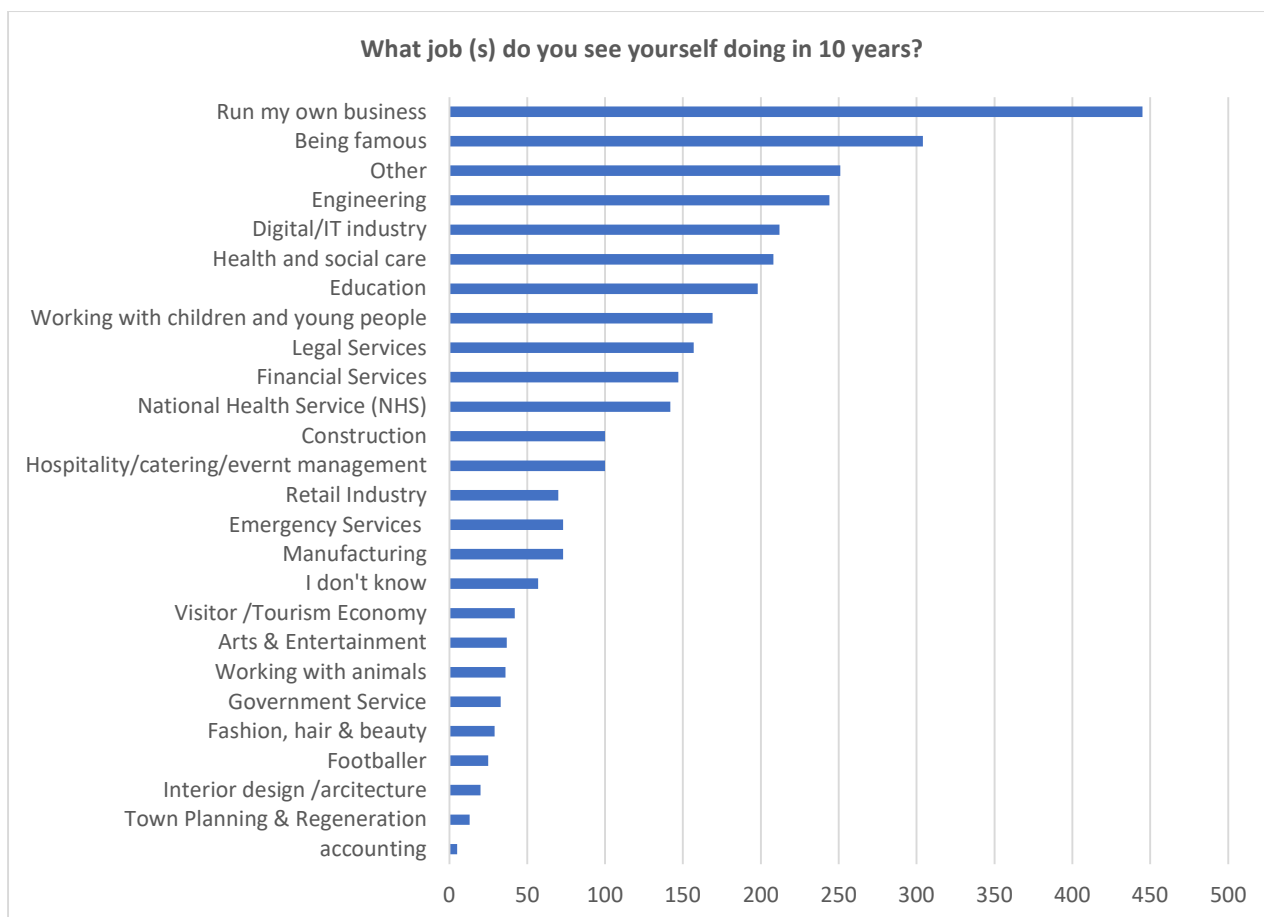
In this section, the final question asked to young people was, if they were in charge of Sandwell Council for one day, what problem would they solve and how would they solve it. Figure 13.5 shows the common themes for both groups were littering, bullying, homelessness, crime including knife crime and vaping, cost of living. For the secondary age group mental health, school, poverty and safety were also stated.



Figure 13.5 – Responses to “What problem would you solve?”

