

The Good Childhood Report 2022



**The
Children's
Society**

It matters about
how you feel



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Foreword



Our eleventh Good Childhood Report is published at a critical juncture for children and young people's well-being. The negative effects of the cost of living crisis, the disruption of the pandemic to young people's education, and the ongoing decline in children's happiness with their lives are on a collision course. Unless urgent action is taken, young people face a well-being catastrophe.

This year's report focuses on schools as vital settings that influence children's well-being. Children spend most of their time at school – it's where they develop as unique individuals, finding their passions and forming friendships. But for some, it's a part of their life where they don't feel happy.

Our findings show us that feeling listened to at school was strongly associated with children's overall happiness at school. This is an incredibly important insight, but it is not surprising to us at The Children's Society. Children and young people's voices are at the heart of everything we do. They are the driving force behind our unflinching determination to overturn the damaging decline we have seen in children's well-being over the last decade by 2030.

Our case studies in chapter 3 highlight the benefits of listening to and learning from children about their own well-being. It's time that we stop dismissing the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of young people in our society. Instead, we must actively seek, include, and value them.

Parents and carers share our concerns for the UK's children. Their responses to our household survey suggest 53% thought the pandemic had a negative impact on their children's education during the last 12 months. A staggering 85% are concerned about the impact of the cost of living crisis on their family in the next year. For children, their happiness with school varies based on their family's income. When combined, the reality of what's facing children and the lack of a holistic response is a national scandal. Children and their families were promised a better

society after the pandemic with comprehensive educational recovery. But this promise has been broken.

Year after year, piecemeal and short-term responses to children's low well-being have left us coasting into crisis. Life is too hard for too many children and young people and as the cost of living crisis continues to hit families, even more children will be pushed into poverty. We will see the impact of this for generations to come. We cannot sit back and watch children's lives decline. National and local decision makers must commit to creating a society built for all children – where every one of them can thrive and reach their full happy and healthy potential.

At The Children's Society, the shocking state of children's well-being drives the work of our entire organisation. We are calling for a bold, radical new deal for children across health, education, social care, and beyond, so that every child no matter where they live across the UK can have a good childhood. As well as the current focus on late intervention and crisis support, we need to get ahead of the problems coming down the track, with long-term investment in prevention and early intervention for children's well-being support and social care.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Russell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Russell
Chief Executive
The Children's Society

Introduction

The Good Childhood Report 2022 is the eleventh annual report on the well-being of children in the UK, and marks the tenth anniversary of the series. It presents the most recent trends in children’s subjective well-being and this year looks in more detail at how children feel about school, recognising the pivotal role it plays in their lives. In recent years, there has been a decline in children’s happiness with school and the pandemic has caused significant disruption to children’s education. School is also a key focus of ongoing initiatives to both measure and improve children’s well-being.

There have been several important developments in the evidence base on children’s well-being and mental health since our 2021 report was released. The NHS Digital second follow-up study on the Mental Health of Children and Young People in England and the third Department for Education (DfE) State of the Nation report on the well-being of children and young people in England have been published.^{1,2} The first findings from the #BeeWell well-being survey of over 40,000 young people from across Greater Manchester – discussed further in chapter 3 of this report – have also been released.³

Furthermore, there have been important advancements in policy. These provide an opportunity to influence national and local priorities to put children’s mental health and well-being at the centre of the Government’s plans for children. The Government has committed to develop a new cross-departmental 10-year plan for mental health and well-being in England, launching

a discussion paper and call for evidence in April this year.⁴ In May 2022, they announced a Schools Bill to raise education standards across the country,⁵ and launched the SEND Review – a consultation on special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and the alternative provision system in England.^{6,7} They also released the Levelling Up White Paper, which presents well-being as a key outcome metric for the first time.⁸

In June 2022, echoing The Children Society’s own recommendations and work with partners at the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, The Times Education Commission recommended that well-being be placed at the heart of education and an annual survey of the well-being of children be undertaken.⁹

The year has also seen many changes in our society. Many of the restrictions implemented during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic have now been lifted,¹⁰ but other issues continue to affect children’s lives – from the cost of living crisis to the impact of global events. Amid this unprecedented uncertainty, listening to how children feel and putting children’s voices at the centre of what we do is more important than ever.

This report presents data from a variety of sources that capture children’s own views on how their life is going (or their self-reported well-being).

It includes:

- an overview of the latest trends in subjective well-being in the UK, including variations by gender
- a detailed analysis of children’s responses to questions about their happiness with and experiences of school
- an exploration of what has been achieved in three case study areas as a result of measuring well-being in schools.

¹ NHS Digital (2021).

² Department for Education (2022a).

³ <https://gmbeewell.org/research/publications/>

⁴ Department of Health and Social Care (2022).

⁵ UK Parliament (2022).

⁶ Department for Education (2022b).

⁷ Department for Education (2022c).

⁸ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022).

⁹ Time Education Commission (2022).

¹⁰ GOV.UK (2022).

What is well-being?

To quote the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, well-being 'is about "how we are doing" as individuals, communities and as a nation and how sustainable this is for the future.'¹¹

The Good Childhood Report focuses primarily on children's own views of how their lives are going (or their subjective well-being), while others focus on or combine these with so-called 'objective' measures of well-being. These use social indicators on people's lives, such as physical health and education.¹²

Figure 1 summarises the different aspects of subjective well-being reflected in the literature. It is taken from The Children's Society's joint work with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing on a conceptual framework for children and young people's well-being,¹³ and differentiates between:

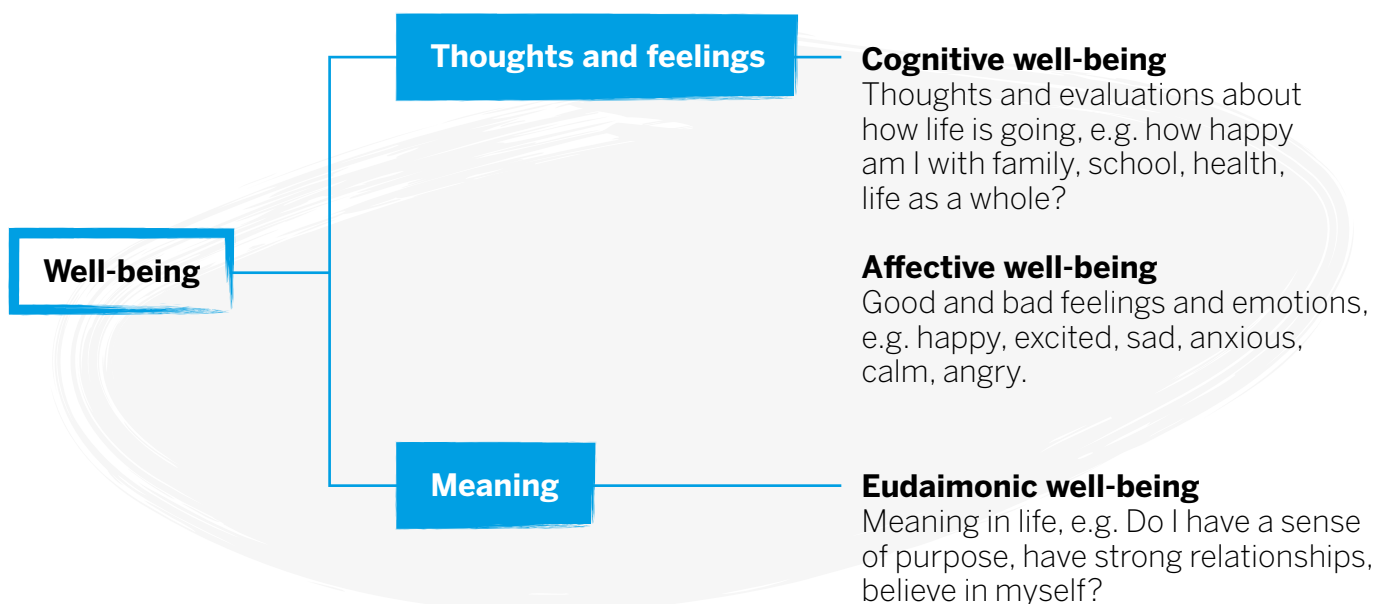
- **Affective well-being:** Positive and negative emotions or how happy people feel (e.g. the Office for National Statistics (ONS) question 'overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?').

- **Cognitive well-being:** The quality of people's lives overall or certain aspects of their lives, including measures of life satisfaction (e.g. the ONS question 'overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?').

- **Eudaimonic** (or psychological) well-being: This looks at people's sense of meaning, purpose, and autonomy (e.g. the ONS question 'overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?').¹⁴

While measures of each of these can be found in The Good Childhood Report, it has primarily been concerned with understanding changes in children's well-being over the longer term and has therefore focused on more stable measures of life satisfaction.¹⁵

Figure 1: Components of self-reported well-being



Source: Soffia, M and Turner, A. (2021a) Measuring Children and Young People's Subjective Wellbeing. What Works Centre for Wellbeing, p.10. Available at: <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/MCYPSW-Conceptual-framework-2.pdf>

¹¹ See What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2022).

¹² See for example the ONS' (2018) Children's Well-being Measurement Framework. Available: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>

¹³ Soffia and Turner (2021a).

¹⁴ See Tinkler and Hicks (2011) for further information on the ONS four questions on personal well-being.

¹⁵ The Good Childhood Report 2013 (p.11) reported that children's life satisfaction was similar on different days of the week, although their happiness varied, and was generally higher at the weekend. As reported in The Good Childhood Report 2017, the multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction presented in Appendix A has good internal consistency overall (a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.84) and for males, females, 8- to 11- year-olds and 12- to 15-year-olds (a Cronbach's Alpha > 0.80 in all cases). A test-retest shows that it also has good reliability, with an intra-class correlation coefficient of 0.84 (p<0.001). See pages 11 to 13 of The Good Childhood Report 2017 for further detail.

Measuring children's subjective well-being

There has been an acknowledgement of the importance of children's well-being in recent policy making, and the need to ask children themselves about their well-being (rather than relying on adults) is now commonly accepted.¹⁶ Indeed, as demonstrated in the case studies presented in chapter 3, understanding children's experiences and the challenges they face enables professionals and policy makers to prioritise specific areas and groups of children in need of support, and to take action to improve their lives.

In the absence of a more comprehensive and regular England and/or UK-wide measure of children's well-being, our report draws upon cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys (available through the UK data service), which ask children in the UK about their life satisfaction.¹⁷ Since 1994, the British Household Panel Survey and later the Understanding Society survey have asked children about their happiness with life as a whole, their family, friends, appearance, schoolwork, and (from 2003) the school they go to.¹⁸ The Millennium Cohort Study also posed the same questions to a cohort of children born in 2000-2001 at ages 11 and 14.¹⁹ These sources have allowed us to track national trends and changes in well-being among the same group of children.

The Children's Society developed The Good Childhood Index in 2010 (see Appendix A) to further the evidence base on children's well-being. It consists of a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction (see Figure 3), which is considered to be more reliable than a single measure,²⁰ and 10

single-item domain measures which ask children about their happiness with different aspects of their life which are known to be important (see Figure 2).²¹ These questions are included in our annual household survey of children (aged 10 to 17) and their parent or carer, which is currently a key source for the ONS Well-being Measurement Framework and the DfE State of the Nation report.

While Understanding Society and our own survey provide good aggregate level data on the well-being of children in the UK, sample sizes necessarily limit the ability to look at the well-being of particular groups of children and different geographies. These data are also only available once a year and, as household surveys, will not capture the experiences of all groups of children.

A larger scale data source on children's well-being is needed to further understand the experiences of groups who are not well represented in the existing sources and to identify local variations. Ideally, data would also be collected more frequently than annually to allow for better monitoring of changes over time.



¹⁶ Research has shown that children's responses to the same set of questions can differ. Goodman, Lamping & Ploubidis (2010) report 'low to moderate' correlations between child and parent reports of the sub-scales of the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire. The Good Childhood Report 2018 also found that a single measure of subjective well-being completed by a cohort of children aged around 14 years was a stronger predictor of self-harm than a 20-item measure of emotional and behavioural difficulties completed by a parent.

¹⁷ Life satisfaction measures focus on how children feel about their life as a whole (see, for example, OECD, 2022).

¹⁸ See Understanding Society (2022).

¹⁹ See Centre for Longitudinal Studies (2022).

²⁰ See Diener, Ingelhart and Tay (2013), and Rees, Bradshaw, Goswami and Keung (2010).

²¹ The Children's Society (2010).

Children's involvement in The Good Childhood Report

The Children's Society makes every effort to involve young people in The Good Childhood Report (see description of current practices below). Over the next few years, we will explore additional ways to include them in production and decisions about the content of the report.

The Children's Society's household survey: question development and testing

The Children's Society's household survey has been conducted annually from April to June since 2015; prior to that the survey was completed more than once each year. As well as including routine questions on children's well-being, a module of topical questions is also included. These questions are developed and tested in conjunction with a small sample of children. A small pilot of the whole survey is then conducted with children and their parent or carer to check that the questions are working before the survey goes live.

The Children's Society's household survey: responses

The Children's Society's household survey collects data on children's well-being, their household, and other characteristics. To date, 21 surveys have been completed, including almost 44,000 children (and their parent or carers).

Good Childhood consultation work

Each year before publication, young people are consulted to get their views on the findings and themes covered in the report. This engagement allows us to understand in children's own words what might be going on and to test the findings with specific groups of children whose views and experiences may not be well represented in general population surveys.

This year, young people were also asked about how adults can talk about and better support their well-being. This insight will be used to produce a new resource later in the year, similar to that produced on friendship in 2020.²²

²² The Children's Society (2020a).





Data sources and methods used for new analysis in this report

This report draws on some of the most robust and timely data sources available on children's subjective well-being. Findings are presented from The Children's Society's own research programme, together with other key sources on the well-being of children in the UK, such as the Understanding Society survey.

The Children's Society's household surveys

The Children's Society has conducted its own household surveys with parents, carers, and children since 2010 (see Appendix B for further details of our well-being research programme). These surveys collect routine data on children's well-being, their household, and other characteristics. They also include a flexible module of questions which varies annually to look at other topical issues that are important to children. Since 2020, the survey has, for example, also looked at parents', carers' and children's experiences of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

The most recent survey was undertaken between May and June 2022, and collected responses from a sample of over 2,000 children (aged 10 to 17) and their parent or carer from across the UK. Children were purposively selected to closely match the demographic (age and gender), socio-economic,

and geographic make-up of the wider population.²³ Weighted data from the survey are presented on our Good Childhood Index in chapter 1 of the report (with a further breakdown of the index by age and gender in Appendix C), and from an additional module of questions asking children about their experiences of school in chapter 2.

While information is collected on children's or parents' ethnicity and the survey questions allow them to self-identify in relation to gender, the ability to conduct further analysis for subgroups and to look at the intersections between different subgroups is unfortunately limited by sample sizes. Some analysis has been presented in the report which compares those from a white ethnic background with those from all other ethnic groups combined, but it is acknowledged that this will necessarily conceal differences between specific groups in the aggregate categories. Previous research by The Children's Society has highlighted differences in life satisfaction between specific ethnic groups.²⁴

The survey was moved to a new provider in 2020, which may have affected the ability to compare findings with those from previous survey years.

²³ Using mid 2020 population estimates as a guide for quotas (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

²⁴ Analysis of Millennium Cohort Study data when participants were age 14 showed that children of Indian origin reported significantly higher subjective well-being than children of white or mixed ethnicity (The Good Childhood Report, 2018).

UK Longitudinal Household Survey (known as 'Understanding Society')

(See understandingsociety.ac.uk/ about for further details)

Understanding Society is a longitudinal study covering a large, representative sample of around 40,000 households in the UK (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland). Households are interviewed annually, with questions completed by adults and a cross-sectional sample of children aged 10 to 15. Fieldwork runs over a period of 24 months, with each household interviewed at roughly the same time each year. The youth questionnaire contains routine questions on subjective well-being and modules which vary between years on other aspects of children's lives.

In 2019-20, the youth survey was completed by 2,100 children (aged 10 to 15).²⁵ There was some overlap between the first wave of Understanding Society and the final wave of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS).²⁶ This means the coverage of the first wave differs slightly from subsequent surveys (i.e. wave two onwards), which also include interviews with BHPS participants.

An Immigration and Ethnic Minority booster (IEMB) sample was added to the survey in an effort to improve the representation of these groups, and data are available for this sample from

2015-16 (wave 7). Trends data using the original Understanding Society sample are presented in chapters 1 and 2 of the report for increased comparability between years. Data from the new booster sample can also be found in the further analysis of data on children's experiences of school in the most recent survey wave, presented in chapter 2, and the analyses by aggregated ethnic group in Appendix D.

Again, there are some limitations in the ability to break down data from the Understanding Society survey for different demographic groups and to look at the intersections between groups (e.g. looking at variations for males and females within ethnic groups). The survey only asks children if they are male or female and therefore it is not clear how those who identify as non-binary or trans might answer this question. This is not only problematic given changing understanding of gender, but it also means that only binary gender analysis can be undertaken. While the booster sample improves the representation of those from different ethnic groups, the small sample sizes for specific groups limits the ability to conduct disaggregated analysis.

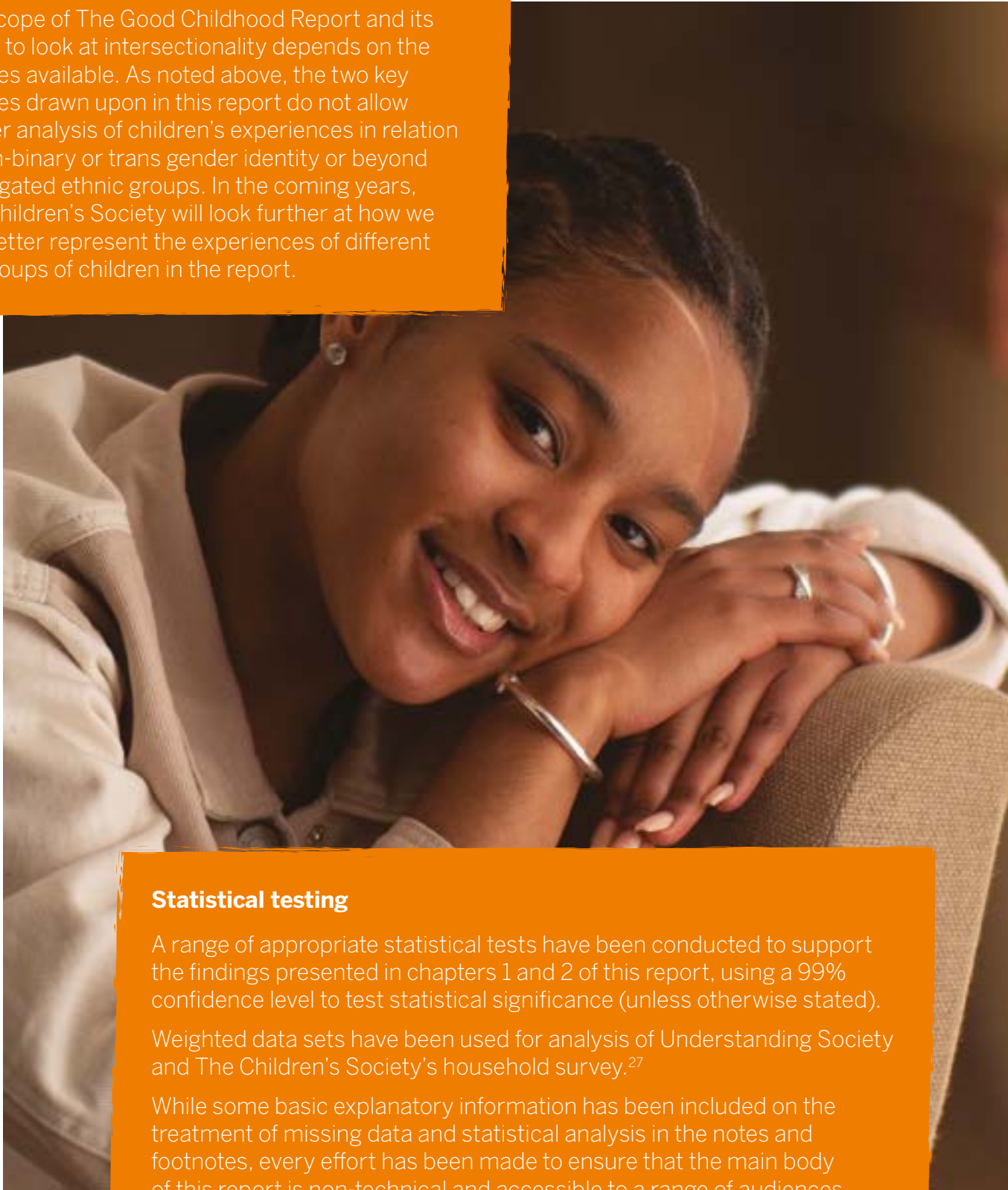
NB. The analyses presented for the case studies in chapter 3 are taken from published sources and were not undertaken specifically for this report.

²⁵ As noted later in the report, there are a very small number of participants in the latest wave who are aged 16, but most of the sample are aged between 10 to 15.

²⁶ The term wave is used to refer to data collected in specific time periods covered by the survey, which use the same questionnaires (question modules vary between waves). Understanding Society is a continuous survey and people are surveyed every year (or in each wave).

Scope for subgroup and intersectionality analysis

The scope of The Good Childhood Report and its ability to look at intersectionality depends on the sources available. As noted above, the two key sources drawn upon in this report do not allow further analysis of children's experiences in relation to non-binary or trans gender identity or beyond aggregated ethnic groups. In the coming years, The Children's Society will look further at how we can better represent the experiences of different subgroups of children in the report.



Statistical testing

A range of appropriate statistical tests have been conducted to support the findings presented in chapters 1 and 2 of this report, using a 99% confidence level to test statistical significance (unless otherwise stated).

Weighted data sets have been used for analysis of Understanding Society and The Children's Society's household survey.²⁷

While some basic explanatory information has been included on the treatment of missing data and statistical analysis in the notes and footnotes, every effort has been made to ensure that the main body of this report is non-technical and accessible to a range of audiences. Further technical details of the research are available from The Children's Society's Research team (see contact details at the end of the report).

²⁷ The Children's Society household data is weighted in line with the most recent available mid-year population estimates (ONS, 2021).

Chapter 1:

The current state of children's subjective well-being: overview, variations and trends over time

National data on children's well-being are an essential source in tracking how children feel about their lives and areas where they might need further support. As well as allowing important changes to be identified over time, these data enable us to distinguish variations between different subgroups of children (based on their demographic and other characteristics).

This chapter presents: the most up to date findings from The Children's Society's annual household survey, including children's responses in 2022 to our Good Childhood Index and

questions about current issues, like the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic; and the most recent data for 2019-20 from the robust annual Understanding Society survey, which allows us to track trends in children's well-being over time.

While Coronavirus (Covid-19) is a continued presence in the UK, many of the associated restrictions on daily life had been removed at the time of writing this report, which are likely to be reflected in responses to our annual household survey. It is important to bear in mind that there were changes to methodology in 2020 when this survey was moved to a new provider, which may affect comparability with findings from previous years.

