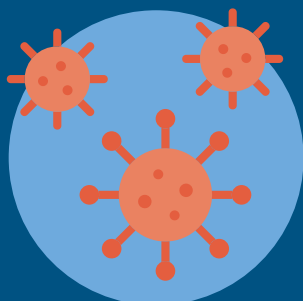
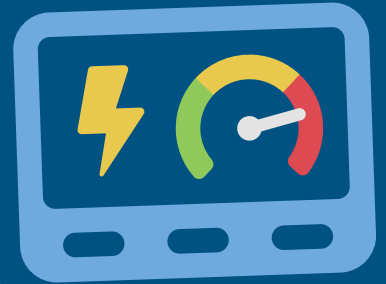


# WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study 12th Annual Survey Annual Report | 2023-24



# Background

The WISERD Multi-Cohort Study (WMCS) is an annual longitudinal study to chart the progress of children and young people growing up in Wales. Each year, we follow three cohorts from schools across Wales and ask questions about their experiences of school and their perspectives on national and international issues.

Here, we provide a summary of key findings from the 2023-24 school year's survey with numbers rounded to the nearest whole percentage. Summaries of results for all of our questions from each year of the survey (2012 onwards) are available on the [WISERD Data Portal](https://dataportal.wiserd.ac.uk/en/wmcs) (dataportal.wiserd.ac.uk/en/wmcs).

## Project Team

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Dr Laura Arman (Research Associate)  
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Ceri Morgans co-developed the questions on mental health support in schools with an advisory group of young people as part of her doctoral research at Cardiff University.

## Data Team

Sam Jones (Research Data Manager)  
Sam Morgan (Senior Data Technician)

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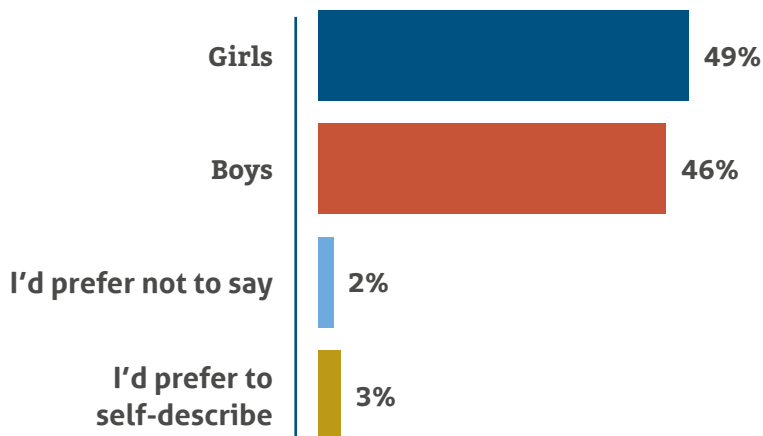
# Demographics

In our 12th annual survey we invited pupils from years 8, 10 and 12 to take part and received responses from 1,614 pupils in total.

We work with schools on a voluntary basis and target those who have previously participated, as much as possible, in order to retain pupils for longitudinal analysis. We aim to collect a sample from all over Wales, with a good representation from differing socio-economic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds.

## Gender

We asked our participants 'What is your gender?' and allowed them to select one of four options, including one that allowed them to self-describe:



## Nationality and ethnicity

73% of this year's participants identified as Welsh, 12% as English, 7% as British, 7% as 'other' and 1% Irish, with other national groups too small to report.

92% reported their ethnicity as 'white', 2% as 'any other racial or ethnic group', 1% Indian, 1% Mixed Asian and other ethnicities present were below 1%.

## Free school meals (FSM)

# 20%

of our sample reported eligibility for free school meals.



## Faith schools

# 11%

of this year's participants attended schools of Christian denominations.

## Urban or rural

# 61%

of our survey lived in built-up areas which are relatively 'urban' in a Welsh context.

## Language medium

# 47%

of our participants attended Welsh-medium schools or bilingual-medium schools.

Su'mae?

Shwmae?