#### 14. Your Future

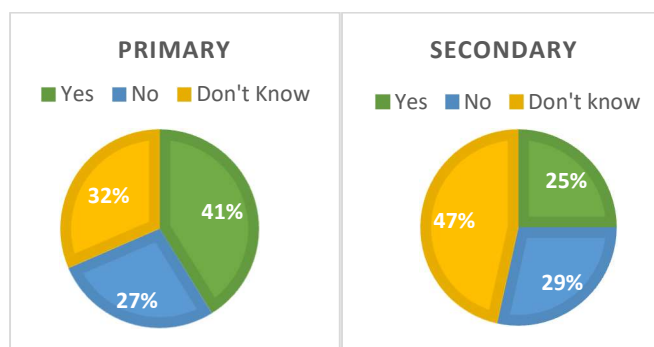
In 10 years', time secondary children will be aged from 21-26. They were asked what job they see themselves doing in 10 years' time. The choices are shown in figure 14.1, with running their own business, being famous and other were the top choices. In the 'Other' category, which was the top choice, many had not made a decision about what they wanted to do yet, others had stated property, investigators, paramedic, artists, working with animals, fashion and clothes industry or in arts.



**Figure 14.1 – Jobs in 10 years' time**

The secondary young people were asked if they had tried to find a job within the last 12 months. 31% of total respondents who were old enough to work, had tried to find a job in the last 12 months with only 16% (41) had been successful and 15% (38) unsuccessful. The ones who were unsuccessful said the barriers they faced were their age.

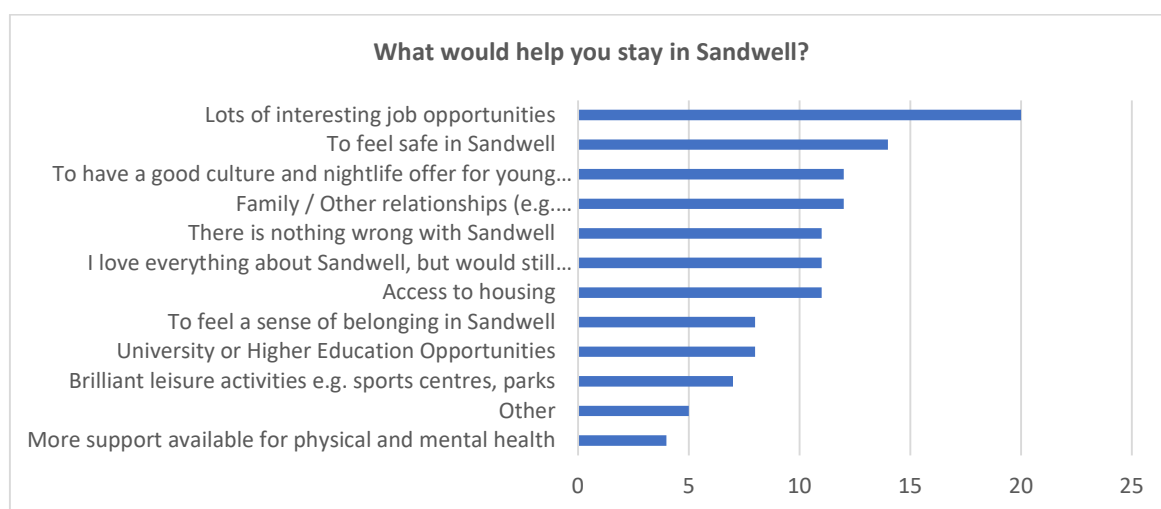
In Figure 14.2, primary children were asked whether they would like to continue to live in Sandwell when they are older and only 41% responded with yes and 32% were unsure, with over a quarter stating that they did not want to live in Sandwell. Secondary aged pupils were asked if they would continue living in Sandwell after college or university and the response was even less at 25% stating yes, 29% not wanting to stay in Sandwell and the highest response was 47% being unsure.



**Figure 14.2 – Would you continue living in Sandwell**



Of the 34% that said they did not want to live in Sandwell, they were asked a follow up question of what would help them to stay, the results are shown in figure 14.3. They stated *'lots of interesting job opportunities'* to feel safe in Sandwell and to have good culture and nightlife for young people.