The Good Childhood Index

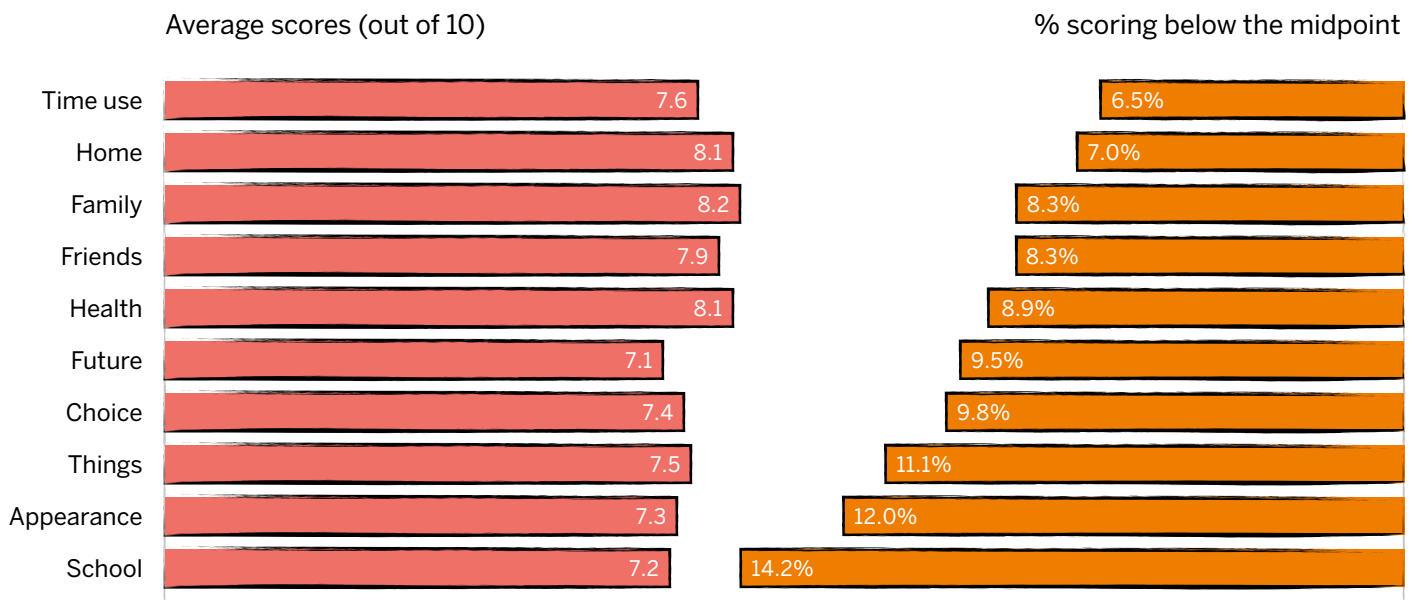
The latest overall figures for the Good Childhood Index (GCI; see Appendix A for further details)²⁸ are presented in Figures 2 and 3. These reflect responses from just over 2,000 children (aged 10 to 17) who completed The Children’s Society’s household survey during May and June 2022.

Figure 2 shows the average happiness score for each of the 10 aspects of life (or well-being domains) that comprise the GCI, and the proportion of children scoring below the midpoint on the 0 to 10 scale (who would be considered as having ‘low well-being’).

In 2022, children were on average most happy with their family, their health, and their home. A larger proportion scored below the midpoint (suggesting they are unhappy) for school than other aspects of life.

Appendix C provides a breakdown of mean happiness scores and the proportion of children with low scores on each of the ten GCI domains by age group and gender. There were consistent differences between boys and girls, with boys having higher mean scores across all ten items.²⁹

Figure 2: Latest figures for The Good Childhood Index

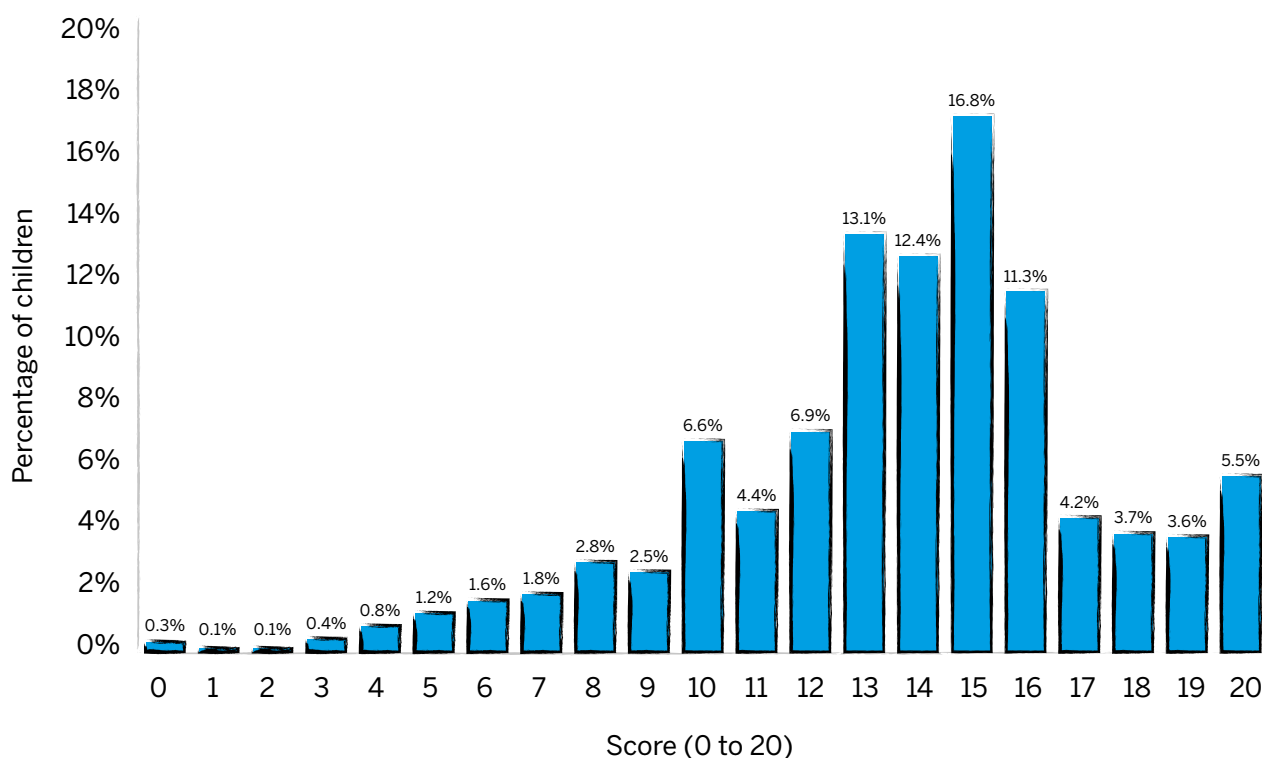


Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including ‘prefer not to say’).

²⁸ The Good Childhood Index was developed by The Children’s Society and is comprised of ten single-item domain measures, which ask children about their happiness with specific aspects of life, and a multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction.

²⁹ Based on indicative significance testing (p<0.01).

Figure 3: Latest figures for children's overall life satisfaction



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Note: Only includes those who provided a score for each of the five items that comprise the measure.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of scores for The Children's Society's multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction, which is based on Huebner's Student Life Satisfaction Scale.³⁰ In 2022, 11% of children aged 10 to 17 scored below the midpoint on the 0 to 20 scale and, as such, would be considered to have low well-being.

Further analysis indicates that higher proportions of females, 16- and 17-year-olds, and those who said that their families were not very well off or not well off at all scored below the midpoint on this measure than might be expected.³¹

³⁰ Huebner (1991).

³¹ Compared to males, those aged 10 to 11 years, and those children who felt their family were about average wealth or very or quite well off, respectively, based on indicative significance testing ($p < 0.01$).

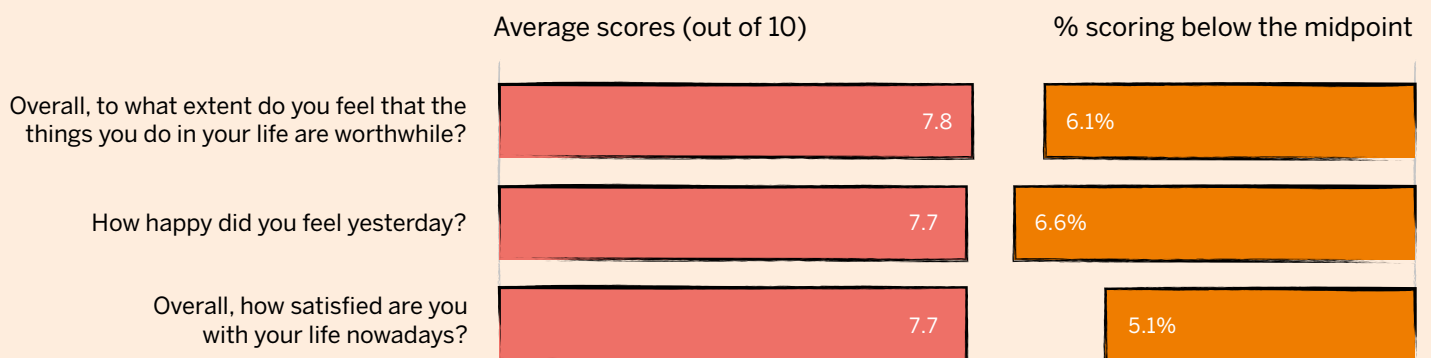


Other measures of children’s well-being

Office for National Statistics indicators

Figure 4 shows children’s (aged 10 to 17) responses to the three ONS questions on personal well-being included in The Children’s Society’s household survey.³²

Figure 4: Latest ONS measures of overall well-being



Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including ‘prefer not to say’).

³² See <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/childrenswellbeingmeasures>

Parents', carers' and children's reflections on current issues

Coronavirus

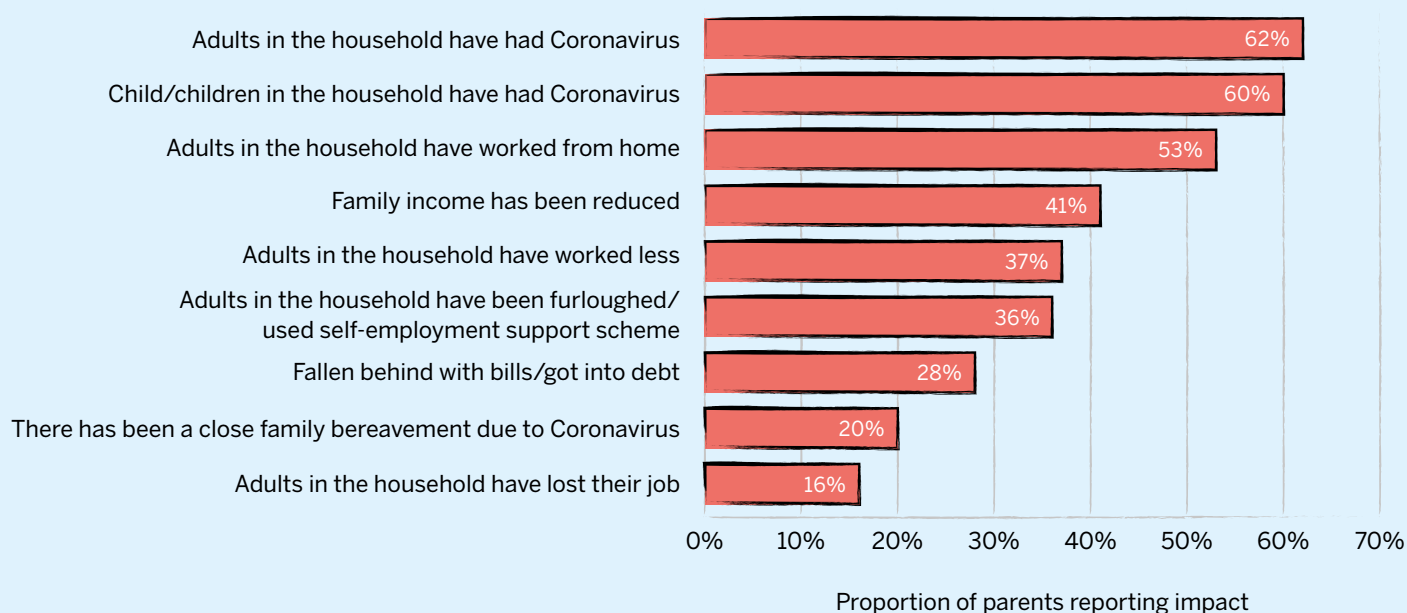
As in 2020 and 2021,³³ questions were again included in The Children Society's 2022 household survey on parents', carers', and children's experiences of the Coronavirus pandemic. Although the survey was conducted at roughly the same time of year (May and June 2022), the circumstances were different to the previous two years with many of the restrictions lifted.

Overall, 72% of parents and carers indicated that they were worried to some extent about Coronavirus ('extremely', 'very', 'somewhat', or 'slightly'). They were asked about a predetermined list of nine impacts on their life since the pandemic began. Most commonly, they reported that adults

(62%) or children (60%) in the household had had Coronavirus (which differs to 2021 when adults having to work from home was the most frequently reported impact).³⁴

When asked to rate on a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 indicated they had not coped very well and 10 they had coped very well) how well they thought they had coped with changes made to daily life due to the Coronavirus pandemic, around 76% of parents and carers who provided a response scored above five, suggesting they had coped to some extent (just under 12% scored at the midpoint and almost 13% scored below it, indicating they had coped less well).

Figure 5: Proportion of parents or carers reporting different impacts on their family since the pandemic began

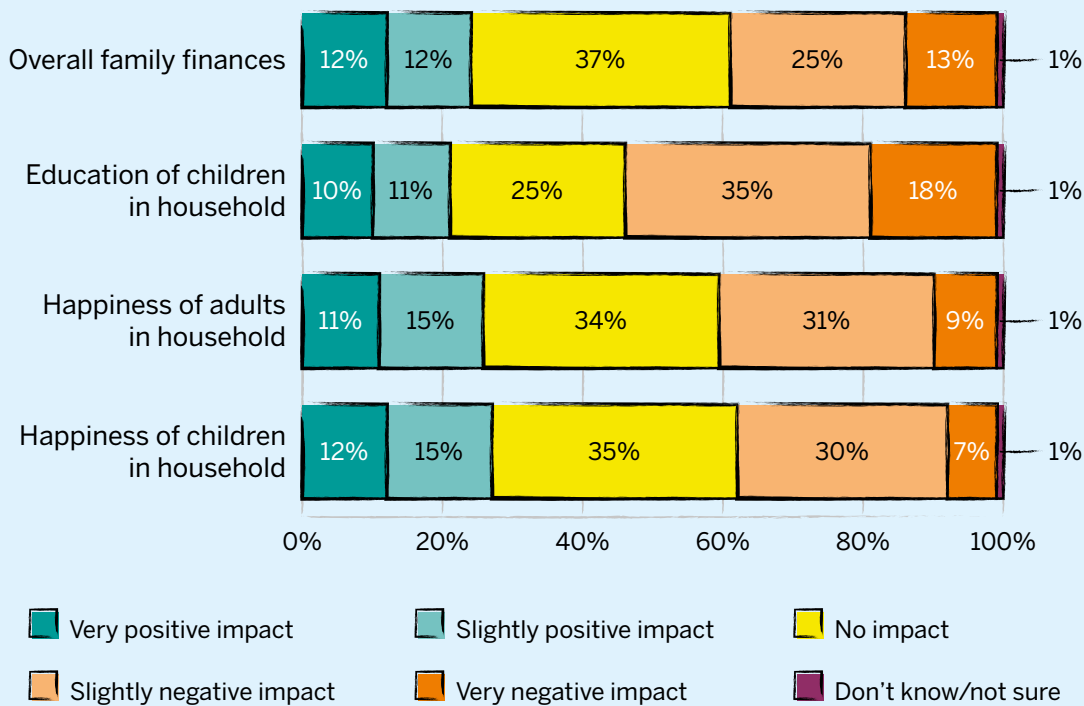


Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Proportions include 'Not sure/prefer not to say' responses.

³³ See The Good Childhood Report 2020 and The Good Childhood Report 2021.

³⁴ In 2021, 16% of parents reported that an adult/adults and 11% that a child/children in the household had had Coronavirus (see The Good Childhood Report 2021).

Figure 6: Reported impact of pandemic on specific aspects of family life in the last 12 months



Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May-June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data.
 Note: Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As in the previous two years, parents and carers were asked about the impact (positive or negative) Coronavirus had had on specific aspects of family life (see Figure 6). Again, they most commonly reported a negative impact on the education of their children (53% reported a ‘slightly negative’ or ‘very negative’ impact), although the proportion was lower than in the previous two years.

Parents and carers were asked what impact, if any, they felt the lifting of Coronavirus restrictions had had on their household, and 65% reported a ‘very positive’ or ‘slightly positive’ impact. Seven in 10 (70%) also said they felt ‘very’ or ‘slightly’ positive about the lifting of Coronavirus restrictions.

As in 2020 and 2021, children were asked to rate on a scale of 0 to 10 how well they had coped

overall and with specific changes made because of Coronavirus (see Figure 7). Encouragingly, 80% of those children who provided a response scored above five for how well they had coped overall (although 11% scored below the midpoint, suggesting they had not coped well). While the order of some items had changed, as reported in 2021, the areas that more children seemed to have coped less well with were not being able to see friends and family and not being able to do hobbies.

A similar proportion of children (64%) to parents and carers said that they felt ‘very’ or ‘slightly’ positive about recent changes to Coronavirus restrictions.

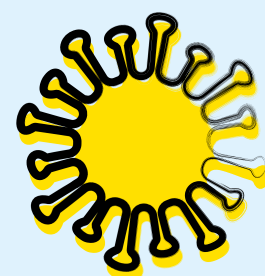
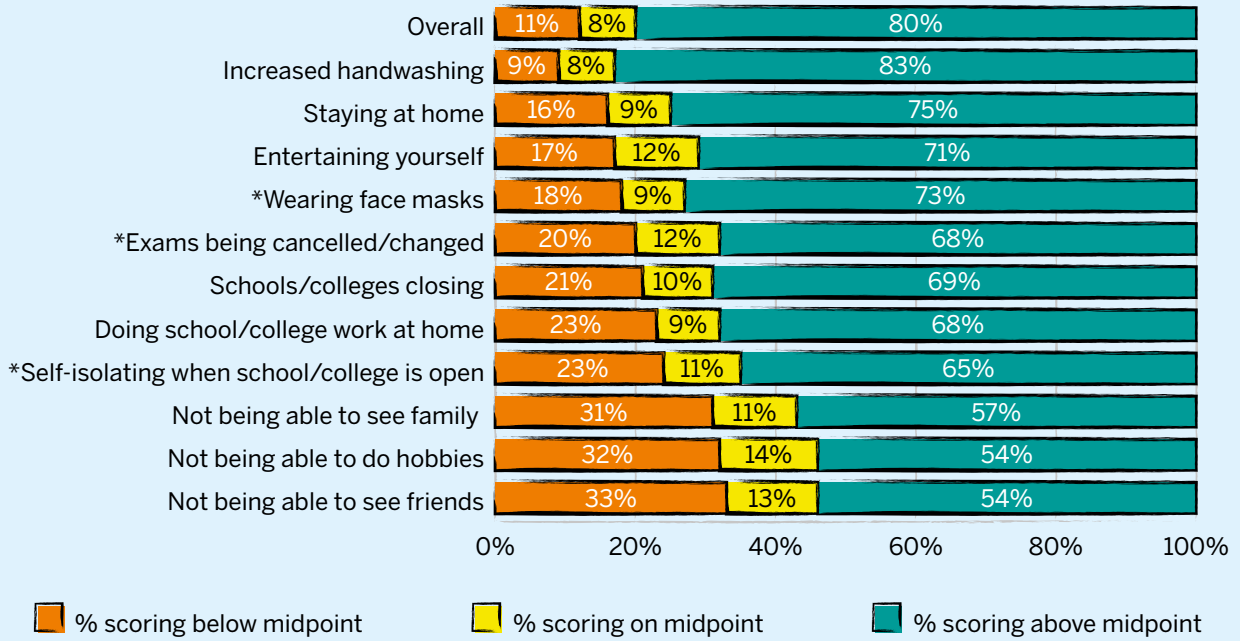


Figure 7: Extent to which children (aged 10 to 17) think they have coped with Coronavirus changes



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data.

Note: Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say'). Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

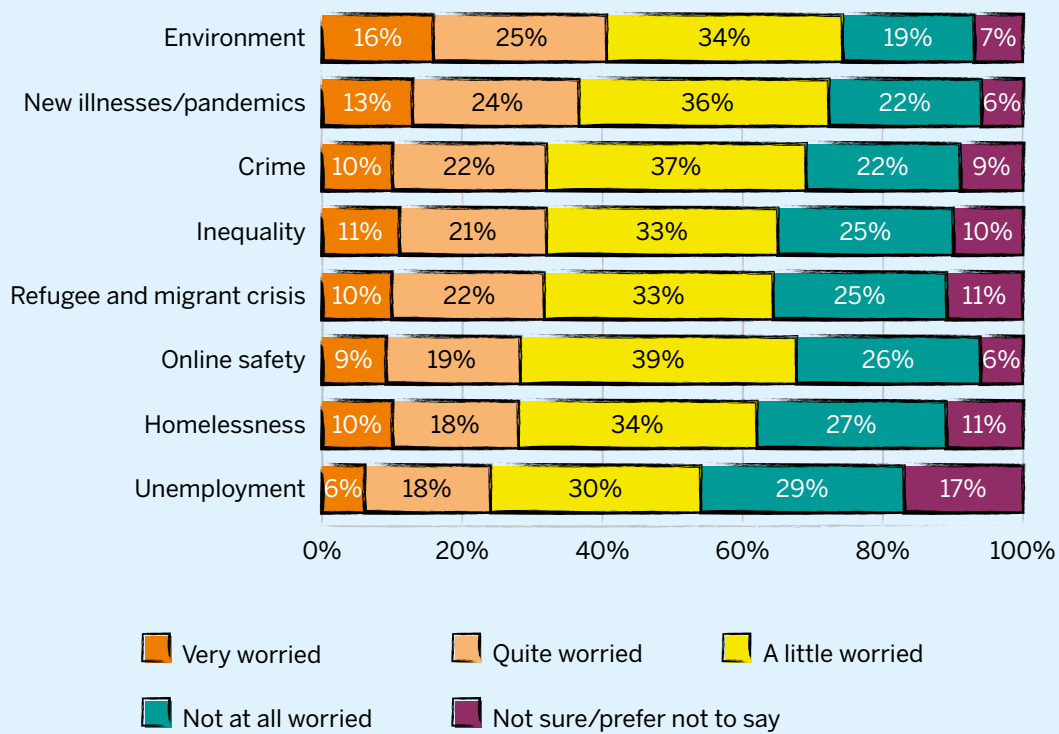
*Children were able to indicate that these items were not applicable. N/A responses are excluded from analysis.



Concern about broader social issues

In light of humanitarian events, such as the war in Ukraine, children were asked how much they worried about each of the same eight broader societal issues they were asked about in 2021. Responses are shown in Figure 8. The environment was top of children’s concerns and, whereas in 2021, Refugee and Migrant Crisis was the issue where the fewest children indicated they were ‘very’ or ‘quite’ worried; in 2022, it had moved to fifth.

Figure 8: Extent of worry about broader issues



Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data.
 Note: Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Cost of living

The Children’s Society was keen to find out how parents and carers were feeling about the recent cost of living increases, and were asked how concerned if at all they were about the impact on their family or household over the next 12 months. Overall, 85% of parents and carers indicated that they were either ‘very’ or ‘quite’ concerned. Chapter 2 looks at the specific challenges parents and carers taking part in the household survey had experienced with the costs of school during the last year.

Time trends

Understanding Society asks 10- to 15-year-olds³⁵ how they feel about the following aspects of their life: 'schoolwork,' 'appearance,' 'family,' 'friends,' 'the school you go to,' and 'life as a whole.' Children are presented with a numeric response scale (from completely happy to not at all happy), which is accompanied by faces expressing 'various types of feelings.'

This year's report presents overall trends in children's well-being based on responses to these six questions across the 11 waves of the survey conducted to date. Monitoring trends in these data allows us to identify overall changes in children's happiness over time. The latest available data are for 2019-20 and, as such, reflect children's well-being leading into and during the first year of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 9 shows the most recent mean happiness scores for the six measures across all 11 waves of the survey.³⁶ The solid line reflects the mean scores and the dotted lines above and below are the 99% confidence intervals.

From wave 7 an Immigration and Ethnic Minority Boost (IEMB) sample was added to the original sample for Understanding Society to ensure better representation of these groups. Additional graphs including this IEMB sample, which show overall trends and trends by binary ethnic group (comparing those from the white group with those from all other ethnic groups combined) can be found in Appendix D. The only consistent differences were for appearance, where the mean score for the white group was lower across survey waves than for those from all other ethnic groups combined. Mean scores for schoolwork were also lower among the white group in 4 of the 5 waves.

In 2019-20, children's mean score for happiness with life as a whole was 7.69. The order of their mean scores for the five specific areas of life examined (from highest to lowest) was family (8.94), friends (8.64), school (7.40), schoolwork (7.08), and appearance (6.97), as in previous years.