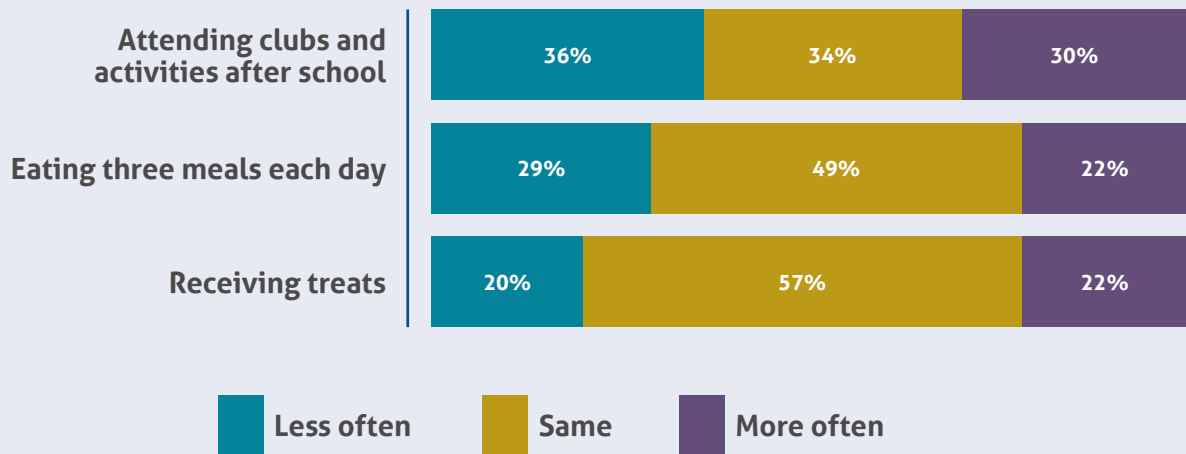
# Cost of living



In order to understand how young people’s lives were being impacted by the cost of living crisis, we included questions about children’s access to meals, treats and extracurricular activities.

29% reported eating three meals a day less often than in previous years. They also reported attending extracurricular activities after school less often.

## In the last year, have you done the following more often or less often than in previous years?



Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM: a common indicator of socio-economic disadvantage) were more likely to report doing all these things less often than last year, compared to pupils who were not eligible.



**48%** of pupils eligible for FSM said they attended activities after school less often, compared with 34% of other pupils.

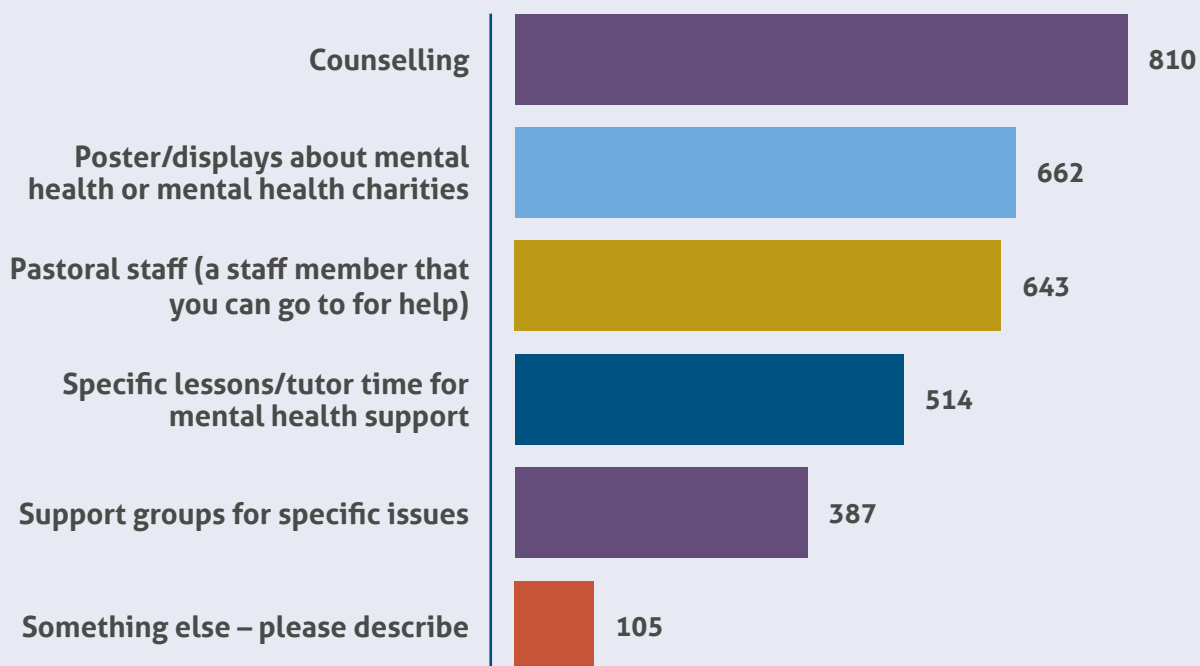
**34%** of pupils eligible for FSM had three meals a day less often, compared with 28% of pupils ineligible.

**26%** of pupils eligible for FSM said they’d received treats less often, in comparison with 19% of their peers.

# Children's mental health

This year's survey included questions on the pupils' knowledge of mental health support at their schools.