**Figure 14.3 – What would help you stay in Sandwell**

## **15. Being a young person in Sandwell**

Finally, young people were asked if there was anything else they wanted to tell us about being a young person in Sandwell. Figure 15.1 shows the vast array of statements and key words stated. The primary aged children generally made positive comments with many referring to it being fun to be a young person, and they were happy with life, spending time with family and friends. Below are a few quotes from children who have acknowledged the sense of freedom that they have by being a young person:

- *“Being a young person is great, schools give us access to do fun thing and have our voice being heard, the environment is changing slowly, in a good way, which is better for our health”.*
- *“It’s great being this person you can hang out and play games”*
- *“I want to be young forever it’s fun and we don’t have to deal with work and bills and taxes and random stuff that makes no sense”*

However, there were some that felt it was difficult and were already encountering struggles, particularly with the increase in technology and influences online, *“Being a young person today can be challenging especially on social media, there are many people who try to persuade us into doing illegal stuff or posting inappropriate things online and since we are vulnerable some fall for it and if we don’t we get bullied so the best we can do is ignore them”.*

How they are treated at a young age is also a concern especially with the continuing issue of bullying, *“Being a young person today is quite bad as the amount of cyber bullying around the world has increased dramatically”.*

Many references were made to technology and how their lives revolved around their mobile phones *“Phones are basically our life if you take them away it’s like saying that you’re not allowed outside to kids who are now in 30s”*.

It was pleasing to see how the survey enables children to express their views and they appear to enjoy the experience along with being a young person growing up, *“Yes I would like to say thank you for giving us the opportunity to do this survey and its really good being young because you get to have a great childhood and also you can do anything you would like to do and it’s amazing and you could live your life”*.

Secondary aged children provided more insight into the challenges they face through their comments. Many referred to being a young person as *“hard”* and *“difficult”*, with ongoing mental health issues, *“It’s harder than you think and we don’t tell adults or at least I don’t because when I talk about it I cry and I overthink A LOT and kids struggle with their mental health because of school this morning I had 2 pieces of homework to do and now I have 14”*.

Young people with disabilities also stated how hard it is for them, *“I would like more support as a person who has anxiety’s also have all of the symptoms of ADHD but I need an appointment at CAMHS but my parents just keep saying no and that I’m fine. and for the students who suffer with anger issues they should be allowed a second chance”* and *“I have anxiety and depression; I get worried about things and cannot sleep properly at night and have symptoms of ADHD”*.

Young people feel their voice is not heard and that often their opinions are ignored, *“1) You’re not taken seriously as a young person 2) Your seen as invisible and not much of a concern to people 3) Not heard enough through voice and opinions 4) Shut out and silenced of issues and problems”*.

Some young people thought that Sandwell was *“ok”*, but the crime did not make it safe *“It is a pretty good place to live but the homophobia, occasional sexism, the stabbings, and other crimes, makes it very worrying when walking out and about”*.

There were a few positive comments from the younger pupils from secondary school, who wanted to embrace their childhood and make the most of the opportunities provided to them, *“I love being young and having a childhood, it embraces me to learn more about life younger and teaches me many ways before I get old”*.



Figure 15.1 – Being a young person in Sandwell

## **16. Conclusion**

This detailed survey report can, even with its limitations, provides a good indication of the needs of young people from their perspective, and provide some recommendations about what the local authority and other agencies should be implementing to meet the needs.

There are clear themes identified through the survey, these include, engaging in risky behaviours, support in educational settings, family as a support mechanism, experience of bullying, engaging in positive activities, youth voice opportunities, communication through digital devices and improving mental health and wellbeing.

### **Engaging in risky behaviours**

Addiction to drugs and substances have been an ongoing issue, with features of new emerging substances throughout the years becoming more of an attraction to young people, thus increasing the need to engage in risky behaviours. In 2023 and 2024, vaping has emerged as a popular choice, and it is evidently an issue for young people, *“The council needs to do something about Vaping because it is out of hand”*. However, this is often a choice made by young people themselves through the need to ‘fit in’ and be socially accepted by peers. The issue of engaging in risky behaviours due to stress or peers, is more than often a perception rather than reality, especially with the usage of substances is relatively low, with vaping being the most popular substance used. Personal issues encountered are much different and tend to focus on education, the pressure of exams and looking towards the future. Bullying is also perceived as a personal issue for those who are victims.