A simple linear regression analysis³⁷ showed that in 2019-20 the five specific aspects of life explained around 47% of the variation in happiness with life as a whole. Of the five domains, appearance and family appeared to be most important for happiness with life as a whole (after controlling for gender and age).³⁸

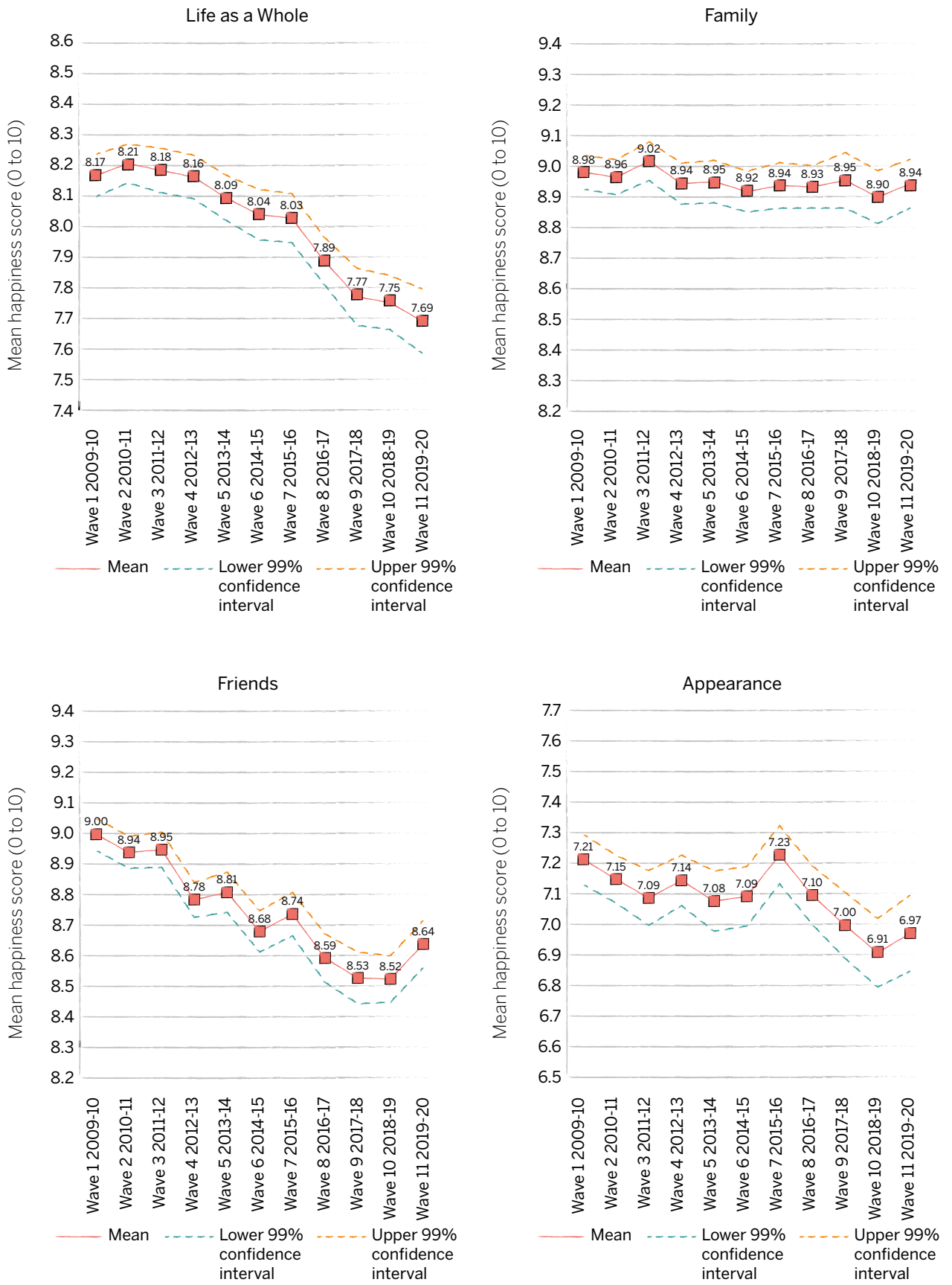
³⁵ A small number of 9 and 16 year olds were also included in some waves who are also captured in the analysis presented in this report (unless otherwise stated).

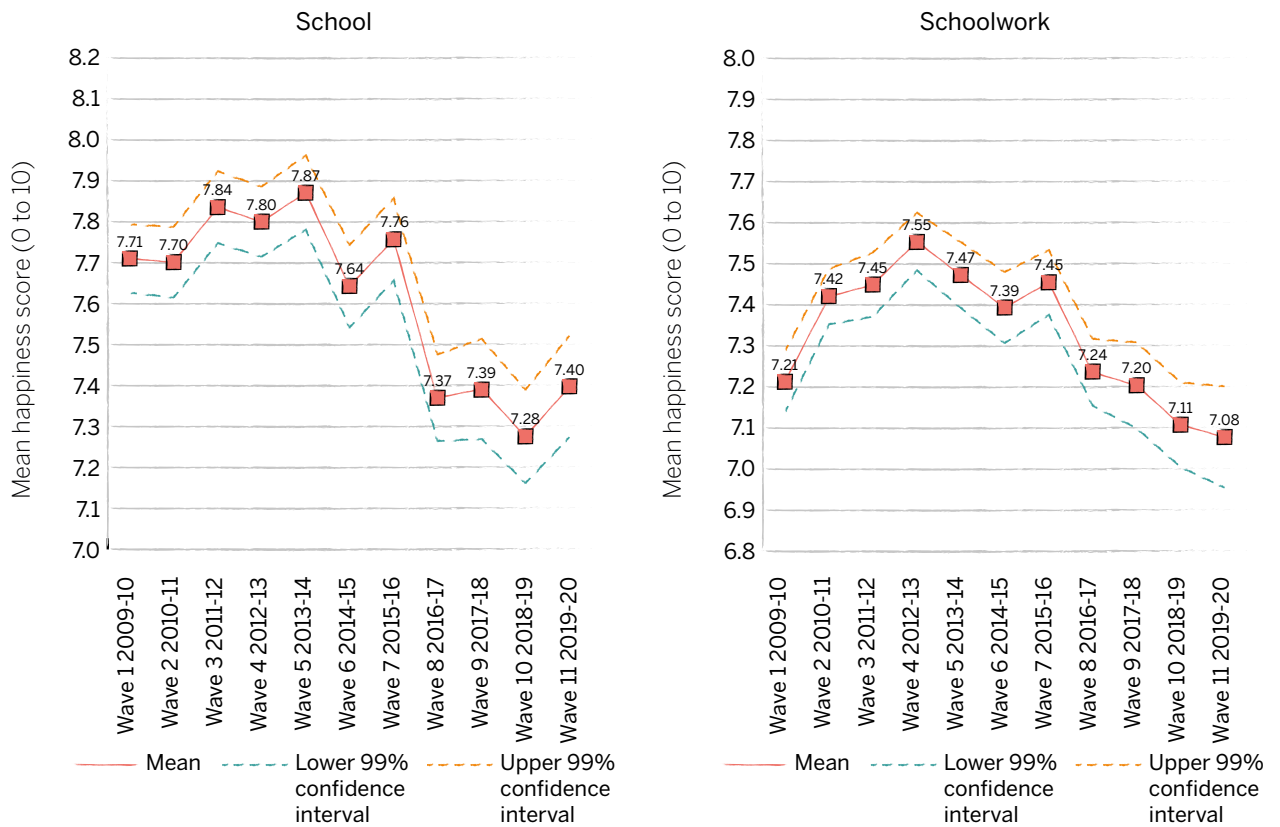
³⁶ The seven-point scale (1-7) used for these questions in Understanding Society (where 1 is 'completely happy' and 7 'not at all happy') has been reversed and converted to an 11-point scale (0 to 10) for the purposes of this report to ease interpretation and comparison with the other measures presented. All figures have been produced using the most recent dataset for each wave. Data for all waves (except wave 1) have been weighted using the BHPS and UKHLS cross-sectional youth interview weight (-ythscub-xw). Wave 1 weights were revised in the most recent dataset (released in March 2022), resulting in some differences between mean scores and proportions presented here and in previous Good Childhood Reports.

³⁷ These analyses did not take account of complex sampling. The value reported is the R square change value from a linear regression model including: i) controls only (age and gender); and ii) controls and the five domain measures of well-being.

³⁸ It is important to note that the five domains do not explain 100% of variation in children's happiness with life as a whole, and, as a result, there will be other factors (not identified here) which contribute.

Figure 9: Trends in children’s (aged 10 to 15) happiness with different aspects of life, UK, 2009-10 to 2019-20





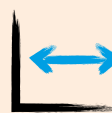
Source: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2022). Understanding Society: Waves 1-11, 2009-2020 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 15th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-16.

Presentational note: All graphs use the same size range of values (1.2) so that they can be visually compared. Data are weighted (confidence intervals take account of design effects).

In the latest wave of the survey (2019-20):³⁹



Mean happiness scores for life as a whole, friends, appearance, and school were significantly lower than when the survey began (2009-10). This was in spite of a slight upturn (not statistically significant) in the mean scores for friends, appearance, and school in 2019-20.



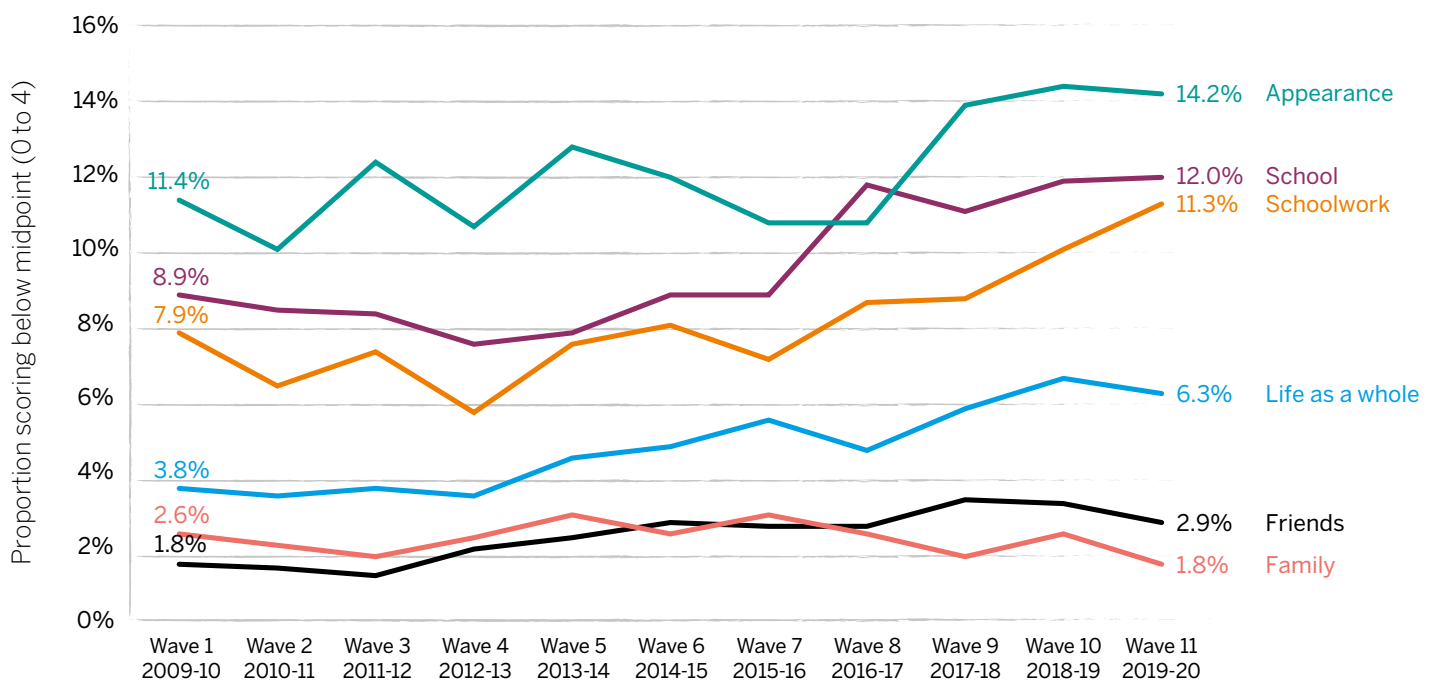
There was no significant difference in mean happiness scores for family or schoolwork (in spite of a decline in the latter in recent years) compared with 2009-10.

³⁹ For ease of understanding, the statistical significance of differences between waves and by gender have been determined based on non-overlapping 99% confidence intervals. This approach provides a more conservative assessment of statistical significance than traditional methods. As a result, there may be some differences between conclusions on statistical significance compared to previous Good Childhood Reports.



While the vast majority of children scored above the midpoint for all six measures of happiness, there are a small proportion of children who score below the midpoint for each (indicating that they are unhappy). In 10 out of 11 waves of the survey, more children have been unhappy with appearance than with other areas of life (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Proportion of children with happiness score below midpoint (0 to 4 out of 10) for life as a whole and five different aspects of life, UK, 2009-10 to 2019-20



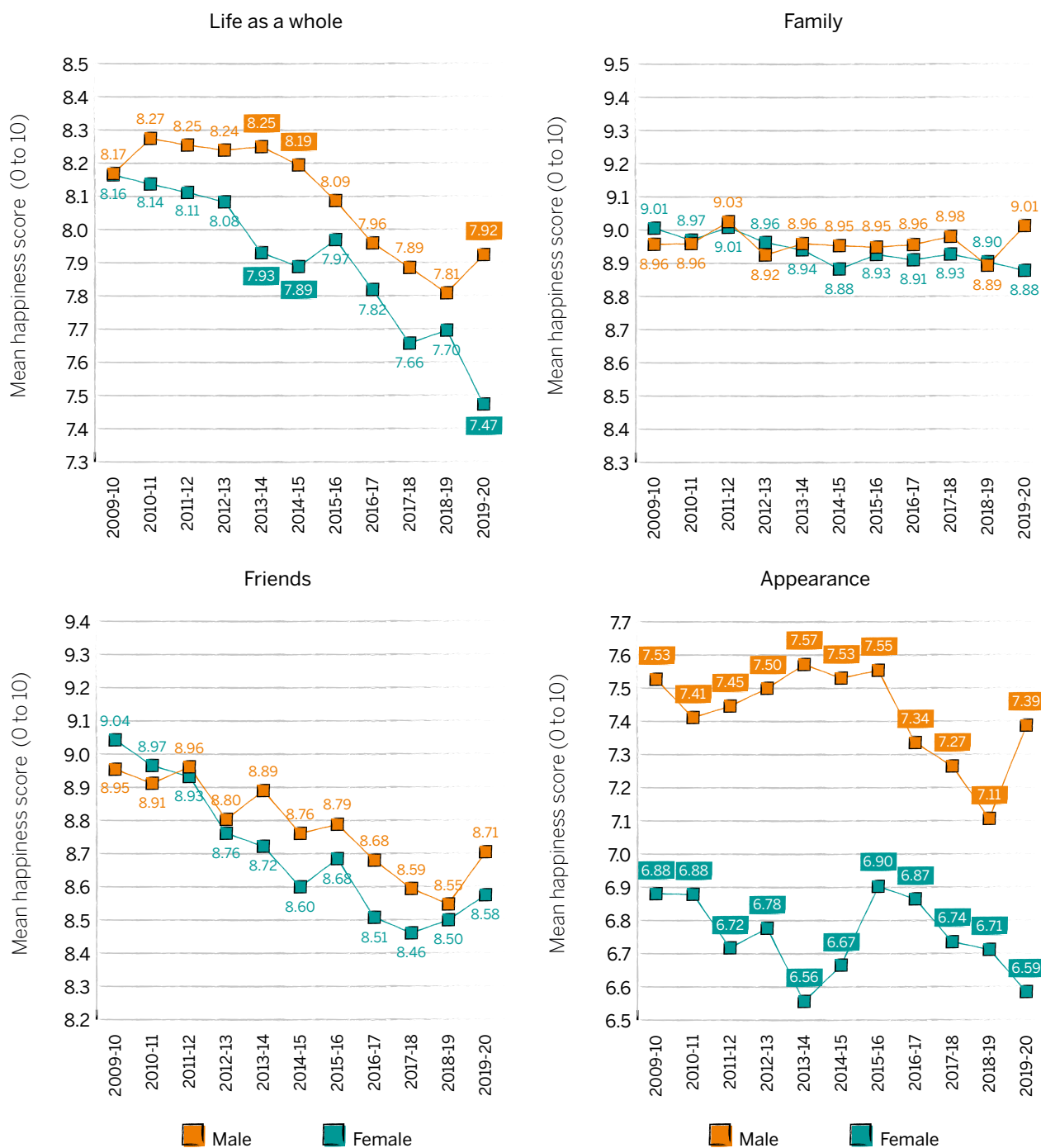
Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, weighted data.

Figure 11 presents the mean happiness scores for females compared to males across waves.⁴⁰ It shows consistent differences⁴¹ for appearance with the mean happiness score for males higher than that for females in each survey wave. The narrowing in males' and females' mean scores for happiness with appearance, which has been referred to in recent reports, was not reflected

in the most recent wave and will continue to be monitored going forward.

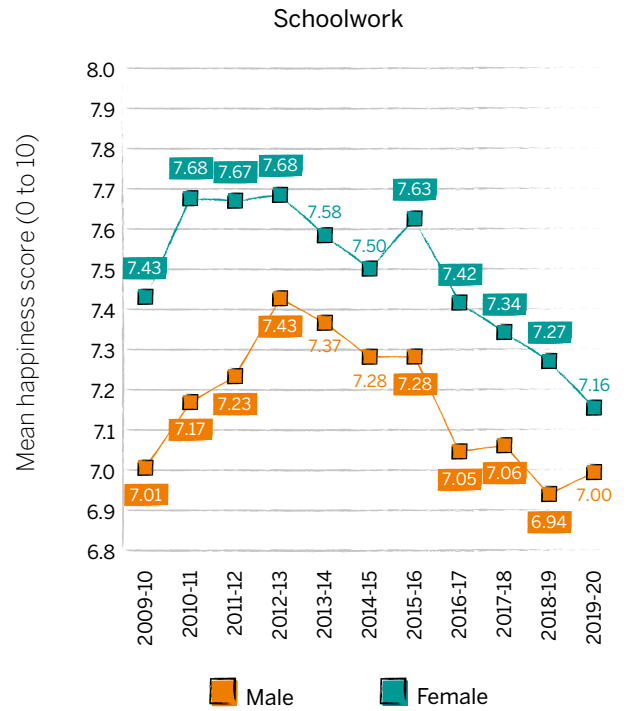
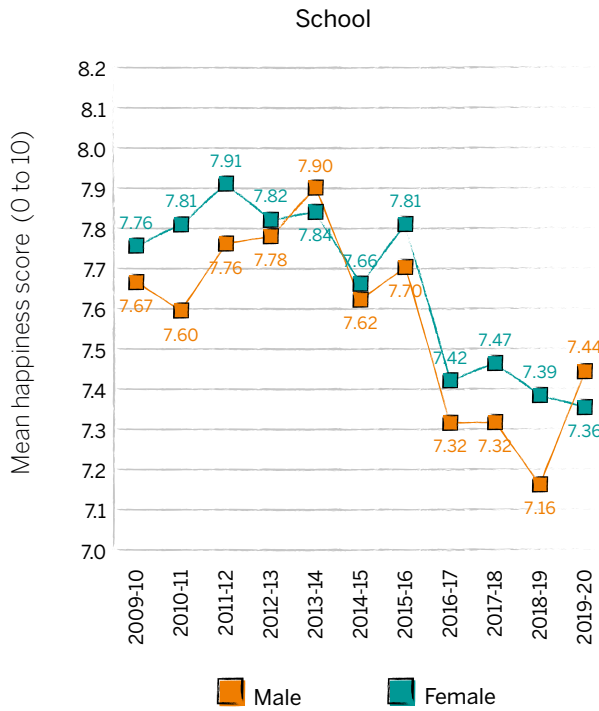
Mean happiness scores for schoolwork were significantly higher for females than males in eight waves of the survey, although there was no statistically significant difference in their mean scores in 2019-20.

Figure 11: Trends in children's happiness with different aspects of life by gender, UK, 2009-10 to 2019-20



⁴⁰ As previously noted, children completing Understanding Society are only asked if they are male and female, which only allows for binary analysis of findings.

⁴¹ Statistical significance was determined based on non-overlapping 99% confidence intervals, which provides a more conservative assessment than traditional methods. As a result, there may be some differences in conclusions about statistical significance compared to previous Good Childhood Reports. The Understanding Society variable ypxex was used to conduct the analyses by gender.



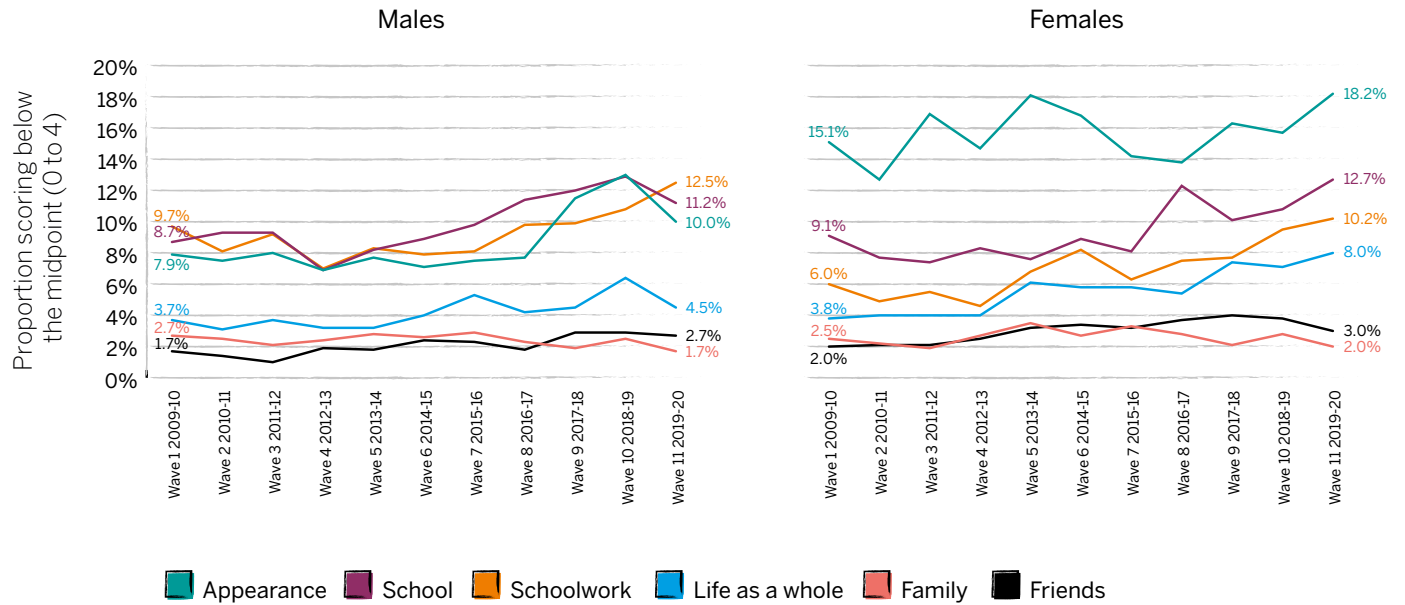
Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, weighted data (confidence intervals take account of design effect).
 Presentational notes: All graphs use the same size range of values (1.2) so that they can be visually compared. Mean scores are displayed in boxes in those waves where there were significant differences by gender based on non-overlapping confidence intervals (at 99% level).



Across waves (including 2019-20 when 18.2% scored below the midpoint), more females were unhappy with their appearance than with any other measure (see Figure 12). In the most recent

wave, similar proportions of males were unhappy with schoolwork, school, and appearance (12.5%, 11.2%, and 10.0% scored below the midpoint respectively).

Figure 12: Proportion of males and females with happiness score below midpoint (0 to 4 out of 10) for life as a whole and different aspects of life, UK, 2009-10 to 2019-20



Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, weighted data.



Summary

Measuring children's well-being is essential to understanding how they feel about their lives as a whole and about specific aspects of their lives. It can help to identify particular issues or subgroups for focus, and what actions might be taken to improve children's lives.

The latest trends data for children aged 10 to 15 in the UK (from the Understanding Society survey) show that:

- In 2019-20, children were, on average, less happy with their life as a whole, friends, appearance, and school than when the survey began in 2009-10.
- In 10 out of 11 waves of the survey, more children were unhappy with their appearance than with the other five aspects of life they were asked about (life as a whole, family, friends, school, and schoolwork).
- Males were significantly happier with their appearance than females across survey waves, and females were significantly happier with their schoolwork than males in 8 of the 11 waves (but not in 2019-20).

In 2022, a larger proportion of children (aged 10 to 17 in the UK) completing The Children's Society's annual household survey were unhappy with school than with the nine other well-being domains they were asked about. We need to further understand what it is about children's experiences of school that they are dissatisfied with and take a closer look at this issue in chapter 2.

With Coronavirus less prominent in people's day-to-day lives, responses to our household survey suggest that 3 in 4 parents and 4 in 5 children coped to some extent with overall changes to daily life due to the pandemic. As 13% of parents and 11% of children indicated they did not cope well, there is a continued need for support and ongoing monitoring of the impact of the pandemic on children and families.

Cost of living increases are currently reported daily in the media.⁴² Worryingly, 85% of parents completing our annual household survey indicated that they were either 'very' or 'quite' concerned about the impact that these increases might have on their family or household over the next 12 months.

⁴² BBC News (13 July 2022).



Chapter 2:

Children's happiness with school

In chapter 1, analysis of Understanding Society data showed that the mean happiness score for school was significantly lower in 2019-20 (7.40) than when the survey began in 2009-10 (7.71). The decrease in happiness with school was first observed in The Good Childhood Report 2019,⁴³ and related to a drop between waves 7 (2015-16) and 8 (2016-17).

While there has been a recent decline in children's mean scores for happiness with schoolwork, there is currently no significant difference compared with 2009-10.

In addition to the trends data, other analysis in our Good Childhood Reports has also highlighted school as an area for closer attention. In 2022, school was again the domain within our own Good Childhood Index where the largest proportion of young people scored below the midpoint (14.2%), suggesting that they were unhappy. In The Good Childhood Report 2020, our analysis of data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Programme

for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 found that children in the UK may be faring less well than their counterparts in other European countries on key measures of well-being.⁴⁴ Of the 24 European countries included in the analysis, children (aged 15) in the UK had the greatest fear of failure and the lowest life satisfaction.⁴⁵ Findings from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, published in the same year, also indicated that England, Wales, and Scotland were among the six countries (out of 45) with the highest levels of schoolwork pressure among 15-year-olds.⁴⁶

This chapter further explores the time trends from Understanding Society through the lens of demographic characteristics, and also looks at children's responses to a set of questions on school. These questions were included in both the most recent survey and the survey from 2015-16, which precedes the dip in happiness with school. It then examines responses to a new set of questions included in The Children's Society's annual household survey in 2022 on children's experiences of school.

⁴³ The Children's Society (2019).

⁴⁴ OECD (2019).

⁴⁵ The Children's Society (2020b).

⁴⁶ Inchley et al (2020).

Further exploring trends in children's happiness with school and schoolwork

The first section of this chapter looks further at the trends in happiness with school and schoolwork using data from Understanding Society. It explores:

- to what extent these time trends differ for children based on age, gender and ethnicity, and
- what are some of the underlying experiences that children have of school and how these vary by demographics and over time.

Trends by demographic characteristics

To further explore the trends, analysis was undertaken which looked at whether these patterns differed by gender, age, and between children from a white ethnic background and children from all other groups combined.⁴⁷ Whereas chapter 1 looks at differences by gender and ethnicity within each survey year, this chapter looks at the overall trend and whether there were changes according to children's demographic characteristics.⁴⁸

Gender

While the overall trends for happiness with school and schoolwork (from wave 4 onwards) were significantly downward, there was no statistically significant difference in the trend by gender (when controlling for age and ethnic group).

Age

Trends in happiness with school and schoolwork were examined for three age groups (9 to 11, 12 to 13, and 14 to 16)⁴⁹ from waves four to 11 (2012-13 to 2019-20) of the survey,⁵⁰ controlling for gender and ethnic group.⁵¹

The decline in happiness with schoolwork was larger for older children, and regression analyses showed that this pattern was statistically significant (Figure 13). In other words, older cohorts of children appear to be getting more unhappy with schoolwork at a quicker rate than younger cohorts of children.

There was no statistically significant difference in the trend for happiness with school by age group.



⁴⁷ Those from a white ethnic background includes those from British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish, Irish, and any other white background. Those from all other groups includes Gypsy, Roma, or Irish Traveller, white and black Caribbean, white and black African, white and Asian, any other mixed background, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, any other Asian background, Caribbean, African, any other black background, Arab, and any other ethnic group.

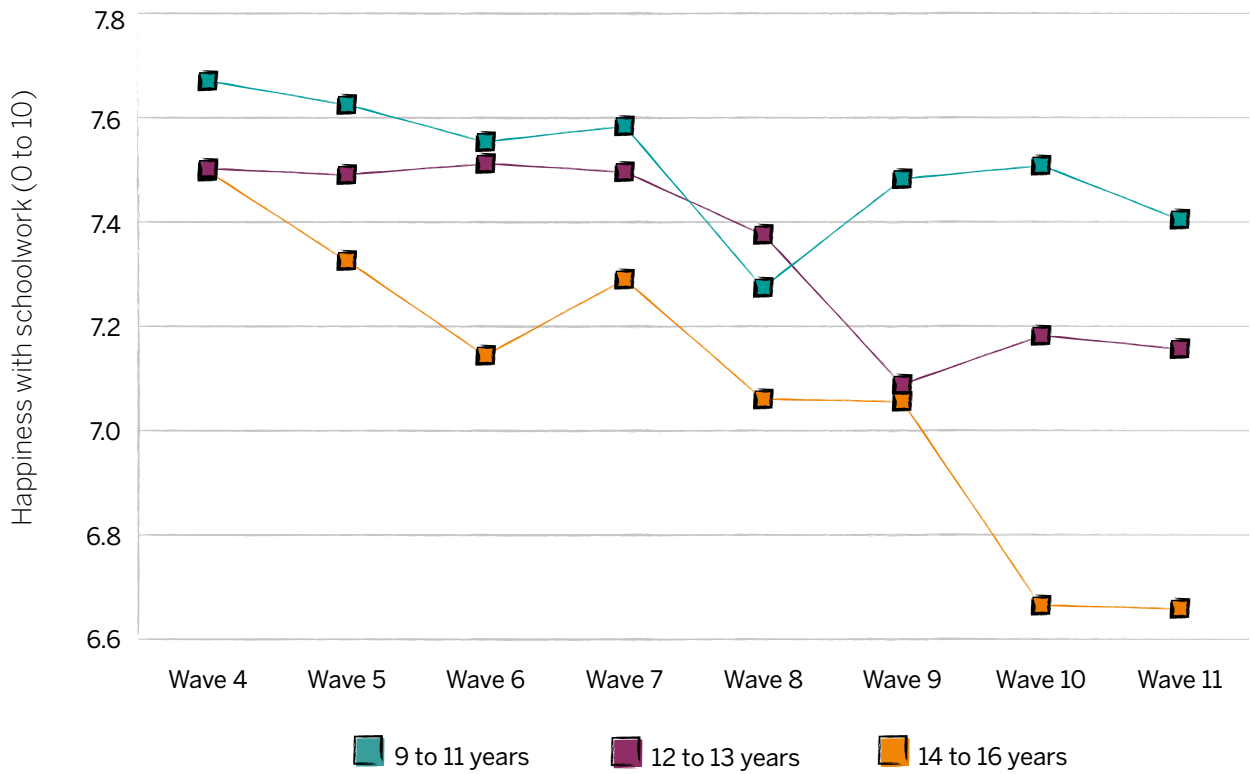
⁴⁸ Trends are based on linear regression analyses. They employed the `ythscub_xw` weight and controlled for the other demographic characteristics examined. All analyses exclude missing values, which means that, in regression analyses, cases are omitted if they have any missing values for the variables included.

⁴⁹ The target age range of the survey is from 10- to 15-years-old but there are a small number of children who were aged 9 or 16 at the time the survey was conducted.

⁵⁰ Regression analyses showed that the trend was not linear and the drop had been more substantial after wave 4. Only wave 4 onwards is therefore presented in the charts.

⁵¹ The figures shown in the chart are the predicted margins from the linear regression with happiness with schoolwork as the dependent variable and wave, gender, age, and ethnic grouping as the independent variables.

Figure 13: Trends in children's happiness with schoolwork by age group, UK, 2012-13 to 2019-20



Source: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2022). Understanding Society: Waves 1-11, 2009-2020 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 15th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-16

Note: Trends are based on predicted margins from a linear regression which included four independent variables (wave, age group, gender, and ethnic group).



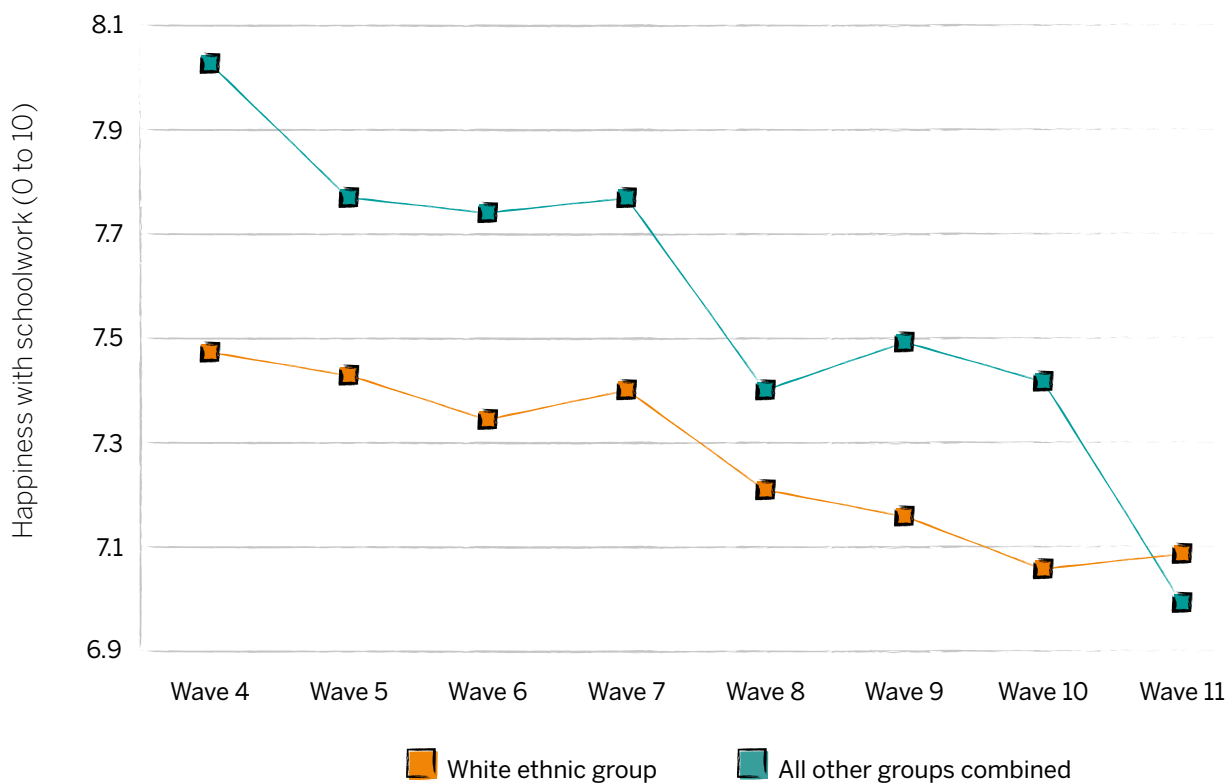


Ethnicity

Understanding young people’s well-being through the lens of their ethnic identity is really important. It is, however, constrained by the available sample sizes. For the purpose of this analysis, all groups apart from White British, Irish, and White Other were collated into a single group, referred to as ‘all other groups combined’.⁵²

Analysis showed there are no clear patterns for happiness with school by ethnic group. While there appears to be a narrowing in the gap between happiness with schoolwork among those from all other groups combined (who have historically been happier with this aspect of life) and those from the white group (see Figure 14), the pattern is not statistically significant.⁵³

Figure 14: Trends in children’s happiness with schoolwork by ethnic group, UK, 2012-13 to 2019-20



Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, weighted data.

Note: Trends are based on predicted margins from a linear regression which included four independent variables (wave, age group, gender, and ethnic group).

⁵² This analysis does not use IEMB weighting as this is only available from wave 7. Additional graphs including this IEMB sample can be found in Appendix D.

⁵³ Historically, children from all other groups combined have been happier with this aspect of life but the gap has narrowed and disappeared altogether in the most recent wave (although this does not yet represent a firm pattern).

Differences in happiness with school and schoolwork by demographics in 2019-20

Alongside asking children their age, gender, and ethnicity, the most recent wave of Understanding Society (2019-20) also asked whether they had long-term health problems or a disability.⁵⁴ Figure 15 presents average scores for happiness with school and schoolwork in the most recent wave of the survey (2019-20) broken down by children's characteristics and household income.

It shows that, in 2019-20, happiness with both measures declined significantly with age and was significantly lower among children in lower income households. Children with a long-term health problem or disability were also significantly less happy with school.

Exploring other factors and experiences related to school

The most recent wave of Understanding Society (2019-20) included a module that asked children further questions about school. Most of these were also asked in 2015-16, so it is possible to compare responses at these two points in time to see if there is any evidence of changes over that period.

Table 1 shows children's responses to the questions on school asked in both survey waves.

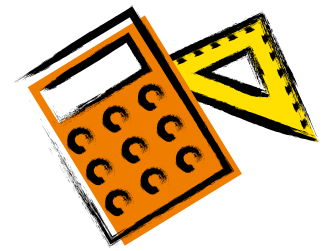
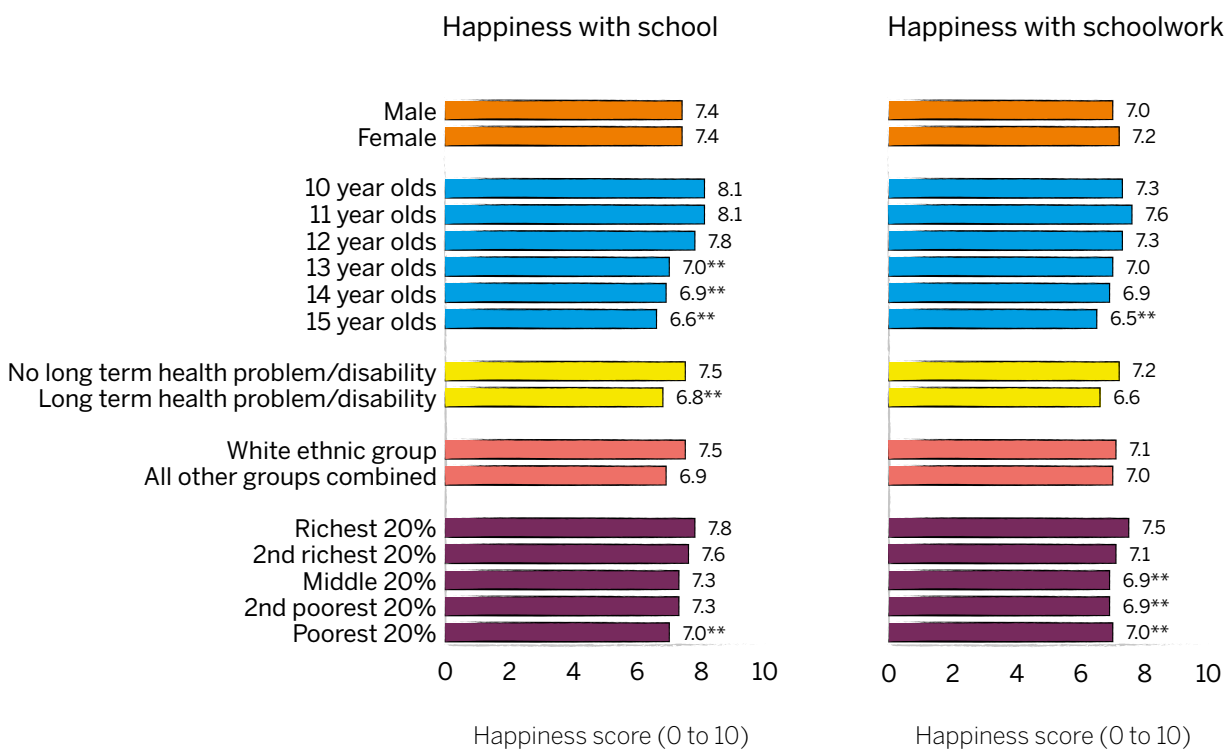


Figure 15: Happiness with school and schoolwork by socio-demographic characteristics, 2019-20



Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, weighted data.

Note: The scores presented are marginal values from linear regression including all five independent variables. ** = p<0.01. Data were weighted using ythscui_xw.

⁵⁴ This information was not collected in previous waves so it is not possible to produce trend analyses for this group of children.

Table 1: Additional questions about children's experiences of school, 2015-16 and 2019-20

Question	Wave 11 2019-20	Wave 7 2015-16
How important to do well in exams		
Very	69%	78%
Less than very	31%	23%
Parents interested in how doing at school		
Always/nearly always	81%	82%
Sometimes or less	19%	18%
Frequency of other pupils at school misbehaving or causing trouble in classes		
Most or all classes	27%	25%
More than half classes	22%	21%
About half of classes	18%	18%
Less often	33%	35%
Being physically bullied at school		
No	84%	82%
Yes	16%	18%
Being bullied in other ways at school		
No	68%	66%
Yes	32%	34%
Having truanted in past year		
No	92%	93%
Yes	8%	7%

Source: Understanding Society survey, children aged 10 to 15, weighted data.

Note: Some variables have been recoded for the purpose of these analyses, which exclude Missing responses (including Not sure). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The only question for which there appears to have been a substantial change over the last four years is whether children felt it was important to do well in their school exams. More than two-thirds (69%) of children felt that it was 'very' important in 2019-20; in 2015-16, almost four-fifths (78%) of children felt doing well in school exams was 'very' important. However, it is valuable to reflect that because of the pandemic there were fewer exams during 2020 (e.g. no GCSEs) when some of the wave 11 surveys were completed. Therefore, the exact meaning of this cannot be fully determined through these analyses alone.

Responses to these questions in the most recent wave can also be compared for different groups of children based on age group, gender, ethnicity, and whether the child had a long-term illness or disability that limited their day-to-day activity. Statistically significant findings in 2019-20 are as follows.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ These comparisons each take account of differences due to the other variables. For example, children from all other backgrounds combined were more likely to live in lower income households but this variation in incomes is 'controlled for' in making comparisons based on ethnicity.

School achievement

- Children with long-term health problems or a disability were less likely than others (58% compared to 71%) to think school achievement is 'very important.'

Parental interest

- Parents in higher income households were more interested in how children are doing at school (89% in the highest 20% compared to 75% to 80% in the other income groups).

Behaviour in school

- There were more class behavioural issues reported by older age groups (73% and 69% among those aged 12 to 13 and 14 to 15 respectively, compared to 57% among 10- to 11-year-olds), but no differences for other demographic groups.
- Females were more likely to report being bullied in non-physical ways (35% compared to 28% for males). The frequency of both types of bullying declines with age – physical bullying declined from 23% at 10 to 13% at 15, and other bullying declined from 43% to 28%.
- Children with a long-term illness or a disability were more likely than other children to be bullied physically (25% compared to 14%) and in other ways (44% compared to 30%).

- Truancy increased a little with age (12% among 14- to 15-year-olds compared to 4% and 6% among those aged 10 to 11 and 12 to 13) and children with a long-term illness or a disability were also more likely to report truanting (16% compared to 6% for other children).

Overall, these figures and the comparisons to the previous survey in 2015-16 do not provide very clear indications of why children's happiness with school and schoolwork should be falling. However, it is notable that these questions do not include some important issues, such as levels of stress at school and relationships with teachers. Other research has found that these are both important issues for children.⁵⁶

Our own annual household survey included questions to explore some of these other factors and how they relate to children's happiness with school in more detail.



⁵⁶ See, for example, Inchley et al (2020).



Which factors affect how young people feel about their school and their well-being more generally?

As noted in chapter 1, more children completing The Children's Society's annual household survey in 2022 indicated that they were unhappy with school than with the other nine aspects of life examined in our Good Childhood Index.

To further explore children's experiences of school, six questions were included in the 2022 household survey that were asked in our previous research. These questions – which comprise our School Index – were developed and reported on in The Good Childhood Report in 2012.⁵⁷ The aim in developing a schools well-being index of this kind was to provide understanding of the aspects of school life which are most important for children

and are most likely to affect their overall feelings about school, such as their relationships with teachers.⁵⁸ These questions have since been used in our local well-being research in schools.⁵⁹

A new set of questions was also included in our survey, which was tested with children and covered a range of different issues not captured by our earlier index. The themes for these new questions were identified through a collaborative exercise with colleagues at the Children's Commissioner Office for England, exploring qualitative responses from the Big Ask,⁶⁰ which focused on the topic of school.⁶¹

⁵⁷ The Children's Society (2012).

⁵⁸ The initial index included five questions, with a sixth question added later. In this year's survey, a further item was included based on feedback from children about what they felt was missing from the six-item scale.

⁵⁹ More information about our local well-being research programme can be found in chapter 3.

⁶⁰ Children's Commissioner for England (2021).

⁶¹ A list of possible questions was collated after conducting a review of school based questions used in known comparable surveys and studies identified in the REA exercise conducted with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing in 2021 (Soffia and Turner, 2021a). A short list of questions was then checked with children on their suitability for inclusion in our survey.

Demographic differences in happiness with school

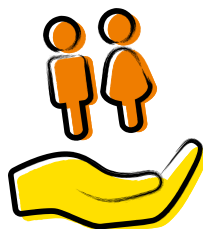
Overall, 98% of children completing The Children's Society's household survey in 2022 were in full-time education, with the majority attending a state-maintained or academy school (74%).⁶²

As well as asking children their age and gender identity,⁶³ this year's survey also included a question about the school year they were in. This was important as our survey includes children aged 10 to 17, and so covers primary, secondary and further education. Grouping children by their school year allowed us to identify the key stage they were in and to further explore differences in well-being between these educational and transitional phases.

Overall, 17% of children completing our survey were reported to have a special educational need (SEN) by their parent or carer,⁶⁴ and 16% of children said that they had caring responsibilities (i.e. looked after someone in their household on a regular basis).⁶⁵

Figure 16 shows the average scores and proportion of children scoring below the midpoint for the Good Childhood Index domain of happiness with school by demographic group. The chart, and remainder of the chapter, focus on those children who were in full-time education only.⁶⁶ All references to difference are based on indicative statistical testing ($p < 0.01$). Key findings include:

- Boys were happier with school on average than girls and a lower proportion scored below the midpoint.⁶⁷
- Children in key stages 2 (years 5 and 6) and 5 (years 12 and 13) were on average more happy with school, and lower proportions in these groups scored below the midpoint than in key stages 3 (years 7, 8, and 9) and 4 (years 10 and 11).
- There were no differences by ethnicity or between the mean scores for children with or without SEN. There was a difference between the proportion of children with SEN and their peers who had low scores (19.3% of children with SEN had low scores compared with 12.8% without).
- Conversely, there were differences in mean scores for children who reported caring responsibilities but not by the proportion scoring low for happiness with school.⁶⁸ Children with caring responsibilities had the highest mean score (7.6), overall, after those in key stage 2 (7.7).



⁶² Parents/ carers were asked whether their child attended: a maintained school, a maintained grammar school, an independent/private school, an Academy or Free School, a Special Educational provision, Alternative provision or Pupil Referral Unit, 6th Form or Further Educational College, or Other. Of the remaining children, 8% attended grammar schools, 7% independent or private schools, 7% were in 6th forms or further educational colleges, 4% attended either a special educational provision, an Alternative Provision (AP) or Pupil Referral Unit or said 'other'. Less than 0.4% of parents responded 'not sure'.

⁶³ While we include a multiple option gender identity question in our survey to ensure inclusivity, sample sizes unfortunately do not allow us to further disaggregate analysis beyond the binary gender categories (male and female).

⁶⁴ This includes children attending special educational provisions and those from other educational settings identified as having SEN. SEN is used here rather than SEND as the question only asked about special educational needs and not about disabilities.