There is a need for young people to build resilience and confidence, for them to resist the pressures of society and fitting into the social norm.

Commissioned organisations for substance abuse prevention should continue to work with schools to promote the risks associated with substance abuse to deter young people away from engaging in the risky behaviours.

### **Support in educational settings**

School pressures with exams will always exist, but alongside this, the pressure, is causing young people to encounter mental health issues. Therefore, is it crucial for young people to feels supported during exam season to ensure that educational settings are not seen as a stressful experience.

Education forms a significant part of a child’s life, not only does it provide learning, but it is also where friendships are built. Along with the positives come the negatives of being influenced by peers into making poor choices in life and changing the person they were when they transitioned to secondary school through to their teenage years. From a primary school age, many children are aware of how secondary school transition can affect them and they show signs of concern. Those who don’t feel supported through school, by a trusted adult or through support services, have to deal with battling mental health issues alone, which can be extremely challenging.



Educational institutions may advocate supporting young people through mental health and wellbeing, but in 2023 we found young people appear to be unaware of where in their school day this learning, features, and want more to be done within school around this topic. Support services work closely with schools, but again young people have little awareness of these and the ones they are aware of, they lack the understanding of their role e.g. school nursing or find comfort in talking to people they trust like family and friends the more preferred option.

Education for young people is not just about the curriculum but to them, learning life skills is key for them to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood. This need has been highlighted in previous survey results, with young people particularly interested in further education on money management, taxes and paying bills, as well as support in making important careers choices, through applying for jobs and preparing for their future, *“I would like to learn about my future more, how to pay bills, mortgage, finance”*.

Educational settings should promote the support they can provide their students on mental health and wellbeing. They should offer a support package during exam season and provide young people with tools and tips to enable them to revise but also manage their time effectively and their mental health, so they do not feel pressured or stressed this period. Schools should also consider and review their offer to students, for preparing for their future, not just through further education, but promoting apprenticeships, work experience and careers. Within this package, should also be an offer of learning key life skills such as money management, finding a house and applying for a job.

### **Family as a support mechanism**

Family plays an important role in the life of the young person. They are seen as a support mechanism for many, choosing to approach parents or siblings over support services. They access advice and guidance from them, whether its regarding careers, their future, education or an issue affecting their mental health such as bullying. Therefore, it is not a surprise that young people want to ensure their families are living in environment where they are all able to live happily, whether that is ensuring their families are supported through deprivation and financially through to better housing. Cost of living is an important factor and due to family circumstances, often children and young people can miss out on engaging in positive activities or enjoying the finer things in life such as holidays, which could explain why families are choosing to take primary aged children out of school term to save costs.

The Local Authority and organisations offering financial advice such as Citizens Advice Bureau should ensure families are aware of what support is available to help them during the cost-of-living crisis.

Organisations offering services for children and young people, should promote and market to parents to make them aware of what services are offered in Sandwell.

### **Experience of Bullying**

Although, as previous years, drugs, substances and crime remain as the main concerns, bullying is still featuring as an issue for young people across different age

groups. With the ever-increasing popularity of social media, cyberbullying is also on the increase. Young people are unhappy about their lack of confidence, appearance and intimate relationships and this is not surprising when looking at the reasons for bullying being based on appearance.

Bullying and appearance also was shown to be high in ranking for personal issues. Bullying is a generic theme which encompasses every issue such as name calling to significant issues like grooming and child sexual exploitation. It also can start from primary age and escalate through secondary school, hence why some children from primary school fear their transition to their secondary school, particularly if the perpetrators are going to the same school. If siblings are present, there is some level of protection for children in younger years of secondary schools but if the young person is alone and has no support, school years can be extremely challenging when they are already facing pressures of exams. Therefore, the idea of changing themselves and “fitting in” and being socially accepted is sometimes an easier option than being a victim of bullying.

This issue continues to be a concern, and further exploration should be done into how young people would like to be supported through their experiences and what more can support services, and their educational institutions do to help them.

Educational institutions should ensure they continue to review anti-bullying policies annually and take up opportunities of anti-bullying training or resources and tools offered including initiatives such as the anti-bullying roadshow, offered by the SHAPE Programme.