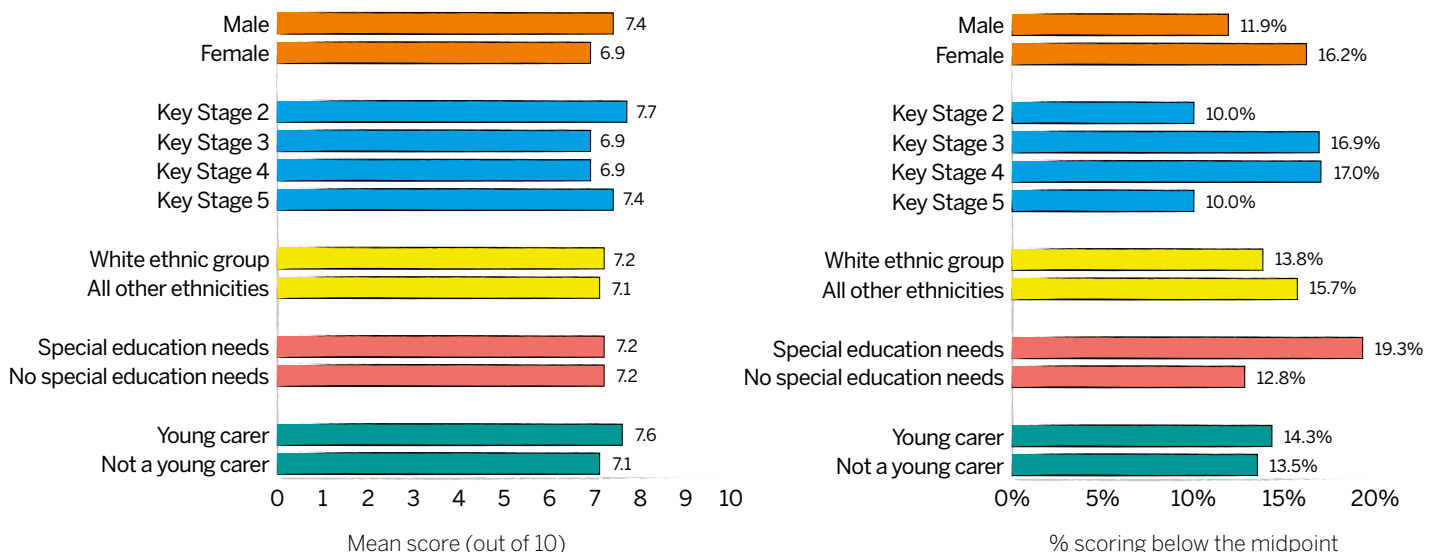
⁶⁵ Among the sample of children in full time education, these proportions were 17% and 17% respectively.

⁶⁶ Only children whose adult respondent indicated that they were in full time education were asked the module of questions about their school experiences. However, all children were asked the overall domain question on school included in our Good Childhood Index to ensure consistency with previous years. In this chapter, analyses include only those children whose parents said they were in full time education.

⁶⁷ Indicative significance testing was undertaken at 99% level using t-tests/ANOVAs for average scores and chi-squares for the proportions low. The relationship with gender would be significant in a random sample but was not particularly strong.

⁶⁸ A higher proportion of males than females completing the survey who were in full-time education said they were young carers. There were similar proportions of young carers in the two aggregate ethnic groups.

Figure 16: Mean scores and proportions scoring below the midpoint for happiness with school, in general, by demographic characteristics⁶⁹



Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including ‘prefer not to say’).

Good Childhood School Index

As noted above, a previously developed set of six questions about children’s school experience was included in The Children’s Society’s annual survey in 2022, together with a new question about what children were learning. These used the same response scale (0 to 10) as our Good Childhood Index questions, and asked how happy children were:

- about how safe they feel at school
- about how they are doing with their schoolwork
- with their relationships with their teachers

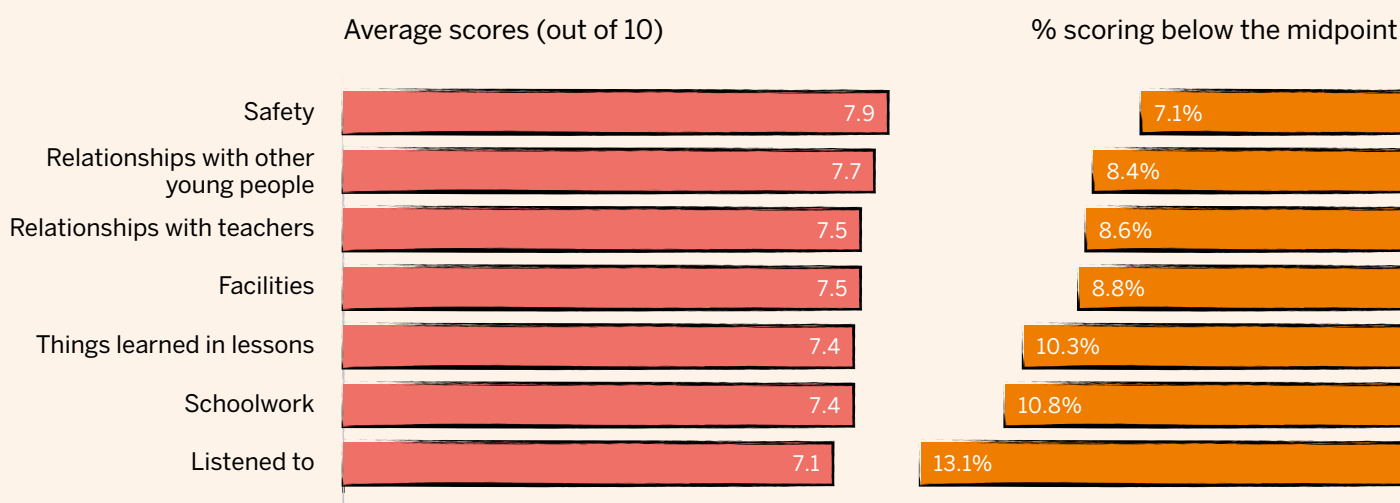
- with their relationships with other young people at school
- with how much they are listened to at school
- with the facilities at their school (like the classrooms, toilets, sports facilities etc.)
- with the things they are learning in lessons.⁷⁰

Figure 17 shows children’s mean scores and the proportions scoring below the midpoint for each of these seven measures.

⁶⁹ Analysis excluded children who were not in full-time education and so figures may differ from those in chapter 1 and in Appendix C.

⁷⁰ This item emerged from the analysis of the Big Ask data and in feedback from children during the question development.

Figure 17: Mean scores and proportions scoring low for different measures of school experience



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May-June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').

On average, children were most happy with how safe they feel in school and least happy with how much they are listened to. More children also scored below the midpoint for how much they are listened to (13.1%) than for other items, indicating that more are unhappy with this aspect of school.

All seven items in the School Index had strong positive correlations with children's happiness with school in general.⁷¹ The strongest relationships were between happiness with school and happiness with feeling listened to (0.749), and happiness with

school and the 'things you are learning in lessons' (0.741) (see Table 2).

A simple linear regression analysis showed that, after controlling for gender and age, the seven aspects of school experience explained around 66% of the variation⁷² in happiness with school, in general. Children's happiness with how much they are listened to made the largest contribution, followed by their happiness with things they are learning in lessons.⁷³

Table 2: Correlation matrix for happiness with school in general and seven aspects of school experience

	School in general
Listened to at school	0.749
Things you are learning in lessons	0.741
Relationships with teachers	0.728
Safety	0.710
Schoolwork	0.703
Facilities	0.681
Relationships with other young people at school	0.678

Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').

⁷¹ It is important to note that there were also some strong correlations between items.

⁷² This is the added R2 Value from a linear regression (p<0.01) which includes the seven school variables and controls (age and gender). Model 1 includes only the age and gender variables, and model 2 includes age and gender, followed by the seven school variables.

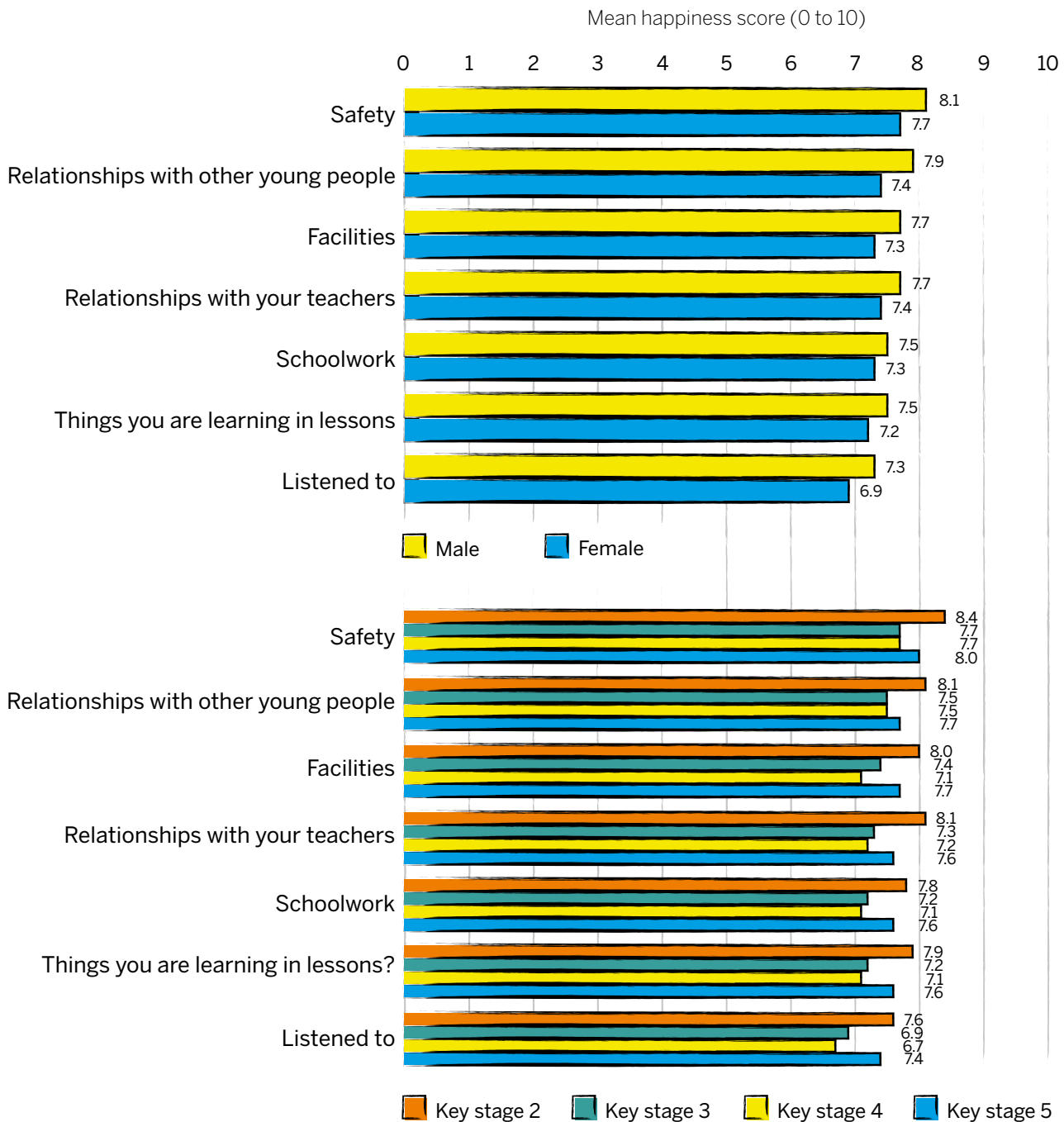
⁷³ As the seven items did not explain 100% of variation in happiness with school, there will be other factors (not identified here) which are influential.

When comparing the seven school items by the demographic categories previously examined (see Figure 18), the only consistent differences (that would be statistically significant at 0.01 level) were:

- Boys had higher average scores than girls for all aspects apart from schoolwork.

- Children in key stage 2 scored higher on average than children in key stages 3 and 4 across all items.
- Children who said that they had caring responsibilities were happier with how much they are listened to at school, their schoolwork, the facilities, and what they were learning in lessons.

Figure 18: Mean scores for aspects of school experience, by gender and key stage



Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including ‘prefer not to say’).

Other factors in school

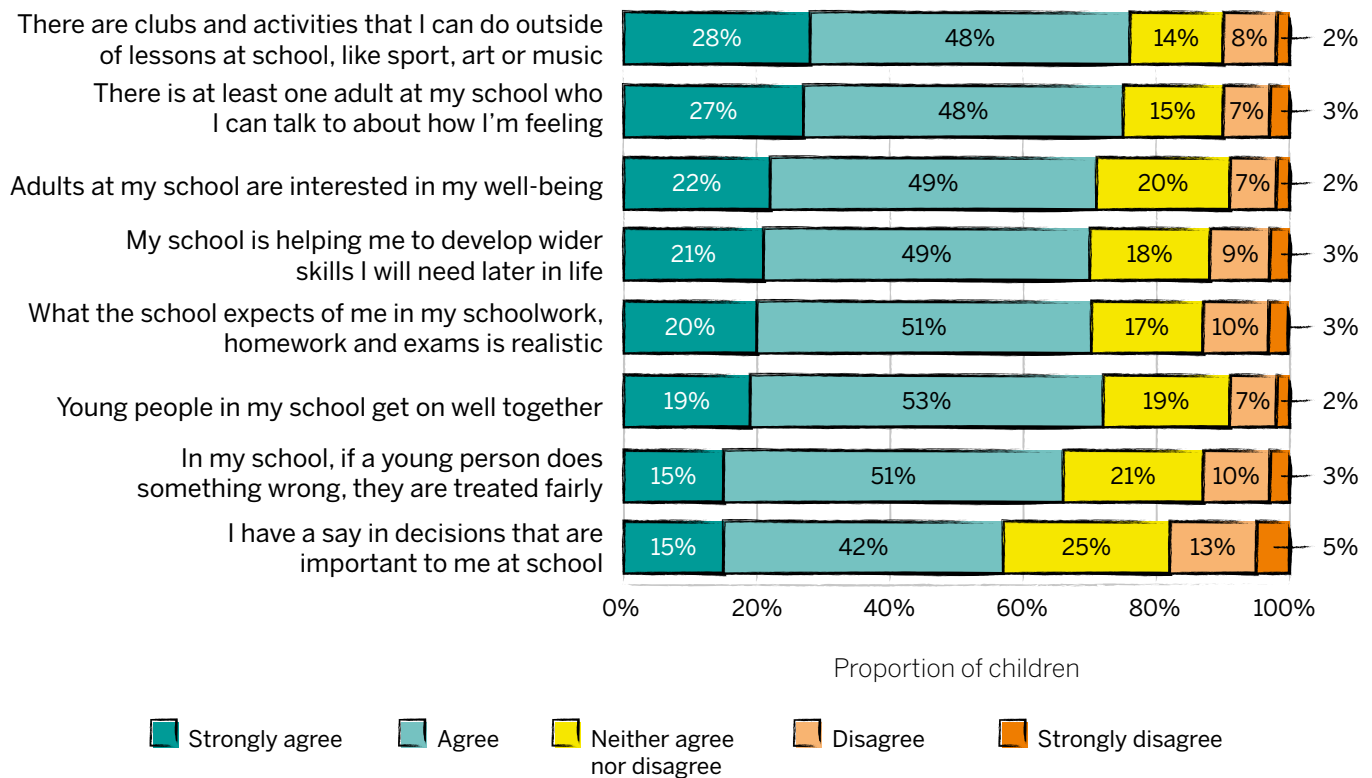
Our household survey also included statements that looked at other features of children's school experiences, such as support within school, expectations, fairness, development of wider skills, and access to extracurricular activities. These statements and children's responses to them are shown in Figure 19.

Overall, the majority of children either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with all the statements, though nearly 1 in 5 (18%) did not think that they had a say

in the decisions that are important to them in school.

When we compared aggregated responses to these questions⁷⁴ by gender, a larger proportion of girls 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the statements: "I have a say in decisions that are important to me at school," "In my school, if a young person does something wrong, they are treated fairly," and "Young people in my school get on well together."

Figure 19: Children's views about broader school experiences



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'Don't know').

Note: Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

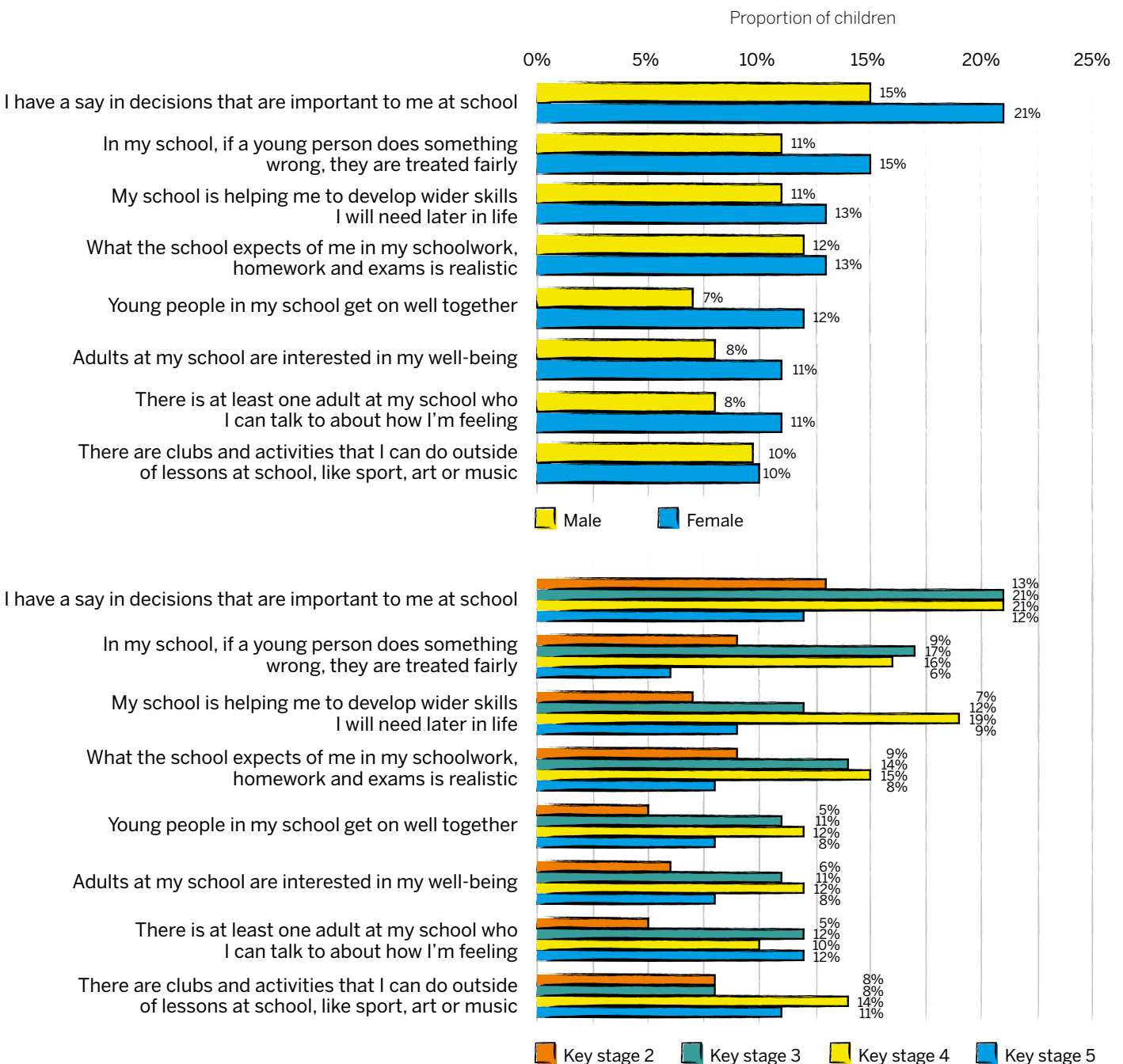
⁷⁴ Comparisons were between those who agreed (combining responses 'strongly agree' and 'agree'), those who neither agreed nor disagreed and those who disagreed (combining responses 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree'). Only differences that would be statistically significant in a random sample are reported (p<0.01).

There were also differences for all statements when compared by key stage (see Figure 20). A higher proportion of those in key stages 3 and 4 strongly disagreed or disagreed with 5 of the 8 statements. The exceptions were for “There are clubs and activities that I can do outside of lessons at school, like sport, art or music” and “My school is helping me to develop wider skills”, where larger proportions

in key stage 4 only disagreed, and “There is at least one adult at my school who I can talk to about how I’m feeling” where fewer of those in key stage 2 disagreed than in any of the other groups.

There were no differences in the responses to these statements by aggregated ethnic group and no consistent differences for children with and without SEN.

Figure 20: Proportion of children who disagreed with eight statements about their school, by gender and key stage



Source: The Children’s Society’s household survey, wave 21, May-June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including ‘Don’t know’).

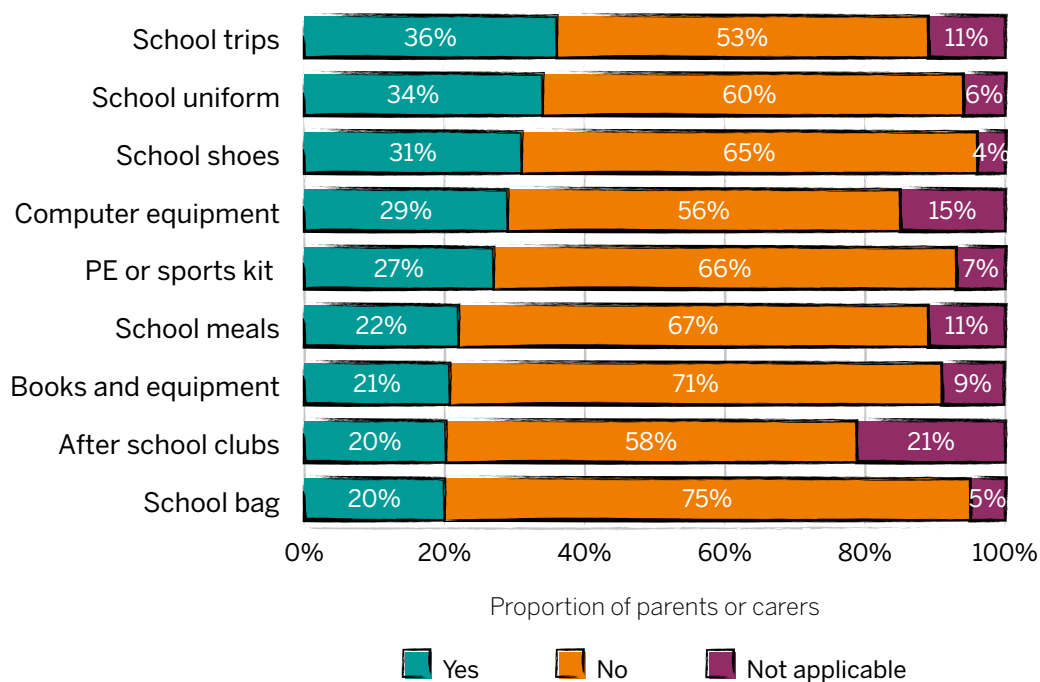
Socioeconomic situation

Research has previously shown that children's economic situation can impact their experiences at school.⁷⁵ There are a number of different ways that children's economic situation is captured within The Children's Society's household survey. This year, as noted in chapter 1, parents were asked how concerned, if at all, they were about the impact of cost of living increases on their family or household over the next 12 months. Overall, 85% of parents and carers indicated that they were either 'very' or 'quite' concerned.

Parents and carers were also asked whether they had struggled with the costs of school related items for their child over the last year. The results are presented in Figure 21.

Over a third of parents and carers reported that they had struggled with the cost of school trips and with the cost of school uniform. More than a quarter had struggled with the cost of school shoes, computer equipment, and PE kits, and around 1 in 5 had struggled with the other items listed. The Children's Society have campaigned for change for many years to reduce the burden that the cost of school uniform can have on families and its impact on their finances. Our research and campaign for affordable school uniforms led to us working with Mike Amesbury MP to get the School Uniforms Act 2021⁷⁶ passed into law and supporting the DfE in creating accompanying statutory guidance.⁷⁷

Figure 21: Proportion of parents and carers who have struggled with school costs over the last year



Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May-June 2022, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').

Note: Percentages for each item may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

⁷⁵ See, for example, The Children's Society (2017b).

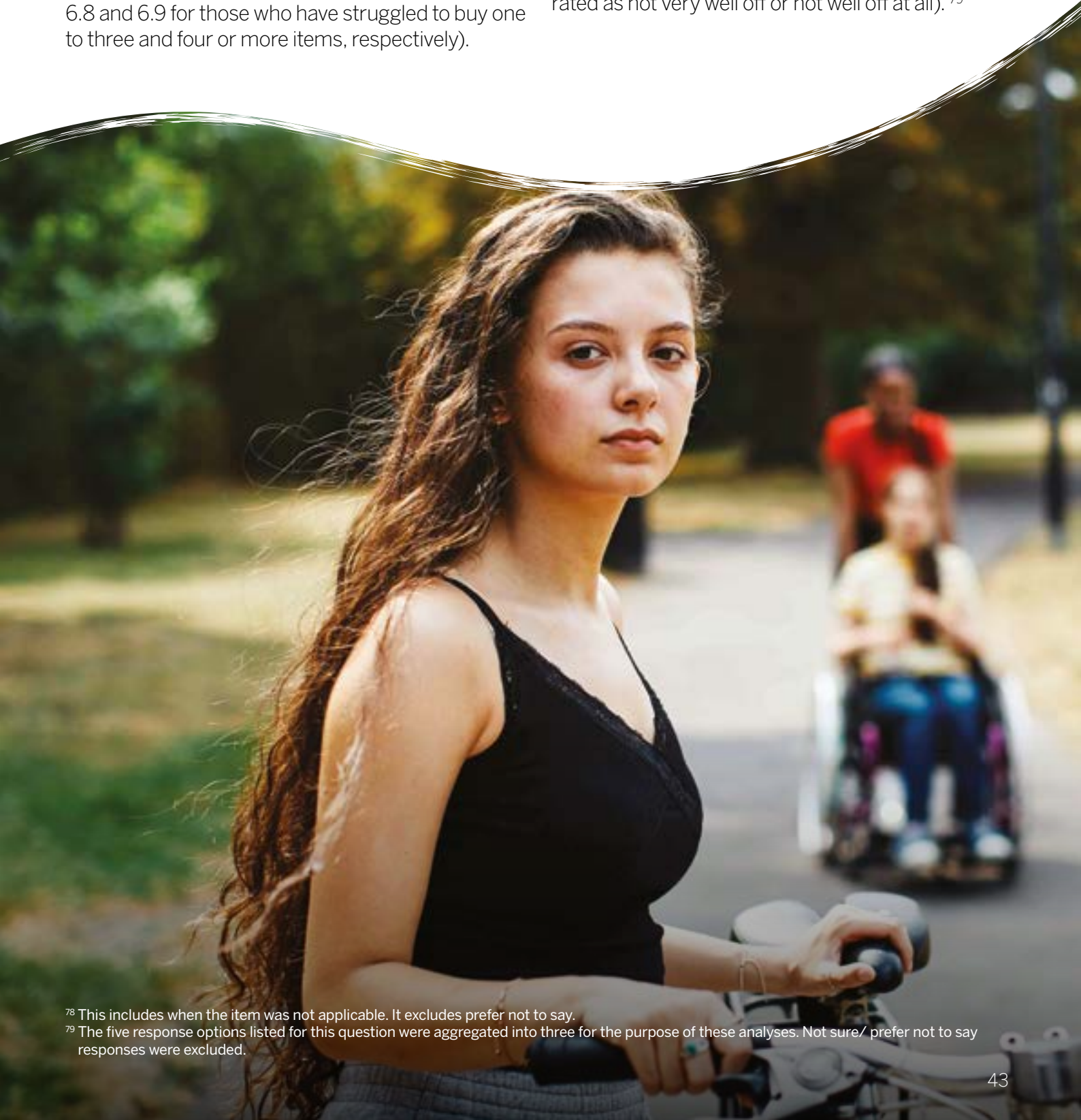
⁷⁶ UK Parliament (2021).

⁷⁷ Department for Education (2021).

When looking at the combined impact, less than half (49%) of parents and carers reported that they hadn't struggled with any items in the last year,⁷⁸ 20% had struggled with the cost of one to three items, and 31% had struggled with four or more items.

Analysis suggests that those children in families who have not struggled with buying any items are on average happier with school (scoring an average of 7.6 out of 10) than those children in families who have struggled to buy items (with average scores of 6.8 and 6.9 for those who have struggled to buy one to three and four or more items, respectively).

The Children's Society's household survey also includes a measure of children's own perception of their family's wealth, asking whether they think their family is very well off, quite well off, average, not very well off, or not well off at all. Again, there are differences in children's responses to the happiness with school question, according to children's own assessment of wealth (those in families children considered to be 'very' or 'quite' well off scored on average 8.1 compared with 7.1 in families thought to be of average wealth and 6.2 in families children rated as not very well off or not well off at all).⁷⁹



⁷⁸ This includes when the item was not applicable. It excludes prefer not to say.

⁷⁹ The five response options listed for this question were aggregated into three for the purpose of these analyses. Not sure/ prefer not to say responses were excluded.

Summary

In recent years, a range of national and international sources have highlighted children's experiences of school as an area requiring further investigation. Trends from Understanding Society reflect a reduction in recent years in children's happiness with school and schoolwork. More children completing our annual household survey in 2022 were unhappy with school than with any other aspect of life examined. Further analysis of these two sources was undertaken in 2022 with a view to learning more about children's experiences of school, what might be influencing how children feel about this aspect of life, and what action might be taken to improve things.

- Further analyses of the data from Understanding Society do not provide very clear indications of why children's happiness with school and schoolwork should be falling. They do indicate there may be an age effect for happiness with schoolwork (but not happiness with school), however, whereby older cohorts of children appear to be getting more unhappy with schoolwork at a quicker rate than younger cohorts of children.
- In 2019-20 (the most recent wave of Understanding Society), happiness with school and schoolwork declined significantly with age and was significantly lower among children in lower income households. Children with a long-term health problem or disability were also significantly less happy with school.
- Responses to The Children's Society's household survey in 2022 provide a sense of some of the potential demographic groups and aspects of school which might benefit from further attention. They highlight, for example, differences in happiness with school by gender, key stage, and children's perceptions of their family's wealth. The latter are particularly illuminating in the current context of increases in cost of living.
- Of the seven items asking children about their happiness with specific aspects of school, happiness with how much they were listened to at school was most strongly related to their happiness with school in general.
- While overall the majority of children agreed with positive statements about other features of school (including support, expectations, fairness, development of wider skills, and their access to extracurricular activities), almost 1 in 5 did not think they had a say in decisions that were important to them in school. Again, more girls and children in key stages 3 and 4 (i.e. in secondary school) reported feeling this way.

Chapter 3:

What are the benefits of measuring well-being in school?

When The Children’s Society launched the Good Childhood research programme in 2005, our aim was to help adults, decision-makers, and society to recognise the importance of children and young people’s subjective well-being, and to raise awareness of the issues affecting how young people feel about their lives.

As reflected in the introduction to this report, there have been significant changes in the policy and research landscape in relation to children and young people’s well-being in recent years – largely (though not exclusively) as a response to the Coronavirus pandemic. There is now increasing acknowledgment of the importance of understanding how children are feeling about themselves and their lives more broadly, and of the need to measure children and young people’s well-being and to better support those with low well-being.

The call to action from The Children’s Society has now changed from **‘we should be listening to and measuring children’s well-being’** to **‘how can we most effectively listen**

to and measure children’s well-being and what change can be achieved through utilising the results of that measurement?’

In chapter 2, we focused on children’s happiness with school. This was partly due to the downward trend reflected in the Understanding Society survey, as well as children’s responses to our own Good Childhood Index item on school (reported in chapter 1). School is also the place where most children spend most of their time, and, as such, has the greatest capacity to identify the issues children are facing and be part of the solution.

This final chapter explores what can be achieved by measuring children’s well-being in a school context, and how this can result in change for young people and their well-being. The three case studies presented reflect local well-being services led by The Children’s Society and work by our colleagues and partners in Greater Manchester delivering the #BeeWell programme.⁸⁰ The chapter concludes by looking at a potential future mechanism for change, highlighting the role of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), including the work of the RISE service in schools in Newcastle and Gateshead, which is run by The Children’s Society.

⁸⁰ #BeeWell (2021a).

Good Childhood local well-being assessments

The Children's Society has long supported bespoke projects in local areas to better understand the well-being of children and young people in their area.

Since 2012, we have undertaken local assessments of children's well-being in locations across England. More than 43,000 young people aged 8 to 18 have taken part in local surveys and over 8,500 have been consulted face-to-face. The approach has been adapted to meet local needs.

Some assessments have consisted only of surveys, some only of consultation. The rest have been based on a combination of the two approaches.

Local well-being assessments draw attention to and provide evidence of the benefit of measuring children's subjective well-being. They also highlight significant variation in young people's experiences, based on the areas and context in which they are living. Our local well-being work has provided us with opportunities to support and work with local partners more closely to directly address the issues that young people face.



2012 Isle of Wight

This was the first large-scale local assessment undertaken by The Children's Society. Almost 5,000 children and young people from years 4 to 11 took part in an online survey, and around 450 children and young people were consulted face-to-face.

Key themes that emerged from the survey included safety (both in school and in the community), appearance, local facilities, and local adults. Children on the island generally expressed positive views about their local area.

The Isle of Wight used the findings to help consult on the Children and Young People's Plan 2014-2017. The Isle of Wight Anti-Bullying Group set up a website to help tackle bullying and schools used the findings to improve culture as they transitioned from a three-tier school system to a two-tier one.

2014 Portsmouth

Over 4,100 children and young people in primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and an SEN school participated in the survey.

Key issues raised by the survey that were further explored in consultations included: school (and relationships with peers and staff in particular); thoughts about the future, health and appearance; local area (with a focus on safety); and possessions and things children and young people own.

The findings were reported back to Portsmouth City Council and partner organisations, as well as the Portsmouth Youth Parliament, to encourage discussions.



2015 Nottingham

The Children's Society's work in Nottingham in 2015 extended from a smaller project working in the suburb of Bilborough the year before. It provided a unique insight into the lives of children and young people living in Nottingham City as a whole.

Key themes included local area, school experience, help and caring at home, and health and appearance. Our consultation revealed that girls felt a huge amount of pressure to conform to a certain 'unachievable image'. 'Being judged' was a consistent theme which emerged from our consultations with secondary school girls.

Following the publication of the report the City Council, public health, Education Improvement Board, University of Nottingham, Primary Parliament, school councils, Children's Partnership Board, Director of Education, NCVS Youth Provider Network, police, and library service engaged with the findings.

In 2017, some schools participated in a year-long project called Free to Be Me as a response to the report. The aim of Free To Be Me was to encourage exploration of the issues that made children happy or unhappy, and to promote self-esteem.

2016 South East Coventry

This local well-being assessment was commissioned due to concerns among professionals about a game called '21 Dares' being played in a specific area. The assessments acted as a basis of understanding local need regardless of topical issues or transitory concerns from adults. It was used to learn more about the experience and perspectives of the children themselves.

Initial themes from survey findings formed the basis of consultations in schools. Themes emerging from these consultations in turn informed the focus of subsequent sessions in youth settings.

Our extensive conversations with children and young people showed that the game '21 Dares' imitates peer-to-peer relationships, with the dares reflecting the expectations they have of each other - expectations which vary according to gender. Another major finding was around young people's sense of safety in their local area.

In 2016, The Children's Society's Campaigns team worked with young people to develop a local campaign to address issues raised in the well-being assessment, in particular young people's concerns about their safety and the behaviour of some adults in the community. The young people settled on the idea of a pledge, which they designed themselves, to get their peers, parents and fellow residents to sign up to and encourage a safer environment for young people.

We were also able to produce a short film, with funding provided by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner. In collaboration with West Midlands Police, we carried out a community safety survey. This involved taking children from the primary school and youth club on a walkabout of the neighbourhood. They assessed any safety issues and completed a short questionnaire before feeding back to each other, the police, and councillors.

2016 Elmbridge (Surrey)

The prompt for work in the borough of Elmbridge came from Surrey County Council and Streets Apart. This project also had a specific focus on children's experiences of disadvantage in Elmbridge and what actions might be taken to reduce the impact of disadvantage.

The survey results showed that secondary school children living in Elmbridge were relatively happy with their lives. There were marked differences in well-being across a range of economic indicators. For a minority of children, there was evidence of lives that are not so certain and where the opportunity to fit in and belong is compounded by the relative affluence that surrounds them.

At the conclusion of the project, a multi-agency workshop was held to present the key findings and encourage ideas to respond to what had been found. The agencies represented at the event were keen to gain new insight into the lives of children and to apply that learning. Each made a commitment to carry forward ideas and plans that emerged from the workshop. This included setting up a webpage to feed back findings to the young people in the local area.

Case study 1: The St Helens Good Childhood Inquiry 2020

In 2019, St Helens Council and the Integrated Children's Commissioning Group commissioned The Children's Society to carry out a project to better understand the well-being of children and young people in St Helens. The aim was to identify aspects of life where children in St Helens were doing well and less well, in order to identify potential local priorities for improving well-being.

The inquiry consisted of an online school-based survey and subsequent face-to-face consultations. The survey was developed by The Children's Society working with St Helens Council and the Integrated Children's Commissioning Team. It covered all ten aspects of children's lives included in our Good Childhood Index, as well as asking them about bullying, their local area, safety, support, and feelings of relatedness and loneliness.

Who was involved?

In the autumn term of 2019, all primary and secondary schools in the borough of St Helens were invited to participate in an online survey for school years 5, 6, 8, and 10 that ran from October until December 2019.⁸¹ Over 3,000 children completed the survey, with around 70% of primary schools and two-thirds of secondary schools in the Borough taking part.

Survey findings were complemented with children and young people's comments and views, expressed in face-to-face consultations. In total, the team from The Children's Society met with over 600 young people in the borough in a number of settings including four primary and three secondary schools, and 12 smaller groups that featured three special schools, an LGBTQ group, refugee and migrant young people, young people with learning difficulties, young carers, and many more.

In face-to-face sessions, children shared their thoughts on safety in the local area, their aspirations for the future, mental health, and who supported them in their lives.⁸² These consultations were anonymous and confidential. Children were encouraged to participate in the activities as honestly and openly as they felt able to so that their voices could be heard. Consulting children in this way provides insight into their feelings and experiences that can contextualise key themes identified from the survey findings.



⁸¹ The main survey was offered to all mainstream educational settings. Young people in special educational provisions were consulted in face to face qualitative sessions.

⁸² These consultations took place in February to March 2020 and so occurred at the start of the pandemic before the country went into the first national lockdown. See The Children's Society (2020c) for full report.

Key findings

Most children in St Helens were relatively happy with their lives but 9% had low overall well-being. There were differences in well-being by age and gender. Primary-aged girls had the highest well-being, while secondary-aged girls had the lowest. Children who self-identified as having a special educational need or disability had lower well-being than their peers, as did children who reported having caring responsibilities.

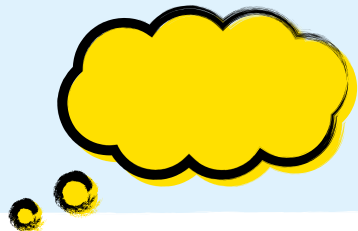
Out of the ten aspects of life examined in the Good Childhood Index, children in St Helens were happiest with their homes, their families, and the amount of money and things that they own. They were least happy with their appearance, their schools and the future.

Children were asked what problems they were worried about in the local area. The majority reported they felt safe in their local area during the day (66%) but only a third felt safe at night. Safety was also a major theme that came through in the face-to-face consultations.

There were mixed views on what there is do in St Helens and what is on offer for the children who live there. Primary school children were more likely to respond positively compared to their peers in secondary school.

What children thought St Helens needed

As part of the consultation, children were asked what they felt was missing from the support available in St Helens and what they would suggest is needed in the future for the borough to provide better help for children. Some asked for specific services to support young people with worries about mental health and places they can talk to someone about their concerns.



'Free sessions for young people to individually speak to someone over phone call, text message, in person with more support in schools.'

'Places for young people to go and not feel / be judged and feel safe.'

'More support for those in school who don't open up. Regular mental health checks maybe. Less pressure for homework.'

'More people to talk to, youth clubs, places to go to meet people who are going through same thing as you.'

What happened as a result?

After the survey was completed, all schools received an individualised summary of their data in January 2020 to allow them to act on the emerging findings. The full report was publicly launched in the autumn of 2020, with key findings and recommendations presented to St Helens executive leadership team, their People’s Board, local elected councillors, local business leaders, and the Youth Council.

Five priority areas were identified based on children’s feedback where change would be most impactful.

1. Leadership for children and young people in St Helens

The Borough Strategy should place children and young people’s well-being at its core, ensuring that there are authentic ways for children’s voices to be heard in council decision making at every level.

2. Services that support children and young people

The Inquiry should be used to expand the provision of youth services in the borough. This should be done in consultation with children and young people.

3. Children’s sense of security

The local authority should work with the local Community Safety Partnership and other relevant safeguarding agencies to review how crime is spoken about to children and young people, especially knife crime, exploitation, and criminal group violence.

4. A place planned, designed and built for children

The council should develop a new Statement of Community Involvement for planning in the borough. This includes an expectation that children and young people’s views and interests are considered as a part of the planning process.

5. A sustainable long-term strategy to promote children’s mental health and well-being

The recommendations were all accepted and learnings from the inquiry have been embedded into the Borough strategy.⁸³

What next for local well-being assessments?

The Children’s Society continues to work with partners in local areas in measuring children’s subjective well-being using our Good Childhood Index, including supporting schools directly.⁸⁴

In 2021, The Children’s Society worked with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing,⁸⁵ supported by The Health Foundation, to produce a comprehensive bank of measures of children’s well-being to help schools, colleges, universities, and other settings measure the well-being of the children and young people in their care.⁸⁶ These measures are being used in a range of settings and projects, including by our partners in Greater Manchester.



⁸³ St Helens (2021).

⁸⁴ For more information on using the Good Childhood Index contact us at wellbeing@childrenssociety.org.uk.

⁸⁵ See <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/>.

⁸⁶ Soffia and Turner (2021b).

Case study 2: #BeeWell well-being measurement in Greater Manchester

What is #BeeWell?

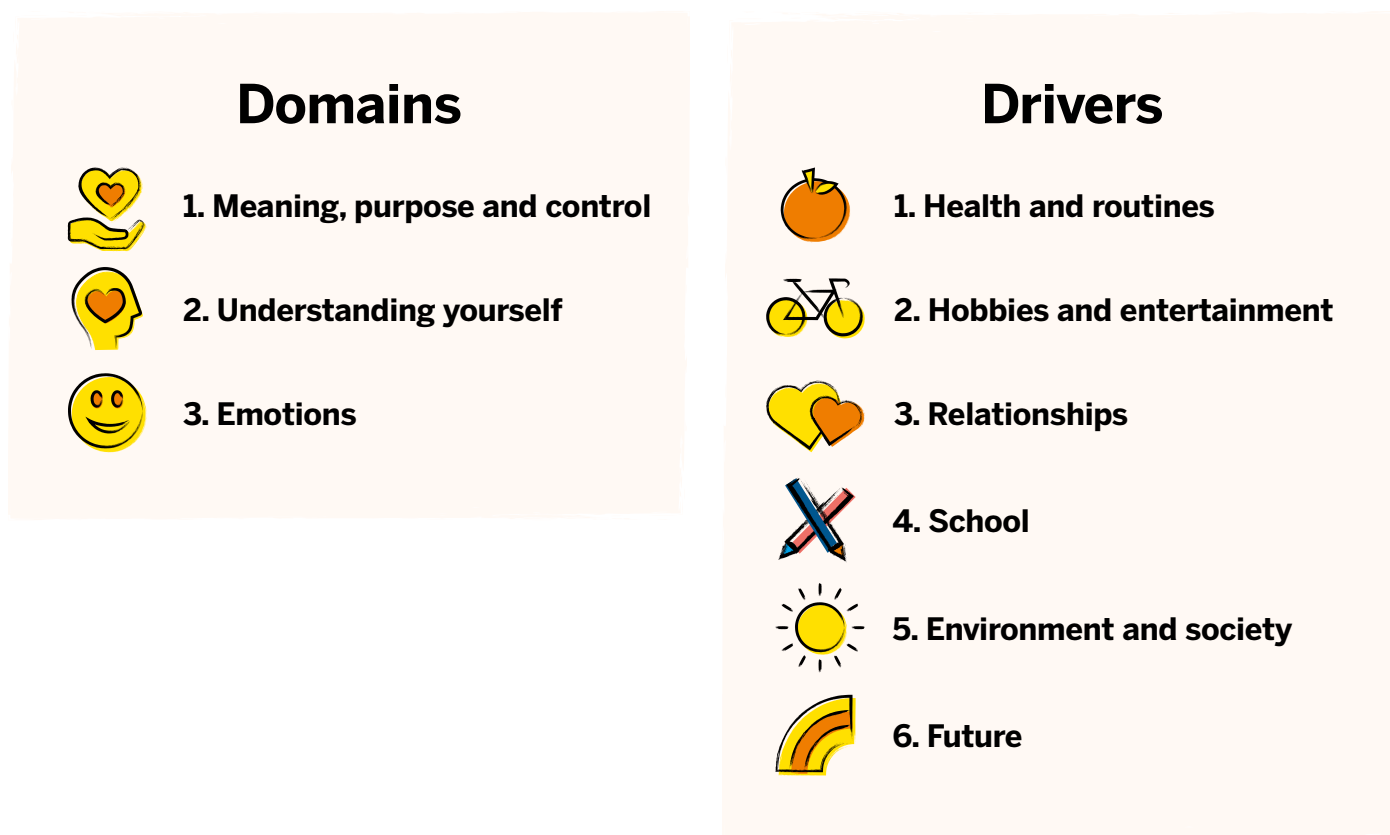
The #BeeWell programme is a collaboration between the University of Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), the Anna Freud Centre, and the Gregson Family Foundation. The programme measures the domains and drivers of young people's well-being on an annual basis and aims to use the data to bring about positive change in Greater Manchester's schools and communities.

#BeeWell has been embedded throughout the city-region through the direction of the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, and close work with the 10 local authorities.

Creation of the #BeeWell survey

Co-creation with young people is at the heart of #BeeWell, which began with young people deciding the programme name and designing the survey. In workshops, young people decided what was most important to include in the survey, culminating in the #BeeWell definition of well-being, split into three domains and six drivers (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: #BeeWell domains and drivers



Source: #BeeWell (2022a) What is wellbeing? Available: <https://gmbeewell.org/about/what-is-wellbeing/>

These workshops were complemented by input from professionals to inform the themes covered by the survey and the measures used within it,⁸⁷ including (but not limited to) The Children's Society, Public Health England, the Department for Education, the Office for National Statistics, the National Health Service, and Sport England. The resulting #BeeWell survey was also developed into more accessible short and symbol versions for young people in non-mainstream school settings.⁸⁸

School leaders supported #BeeWell at this stage, either through engagement with pathfinder schools or through representatives who continue to sit on #BeeWell's governance boards and design groups. #BeeWell also established its Youth Steering Group, which meets monthly and plays an integral role in shaping the programme.

Year 1: Survey roll-out in 2021-22

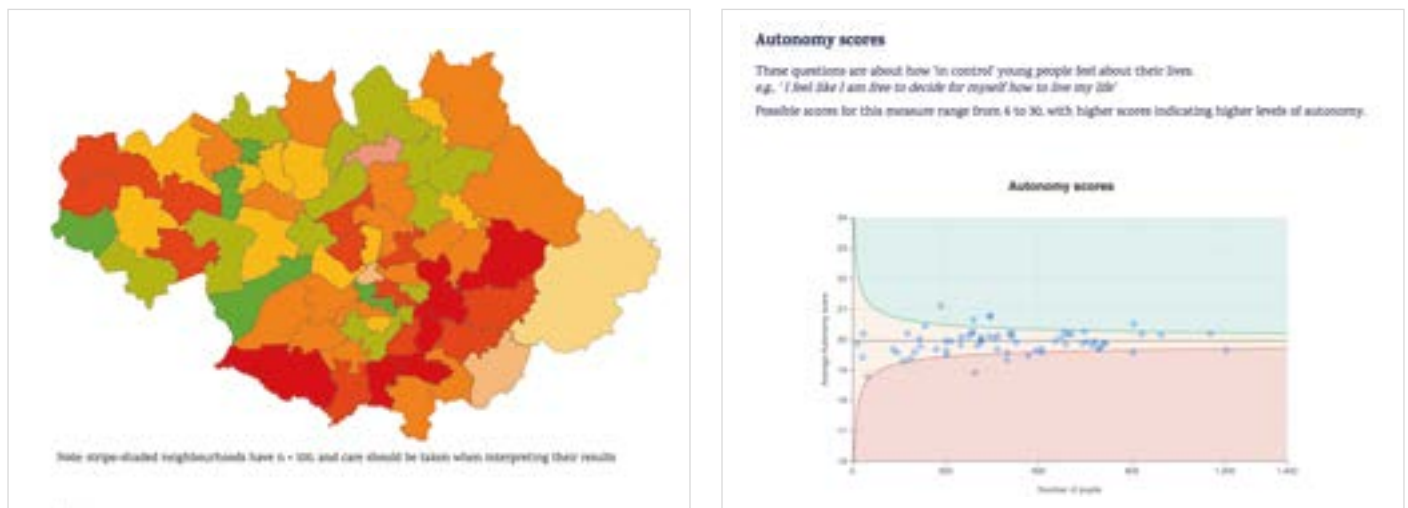
The first #BeeWell survey was rolled out in the 2021-22 academic year to year 8 and 10 pupils.⁸⁹ The year 8 cohort will complete the survey every year to create a longitudinal dataset, and every year there will also be a survey of Year 10 pupils.