### **Engaging in Positive Activities**

At a primary school age, play is important, and children feel adequate time to play is available. At a secondary age, apart from sporting activities in school and out of school many young people choose not to engage in positive activities after school or during holiday periods. They highlight need for relaxation and rest due to the fact that they have been in the school environment which is often stressful for them.

Activities should be fun and engaging and something a group of friends could do if they were bored. To increase uptake in activities, organisations should be promoting the benefits of the activity and ensure they are also marketing them to parents and through schools.

### **Youth voice opportunities**

Although there are opportunities available in schools to have student voices heard, not every young person will take up these roles e.g. of Student Councillor, Mental Health ambassadors etc. Part of being valued in school is to be seen and heard particularly by teachers, *“I want my voice to be heard and respected by teachers”*, therefore there is a clear need to promoting avenues for young people to be heard in and out of school. The fact that 27% of participants, who didn’t know about Sandwell Council’s boroughwide SHAPE youth Forum, were interested in being a part of it, shows there is appetite to be heard.

The Local Authority should continue to promote its SHAPE programme (child's voice initiative) to schools and families to ensure young people can engage in the projects. Sandwell Council is also striving to become a child friendly borough which will provide greater opportunities across the council and partnership to promote child's voice through ensuring the UNICEF rights of a child are understood and embedded by all organisations in Sandwell.

The Local Authority and partners should also continue to ensure that service design moving forward is co-produced and involves children and young people. Sandwell Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy will be launched in April and will provide organisations with guidance on how this can be achieved.

### **Communication through electronic devices**

Young people's usage of electronic devices is on the increase from a primary age with over 75% having access to a mobile phone. Gaming remains hugely popular, with an interest in all ages, for creative, building games such as Roblox and Minecraft. Gaming is seen as a communication tool, an avenue to make friends and socialise, even if that means chatting to people they don't know. Although the dangers of online safety are understood, the element of risk taking is still seen as a benefit if it allows for more socialisation. Before games consoles were seen as the primary resource for gaming but now phones are just as good to use removing the need to be at home in front of a console, phones are the most accessible device.

Video applications continue to grow in popularity and are a source of entertainment therefore You Tube and Tik Tok for both age groups remain the most popular channels. Even though the trend of using devices to access applications remains popular, they are not the preferred method of communication for young people to access information about their local area, they prefer face to face communication through family and friends or through schools. Therefore, the council and partner agency social media channels have a low uptake from young people, in terms of followers. However, if they were promoted more then there is likely to be an increase once the benefits to the young people are outlined.

The local authority should promote the Just Youth website ([www.justyouth.org.uk](http://www.justyouth.org.uk)) as the information hub for young people as they find the information on their useful as a resource. To communicate with young people, organisations should channel information through families and schools.

### **Sandwell as a place to live**

Young people would like Sandwell to be cleaner and safer, have better roads, parks, housing and shops. More sports opportunities and clubs including ones that currently don't exist or there are not many of such as boxing, cricket, ice hockey and martial arts, would also be welcomed. A better environment with more developments would encourage young people to stay in Sandwell.

Young people want to be involved in developing Sandwell, *"Make/ build things and places more centred and focused on the youth e.g. teens and children and have more systems in place to support us."* Therefore, the Local Authority, should continue to

engage and coproducing ideas on regeneration and future developments in Sandwell, with young people.

## **Summary**

Overall, being a child in Sandwell at a primary age can come with its challenges but is generally seen as good, however as a young person transition from secondary school to adulthood life can become extremely difficult, and the impact on young people's mental health can be detrimental. Young people have ambition and drive to succeed but also feel pressure to do this and need more support from their educational institutions. However, the barriers and influences around them with social media and the need to fit into society have made life very difficult for young people. They want to be acknowledged, listened to and supported to address their needs and issues which unfortunately continue to grow.

Improving mental health and wellbeing is an overarching theme. If all other elements are tackled then ultimately a child and young person living in Sandwell can thrive.

The survey results will be shared with Council Directors, Cabinet Members, the wider workforce of the council and partner agencies. The recommendations made, will form part of the Council's strategic objectives and priorities.

# SHAPE




To find out more about the SHAPE Programme


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