In total, more than 160 secondary schools in GMCA signed up to #BeeWell in Year 1, including a number of special schools, Alternative Provision sites, Pupil Referral Units and independent schools. Almost 40,000 pupils completed the #BeeWell survey in autumn 2021, which represents approximately 60% of Year 8 and 10 pupils in the city-region.

In January 2022, schools received individual online data dashboards, presenting their survey results. The dashboards allow schools to compare their pupils' responses to Greater Manchester averages and 'comparable schools' (e.g. those of a similar size, ethnic composition, and levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility to themselves).

#BeeWell has also published a neighbourhood data dashboard and interpretation of the findings at a Greater Manchester level (an example is shown in Figure 23).^{90, 91}

Figure 23: #BeeWell Greater Manchester data dashboard example



Source: #BeeWell (2021c) #BeeWell Neighbourhood Data Hive, <https://uomseed.com/beewell-neighborhoods/2021/>.

⁸⁷ These workshops were attended by academics, mental health professionals, healthcare representatives, education experts, parents, teachers, and young people, among others.

⁸⁸ See #BeeWell (2021b).

⁸⁹ The initial funding for the programme ensures that it will be delivered for three years in the first instance.

⁹⁰ #BeeWell (2021c).

⁹¹ #BeeWell (2022b).

What did the 2021 survey results tell us about young people's well-being?

#BeeWell worked with the Youth Steering Group to identify the key findings from the survey.

As noted, national comparisons are limited, but **key well-being scores across Greater Manchester are consistent with what we know from other studies.** For life satisfaction, for example, young people gave an average score of 6.6 out of 10.

Inequalities in well-being persist, with the most sizeable differences in young people's outcomes found in relation to gender and sexual orientation.⁹²

Young people say that they have a vibrant extracurricular life, with 73% reporting that they can almost always or often do the things that they like in their free time. This drops to 67% of girls, up to 80% of boys, and 70% of pupils eligible for FSM.

This is strengthened by the feeling that **young people have good things to do and places to go.** 71% agree or strongly agree that they have good places to spend free time. However, the proportion agreeing varies from 61% to 80% across neighbourhoods and from 66% of black pupils, and 62% of Chinese pupils, to 76% of white pupils. It also falls to 62% of gay or lesbian pupils and 61% of bisexual or pansexual pupils. We see the aforementioned inequalities in well-being displayed clearly across the drivers of well-being.

Overall, 3 in 4 young people agree that their area is safe to live in, which drops to 69% of young people eligible for FSM. 58% of young people agree that people support each other's well-being in their area.

The #BeeWell team is keen to work with partners and use the GM neighbourhood dashboard to identify where young people may not feel positively about their well-being, and what action can be taken in response.

What has been done to respond to these findings?

#BeeWell schools have begun data exploration at a school level. There have been one-to-one consultations with the Anna Freud Centre, three targeted learning sets, and opportunity to take part in a programme with the Politics Project for pupils to feedback their thoughts on well-being to their elected representatives.

Schools have been at the forefront of driving change in response to the data. They have engaged with findings at a senior leadership level, fed back the data at parents' evenings, begun whole-school approaches to investigate areas of concern, and planned to use PSHE lessons to address findings with their pupils. In the early stages of evaluation, 40% of schools said that they are doing something differently as a result of their #BeeWell data.

Across communities, #BeeWell is determined to encourage the ownership and response to the data at a neighbourhood level. This place-based approach to well-being will be seen in the #BeeWell Champions social prescribing pilots, launching in autumn 2022, that will train young people to support their peers and to use a pot of £5,000 per school to commission activities to support well-being in their neighbourhood.

⁹² #BeeWell (2022c).

#BeeWell's Youth Co-Creation Lead has also begun work to ensure responses across Greater Manchester are informed by young people, work to develop participatory approaches, and start to understand what is driving the findings in the data.

Across the Greater Manchester region,

#BeeWell's partners have issued responses to the findings. The GMCA has adopted well-being measures from the #BeeWell survey, meaning young people's well-being is at the heart of the city-region's strategy for years to come. The Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership is launching a youth-led commissioning pot for LGBTQ+ young people to spend on activities that will support and promote the mental well-being of the LGBTQ+ community.

Across the city-region, GM Moving – an initiative concerned with getting people in Greater Manchester to become more active⁹³ – will launch a youth-led campaign linking the benefits of physical activity for mental health, directly responding to findings on young people's physical activity levels.

Young Manchester will be launching a youth-led commissioning pot for young people to spend on well-being activities in response to the findings. #BeeWell's Youth Steering Group have also commissioned small activities to respond to aspects of the 2021 data. And finally, the Duke of Edinburgh

Award are exploring neighbourhoods with lower support for community well-being, with the commitment to licence voluntary sector organisations to run the award in these areas.

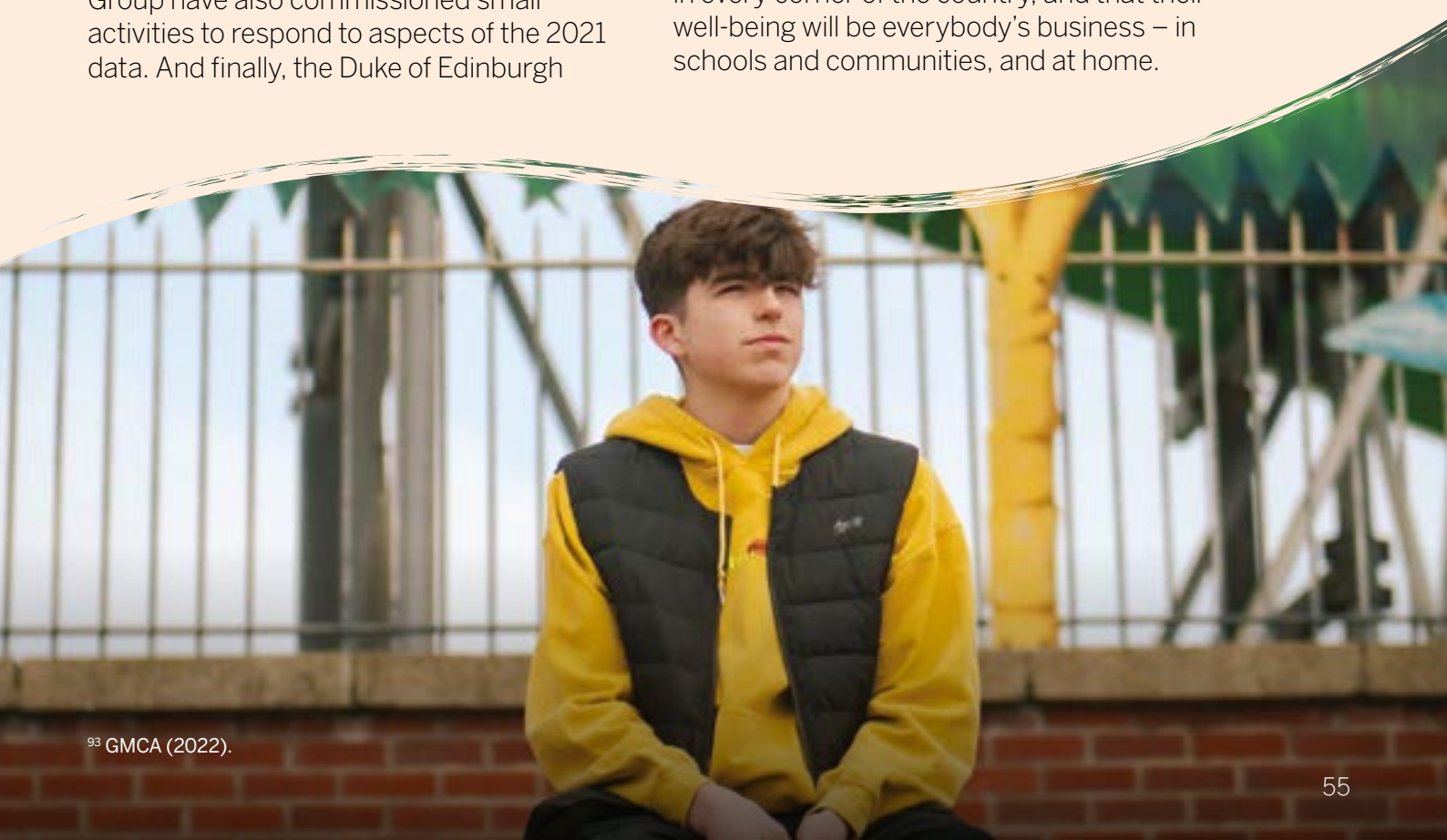
What are the next steps for #BeeWell?

In its current phase, #BeeWell is working with schools, partners, and system leaders across Greater Manchester to ensure the data is in the hands of those that can make real change in the lives of young people.

#BeeWell will begin surveying pupils in Years 9 and 10 from autumn 2022, repeating the survey cycle of the 2021-2022 academic year. In this second year, they will start to collect longitudinal data and see if and how well-being measures change following action across the city-region. The same will then apply in the 2023-2024 academic year.

Following the early impact of #BeeWell in Greater Manchester, active consideration is being given to a second location that could potentially run in parallel with Greater Manchester.

The #BeeWell team has a wider long-term objective, in line with The Children's Society's own aim: that by 2030, the well-being of young people will be measured consistently in every corner of the country, and that their well-being will be everybody's business – in schools and communities, and at home.



⁹³ GMCA (2022).

Case study 3: Potential mechanisms for change – Mental Health Support Teams in school

Whole school well-being measurement is a great step forward in understanding the issues facing our young people, as evidenced in The Children's Society's local well-being work and that of our colleagues in Greater Manchester. The next step is making sure young people who have low well-being receive the support they need.

One potential avenue of support is through Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), a service that has been designed to help meet the needs of children and young people in England by providing mental health support in schools, colleges, and other education settings such as alternative provision.

MHSTs have three core functions:

- to deliver evidence-based interventions for mild-to-moderate mental health issues
- support the senior mental health lead (where established) in each school or college to introduce or develop a whole school or college approach
- give timely advice to school and college staff and liaise with external specialist services to help children and young people to get the right support and stay in education.⁹⁴

Currently, there are 287 teams operational across England, covering over 4,700 schools and colleges, and 26% of pupils in schools and learners in Further Education. There are plans to bring this number up to over 500 MHSTs by 2024.⁹⁵

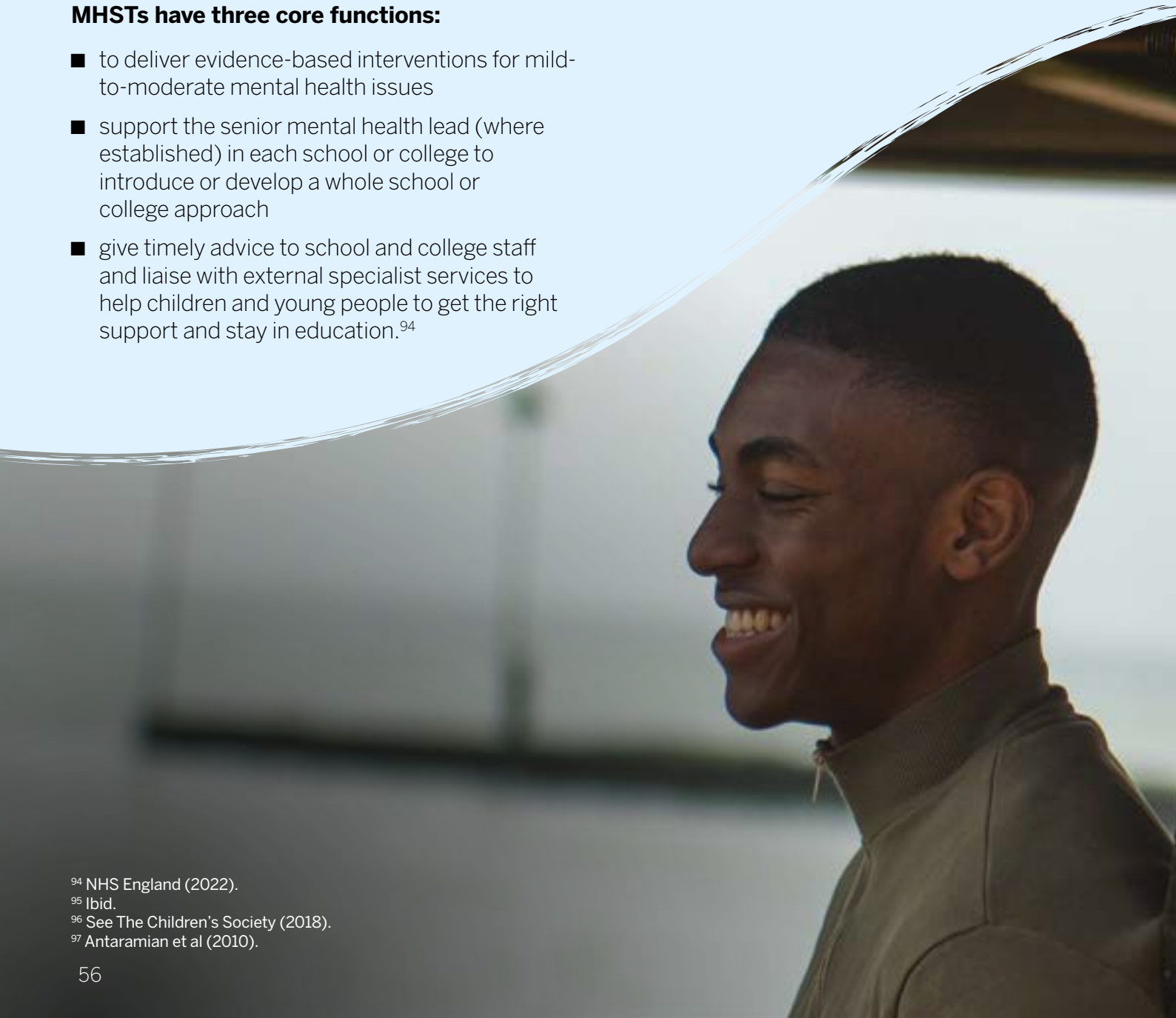
Research has shown that, while the two are related, mental health and well-being are not simply the opposite of each other. A young person may have low well-being without having symptoms of mental illness and have high well-being despite a mental health diagnosis.⁹⁶ But children with low well-being often have outcomes that are just as poor as children who meet a diagnostic threshold for a mental illness.⁹⁷ It is these children that MHSTs have the potential to support through their work in schools.

⁹⁴ NHS England (2022).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ See The Children's Society (2018).

⁹⁷ Antaramian et al (2010).



Learning from The Children’s Society’s RISE service Newcastle and Gateshead

The RISE service is commissioned by the Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS, and DfE Mental Health in Schools programme, and is delivered in Newcastle and Gateshead by The Children’s Society. The teams work in schools and colleges to support young people with low to moderate emotional well-being and mental health needs. The aim is to support as many pupils as possible, so the service takes a whole school approach, working directly with education settings to address children and young people’s mental health and well-being.

RISE practitioners also work with individual students, run group sessions, and help teachers shape lesson plans or assemblies. By enabling professionals and parents to better support young people’s well-being, the service reaches more young people in the longer term.

RISE provides schools with support from Education Mental Health Practitioners (EMHP) with expertise to work with the school or college to shape what will be most beneficial for the children and young people in that school. Education professionals are integral to the success of improving the mental health of children and young people, though often may not feel fully confident in managing certain situations.

The EMHPs provide support, training, and resources to make sure the school community feels able to talk about mental health and, where appropriate, will look to support schools to embed a Well-being Champion who is a member of school or educational setting staff.

RISE also has a range of resources for children, young people, professionals, and parents that offer practical tips to help them feel more in control and become more resilient in managing emotional well-being and mental health.⁹⁸

From autumn 2022, the team will work to implement a whole school measure of well-being as part of the delivery of the RISE service to further support the work of the EMHPs in understanding the issues facing young people in the schools they work with. This would provide strong evidence to guide the whole-school approach and increase the impact MHSTs can have on well-being.



⁹⁸ The Children’s Society (2022a).

Summary

Efforts to measure children's well-being effectively and to act on the findings to improve their lives are increasing. In the absence of a comprehensive, national dataset on children's well-being in England and/or across the UK, the movement to measure and improve well-being in schools has become well-established.

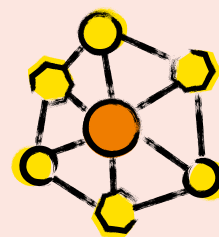
This chapter by no means reflects the full breadth of work undertaken, but rather seeks to highlight some of the key findings, lessons and opportunities for the future from our own work and that of our partners. The three case studies show how measuring well-being can be used to take action to improve children's lives:

- In St Helens, The Children's Society led survey and consultation work on children's well-being resulted in the identification of five priority areas: leadership for children and young people in St Helens; services that support children and young people; children's sense of safety; a place planned, designed, and built for children; and a sustainable long-term strategy to promote children's mental health and well-being. Recommendations and learning from the well-being assessment have been

embedded in the Borough strategy.

- In Greater Manchester, #BeeWell has enabled children and young people to be involved in local decisions, feeding back their thoughts on well-being to elected representatives. #BeeWell measures have been adopted by the GMCA, which means that young people's well-being will be at the heart of the city-region's strategy in the years to come. A youth-led campaign is also being launched on the benefits of physical activity for mental health and well-being, and much more.
- In Newcastle and Gateshead, there are plans for The Children's Society run RISE service to accompany existing onsite support in schools for children's well-being and mental health with well-being measurement to enable an evidence informed approach to service delivery.

There is still a lot of work to do to improve well-being measurement for children and young people and to make sure appropriate, evidence-based support can be provided to meet their needs. There are many possibilities going forward, but none of this can be achieved by any one organisation or school.



The best person to be is yourself



Discussion

Time trends in subjective well-being

Chapter 1 presents trends on children's (aged 10 to 15) subjective well-being for 11 waves of the Understanding Society survey, including the first responses obtained during the pandemic. In 2019-20, children's happiness with four of the six areas examined (life as a whole, friends, appearance, and school) is significantly lower than when the survey began. Children's happiness with family remains relatively stable and, in spite of recent decreases, their mean score for happiness with schoolwork is not significantly lower than in 2009-10.

As in previous years males are, on average, happier with their appearance in 2019-20 than females.

Current patterns and issues

Responses to The Children's Society's annual household survey in 2022 (presented in chapter 1) suggest that more children (aged 10 to 17) are unhappy with school than any other aspect of life.

There continues to be a small proportion of children and parents and carers who indicate that they did not cope well with changes to daily life as a result of the pandemic. As life returns to something more like 'normal', we must ensure that support continues to be available and endeavour to measure any longer term impacts on the well-being of children and their families.

Media and lived experience have highlighted recent rises in the cost of living in the UK. In 2022, 85% of parents and carers completing our survey said

that they are concerned about the impact on their family or household in the next 12 months, which is a further area of consideration when developing support responses for children, young people, and their families.

Children's happiness with school and schoolwork

Chapter 2 looks in more detail at children's experiences of school with a view to identifying particular aspects of school and subgroups of children for attention.

While further analyses of the Understanding Society data do not provide very clear indications of why children's happiness with school and schoolwork should be falling, they do reveal an age effect for happiness with schoolwork whereby older cohorts of children appear to be getting more unhappy at a quicker rate than cohorts of younger children.

The Children's Society's 2022 household survey highlights particular groups of children in full-time education who are less happy with school, including girls, those in secondary education (i.e. key stages 3 and 4), and those who were living in families they thought were not well off. The latter is particularly relevant given the current increases in cost of living. Children's responses also highlight particular aspects of school for attention including the importance of ensuring that they feel listened to and have a say in decisions, and have opportunities to feed in to what they are learning.

What are the benefits of measuring well-being in schools?

The Children's Society has long campaigned for improvements in the measurement of children's well-being and using these data to inform policy making and take action to improve children's lives. In the absence of comprehensive, national measurement, led by the Government, there have been many initiatives to measure well-being within schools.

The three case studies presented in chapter 3 show the potential of what can be achieved by measuring the well-being of children across a whole Borough or city-region. This includes working with children and young people themselves to identify priority areas and direct actions to be addressed in local strategies and individual schools and through funding and other initiatives. The Children's Society calls for a more standardised approach to measurement across the UK and/or England and Wales to enable wider local action and comparison between areas.

Overall comment

The first set of data from Understanding Society to include responses from children collected during the pandemic shows some interesting patterns in children's happiness with different aspects of life. While it is not possible to differentiate the role that the

Coronavirus pandemic has had, it will be interesting to see if the slight upturns seen in some of the measures in the most recent wave continue into the next year. It is likely that it will be some time before any long-term effects of the pandemic are known and it is therefore important that the impact on children continues to be monitored and support remains available for those most affected.

The cost of living rises currently being experienced in the UK are a key concern for the well-being of children, particularly as we know that children's experiences of poverty and financial strain, their perceptions of their family wealth, and their material resources can influence their happiness.⁹⁹

It is interesting that school is one of the most commonly used sources to address and measure children's well-being and yet more children seem to be unhappy with this aspect of life than other areas. At a national level, The Children's Society's household survey provides an insight into subgroups of children and areas for focus within the school setting. At a local level, case studies such as The Children's Society's local well-being assessment in St Helens show the potential to work with children to both identify and find solutions to those areas of life and school that children find more challenging.

⁹⁹ See, for example, The Good Childhood Report (2019) and The Good Childhood Report (2014).



Policy recommendations

Ambition for the future

More than ever before, the findings of this report highlight the importance of addressing the wider [social circumstances](#)¹⁰⁰ that influence our well-being – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age.

- The Government must urgently renew its focus on place-based prevention and early intervention to promote positive well-being for children. '[Stopping the Spiral](#)' (2022) – a report The Children's Society jointly commissioned with Action for Children, Barnardo's, National Children's Bureau and NSPCC¹⁰¹ – shows a 50% decline in local authority spending on early intervention children's services since 2010-11, with 80% of resources now going to late intervention services.
- Often, the most vulnerable children's experiences are not captured by surveys and smaller sample sizes. To fully understand and respond to the key issues for children, including the impact of experiences of discrimination, their subjective well-being must:
 - be measured at least annually
 - with data collected on a larger national scale
 - with data that can be analysed at a local level.
- Our findings highlight a link between children's happiness with school and their perceptions of their family's wealth. The cost of living crisis must firmly bring decision makers' attention to family incomes and access to the basics such as heating, food, and adequate housing. It is not possible to tackle children's well-being without tackling child poverty.
- Local and national decision makers must be ambitious in their aspirations for all children and young people's well-being. We cannot continue to watch children's happiness decline. It is vital that the Government implements and brings together the following interconnecting reforms to improve children and young people's well-being, with appropriate cross-departmental investment:
 - the upcoming 10-year mental health and well-being plan for England
 - the SEND review¹⁰²
 - the [Levelling Up agenda](#)¹⁰³
 - reforms to the [Mental Health Act](#)¹⁰⁴
 - revised [behaviour in schools guidance](#)¹⁰⁵ and [suspension and permanent exclusions guidance](#)¹⁰⁶
 - the [independent review of children's social care](#)¹⁰⁷
 - the upcoming (at the time of writing) Health Disparities White Paper
 - Integrated Care Systems became statutory bodies in July 2022.

More detail on each of our seven headline recommendations can be found in [The Good Childhood Report 2022 Summary and Recommendations](#).¹⁰⁸



¹⁰⁰ See Public Health England (2017).

¹⁰¹ See Pro Bono Economics (2022).

¹⁰² Department for Education (2022c).

¹⁰³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2022).

¹⁰⁴ Department of Health and Social Care and The Ministry of Justice (2022).

¹⁰⁵ Department for Education (2022d).

¹⁰⁶ Department for Education (2022e).

¹⁰⁷ MacAlister (2022).

¹⁰⁸ See The Children's Society (2022b).

Recommendations

Decision makers cannot delay action on children's declining well-being any longer. The Government must step up its attention on prevention and early intervention and take accountability for children's enduring unhappiness with school and appearance. Co-design with children and young people must be at the centre of all our proposed reforms.

1. It is imperative that children's subjective well-being is measured at least annually on a larger scale as it is for adults.
2. Children's well-being support hubs should be available in every community in England and Wales.
3. Vital youth provision must be restored to bring young people and families together as part of healthy communities.
4. The Government must take action on children's unhappiness with their appearance. This has been neglected for too long, failing generations of young people.
5. Radical reform of the education system is needed, as well as rebalancing the curriculum to value personal, social, and health education alongside Maths and English.
6. Family well-being needs to be a priority. The NHS and MHSTs should work with the voluntary and community sector to support parents and carers through a whole-family approach.
7. Children must be protected from the unrelenting cost of living crisis and deepening poverty by increasing child benefit and widening eligibility to free school meals.

See The Good Childhood Report 2022 Summary and Recommendations for more detail on each of our seven headline recommendations.



*It's very important
to let your feelings out
and talk about them.*



Appendix A

Figure 24: The Good Childhood Index

The Good Childhood Index contains the following 16 items.

Please say how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
1. My life is going well						
2. My life is just right						
3. I wish I had a different kind of life						
4. I have a good life						
5. I have what I want in life						

Please tick one of the boxes to say how happy you feel with things in your life

These questions use a scale from 0 to 10. On this scale:

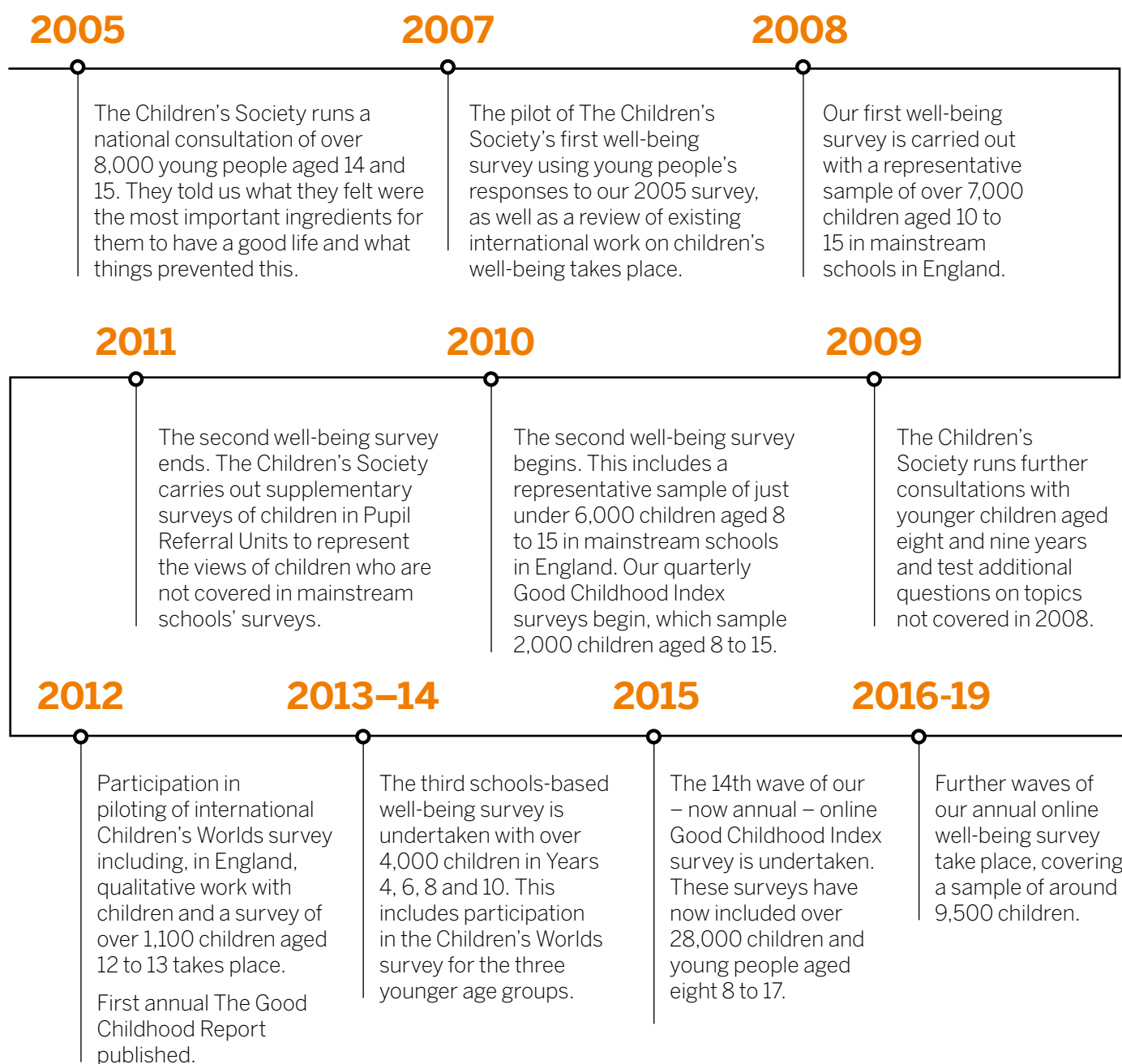
- 0 means 'very unhappy'
- 5 means 'not happy or unhappy'
- 10 means 'very happy'

How happy are you with...

1. ...your life as a whole?	
2. ...your relationships with your family?	
3. ...the home that you live in?	
4. ...how much choice you have in life?	
5. ...your relationships with your friends?	
6. ...the things that you have (like money and the things you own)?	
7. ...your health?	
8. ...your appearance (the way that you look)?	
9. ...what may happen to you later in your life (in the future)?	
10. ... your school, in general?	
11. ...the way that you use your time?	

Appendix B

Figure 25: The research programme





2020

Our 19th Good Childhood Index survey is conducted during the first national lockdown in the Coronavirus pandemic. For the first time, children (aged 10 to 17) in all four nations are included.

Results for England from the third wave of the International Children's Worlds survey are published. Data collection for the England survey, which focused on children in year 6, was carried out jointly by The University of York and The Children's Society.

2022

The latest (and 21st) wave of The Children's Society's annual online well-being survey is completed. These surveys have now included almost 44,000 children.

Appendix C

Table 3: The Good Childhood Index domains by children's age group and gender

		Family	Choice	Money & things
All	Unweighted N	2011	2010	2009
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.2	7.4	7.5
	% scoring below the midpoint	8%	10%	11%
Ages 10 to 11	Unweighted N	522	522	521
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.4	7.5	7.6
	% scoring below the midpoint	8%	11%	10%
Ages 12 to 13	Unweighted N	548	548	548
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.0	7.3	7.4
	% scoring below the midpoint	11%	13%	12%
Ages 14 to 15	Unweighted N	521	520	521
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.2	7.5	7.5
	% scoring below the midpoint	8%	8%	13%
Ages 16 to 17	Unweighted N	420	420	419
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.2	7.5	7.4
	% scoring below the midpoint	6%	7%	9%
Boys	Unweighted N	1043	1042	1043
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.3	7.6	7.7
	% scoring below the midpoint	7%	8%	10%
Girls	Unweighted N	958	958	956
	Mean on scale of 0 to 10	8.0	7.2	7.3
	% scoring below the midpoint	9%	12%	12%

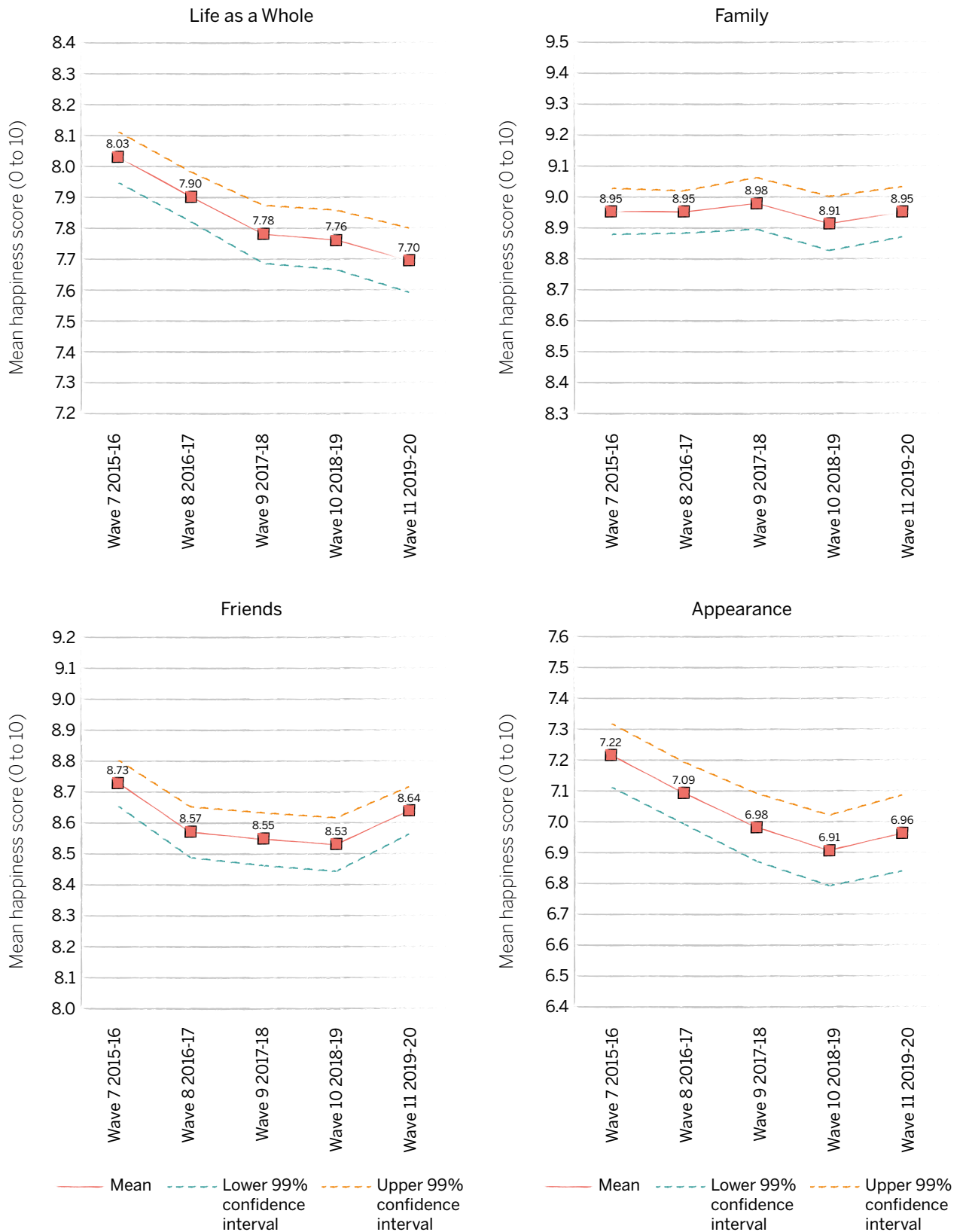
Source: The Children's Society's household survey, wave 21, May to June 2022, 10- to 17-year-olds, United Kingdom. Weighted data. Excludes missing responses (including 'prefer not to say').

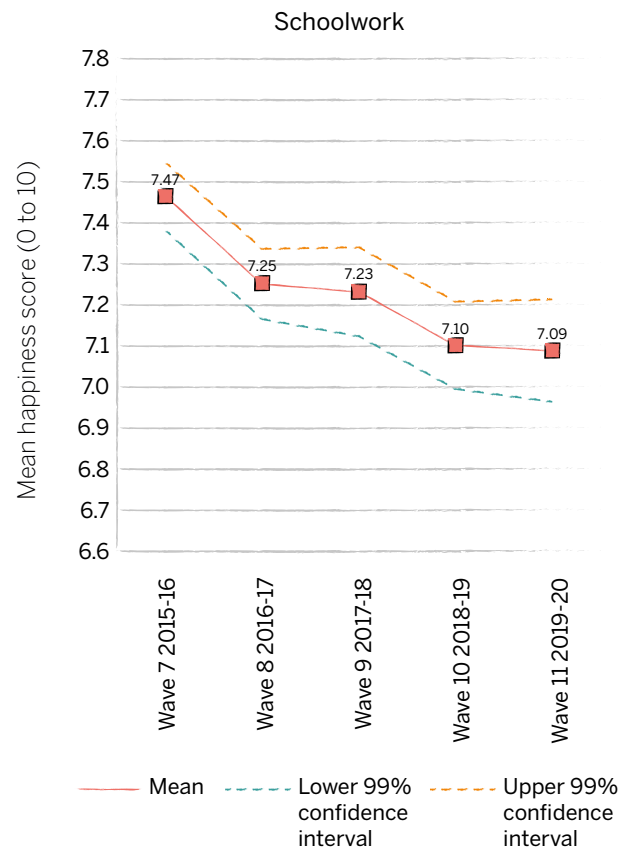
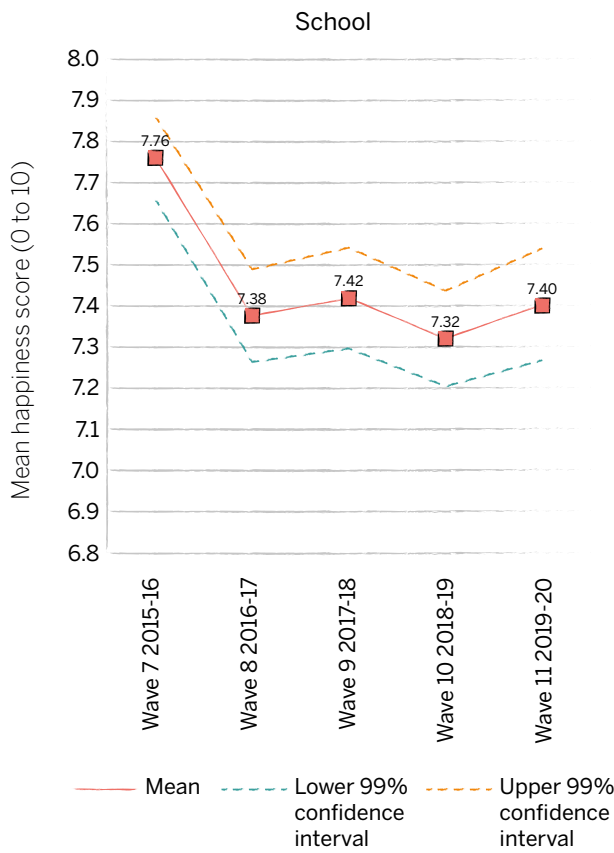
Note: A full breakdown of The Good Childhood Index questions can be found in Appendix A.

Health	Friends	Appearance	Future	Home	School	Time use
2011 8.1 9%	2008 7.9 8%	2004 7.3 12%	1999 7.1 9%	2012 8.1 7%	1998 7.2 14%	2008 7.6 6%
522 8.3 7%	520 8.1 7%	518 7.6 11%	518 7.3 8%	522 8.2 6%	521 7.6 11%	521 7.8 5%
549 8.0 11%	548 7.7 10%	547 7.2 14%	543 7.0 10%	549 7.9 10%	547 6.9 18%	549 7.5 8%
520 8.1 8%	520 8.0 8%	519 7.3 13%	519 7.0 10%	521 8.1 5%	520 7.0 16%	519 7.6 7%
420 7.9 9%	420 7.9 8%	420 7.2 10%	419 6.9 10%	420 8.0 6%	410 7.2 11%	419 7.5 6%
1043 8.3 7%	1041 8.2 6%	1041 7.7 9%	1037 7.3 7%	1044 8.2 5%	1039 7.4 12%	1043 7.8 5%
958 7.9 11%	957 7.6 11%	953 7.0 15%	952 6.8 12%	958 7.9 9%	949 6.9 16%	955 7.4 8%

Appendix D

Figure 26: Trends in children's (aged 10 to 15) happiness with different aspects of life, including Immigration and Ethnic Minority Boost (IEMB) sample, UK, 2015-16 to 2019-20

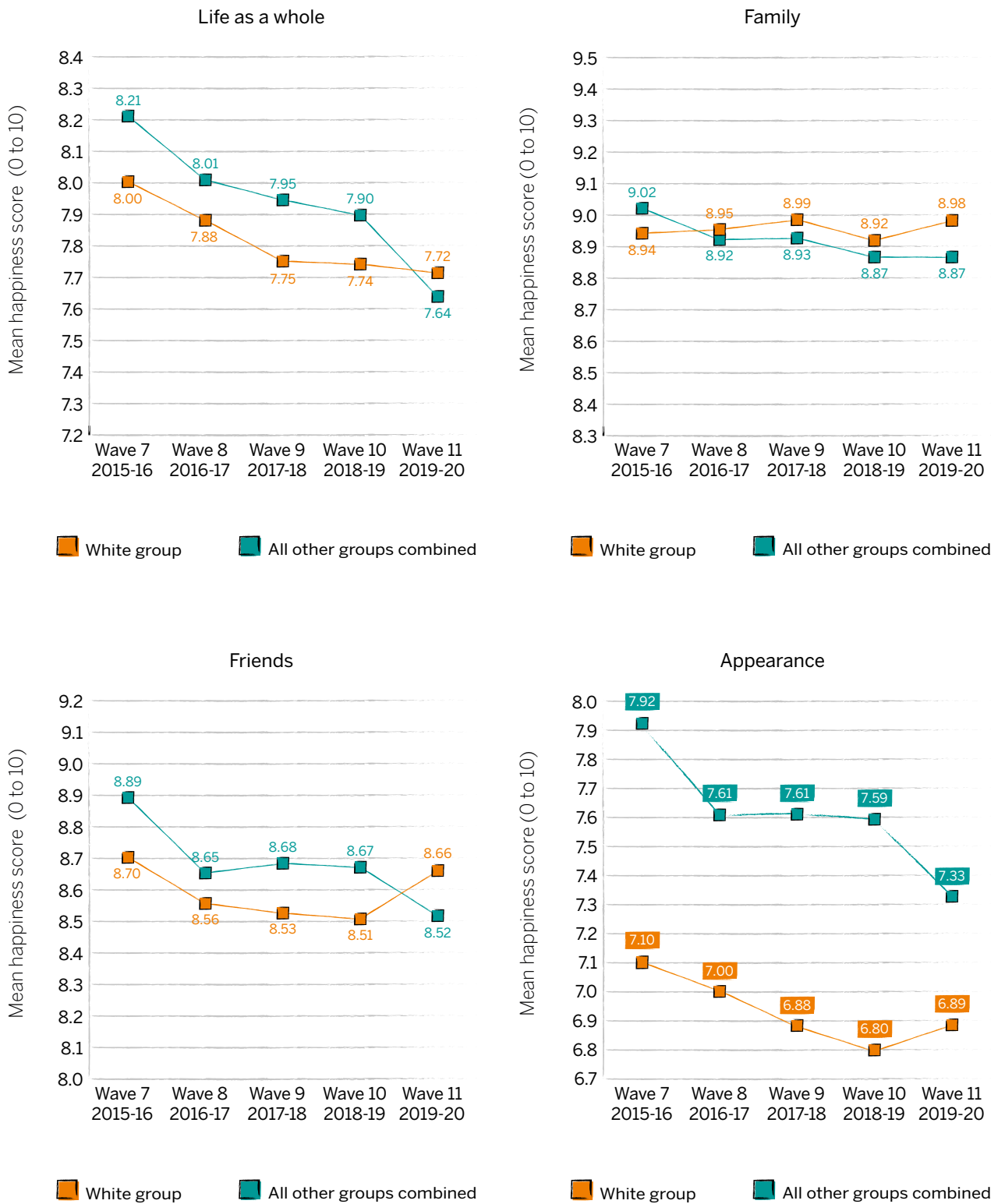


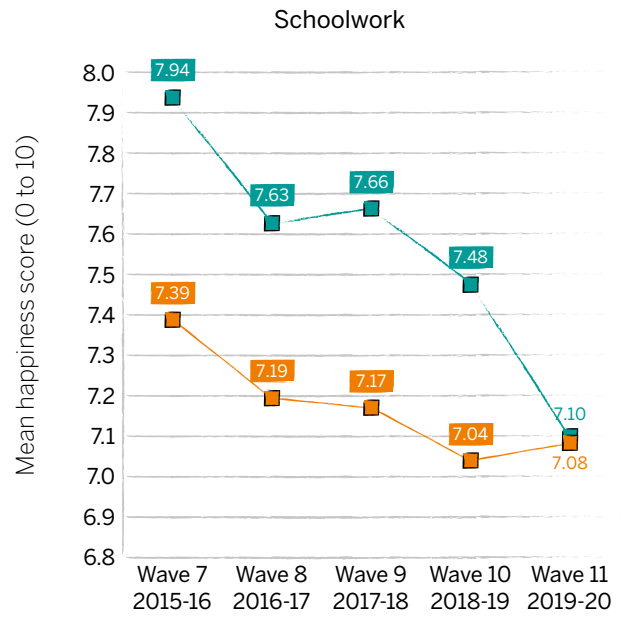
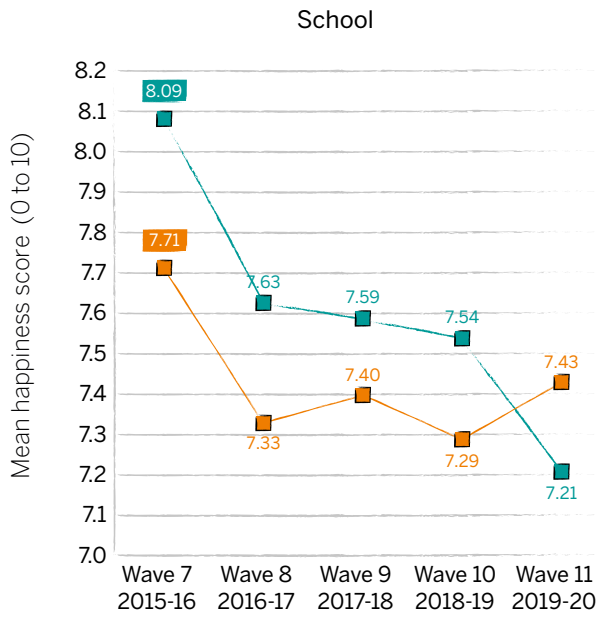


Source: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2022). Understanding Society: Waves 1-11, 2009-2020 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 15th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-16.

Presentational note: All graphs use the same size range of values (1.2) so that they can be visually compared. Data are weighted (confidence intervals take account of design effects).

Figure 27: Trends in children's (aged 10 to 15) happiness with different aspects of life, including Immigration and Ethnic Minority Boost (IEMB) sample, UK, by ethnic group 2015-16 to 2019-20





White group All other groups combined

White group All other groups combined

Source: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. (2022). Understanding Society: Waves 1-11, 2009-2020 and Harmonised BHPS: Waves 1-18, 1991-2009. [data collection]. 15th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 6614, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-6614-16.

Presentational note: All but one of the graphs (appearance) use the same size range of values (1.2) so that they can be visually compared. Data are weighted (confidence intervals take account of design effects). Mean scores are displayed in boxes in those waves where there were significant differences by binary ethnic group based on non-overlapping confidence intervals (at 99% level).

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Acknowledgements

The Children's Society are grateful to the UK Data Archive and UK Data Service for making available data from Understanding Society. However, they bear no responsibility for the analysis of these data.

Understanding Society is an initiative funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and various Government departments, with scientific leadership by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex, and survey delivery by NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public. The research data are distributed by the UK Data Service.

The Children's Society also wishes to thank the following:

- Colleagues from the Children's Commissioner's Office for England for the collaborative work undertaken to explore qualitative responses from the Big Ask, which informed the questions on school included in The Children's Society's household survey in 2022.
- Professor Neil Humphrey, Amy Hibbert, and the teams at #BeeWell and GMCA for their contribution and writing of Case study 2 in chapter 3.
- The young people (and their parents and carers) who took part in our annual household survey and consultation work for this report.

You are
fantastic,
keep it up



Every young person should have the support they need in order to enjoy a safe, happy childhood.

That's why we run services and campaigns that make children's lives better and change the systems that are placing them in danger.

The Children's Society is bringing hope back to children's lives.

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Charity Registration No. 221124 MCB225/0922

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