## Does your school offer any of these types of support? (Tick all that apply)

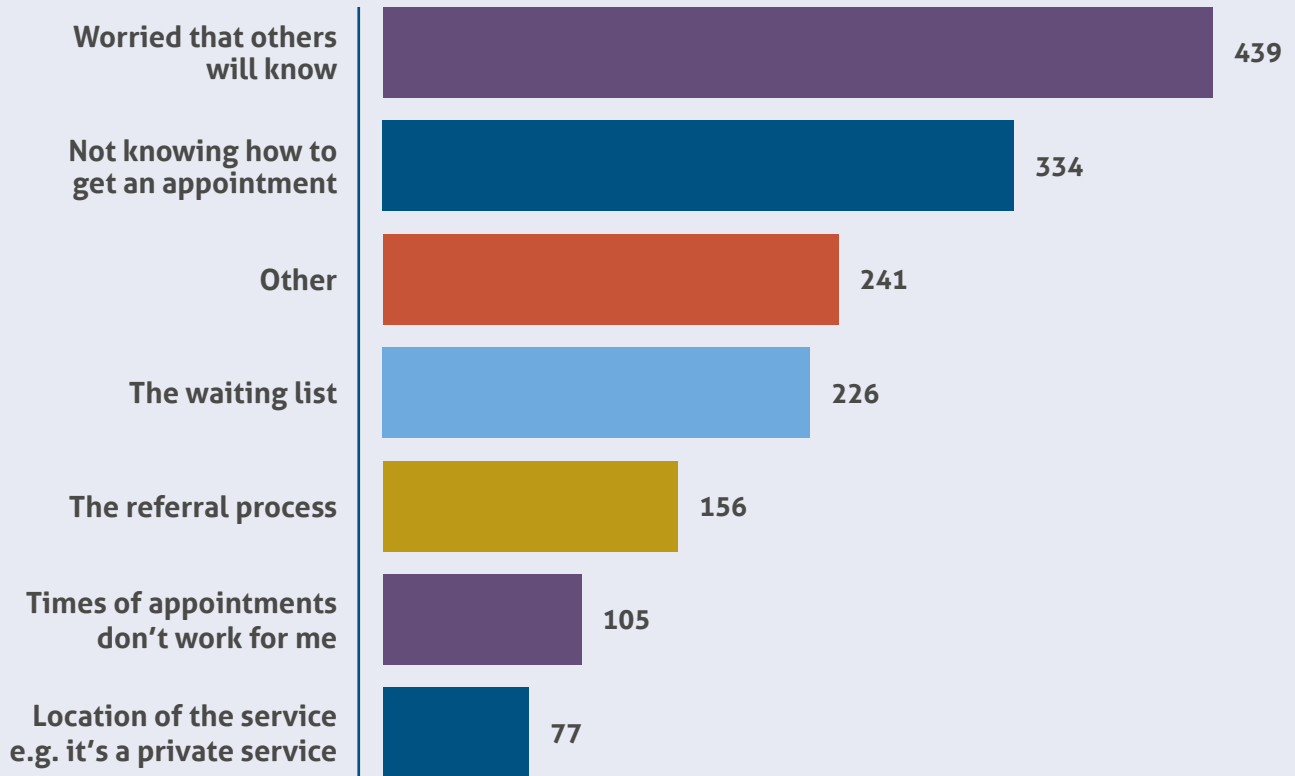


Most pupils who claimed that their school offered "something else" were unsure of what that was or said they did not know as they had not accessed the services themselves.

A few pupils were aware of rooms at their school they could go to when feeling overwhelmed or unhappy.

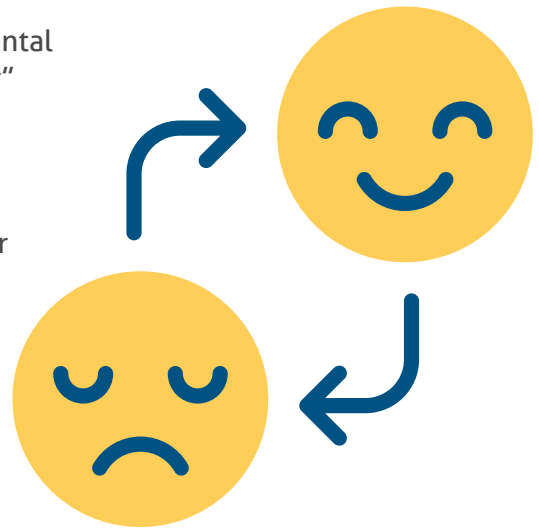


## What makes getting support with mental health at school difficult? (Tick all that apply)



Pupils provided many reasons why getting support with mental health at school can be difficult. Pupils who selected “other” often cited nervousness about talking to adults about their problems, both in terms of making an initial disclosure, and about talking to a counsellor.

They also expressed concern about parents, peers and other teachers knowing about their use of the service. It seems that the perceived stigma around mental health is still an issue for many young people.



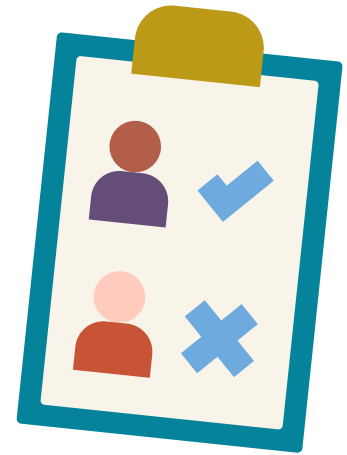
# Absences

**76% of pupils were absent due to illness other than Covid-19 at some point during this school year.**

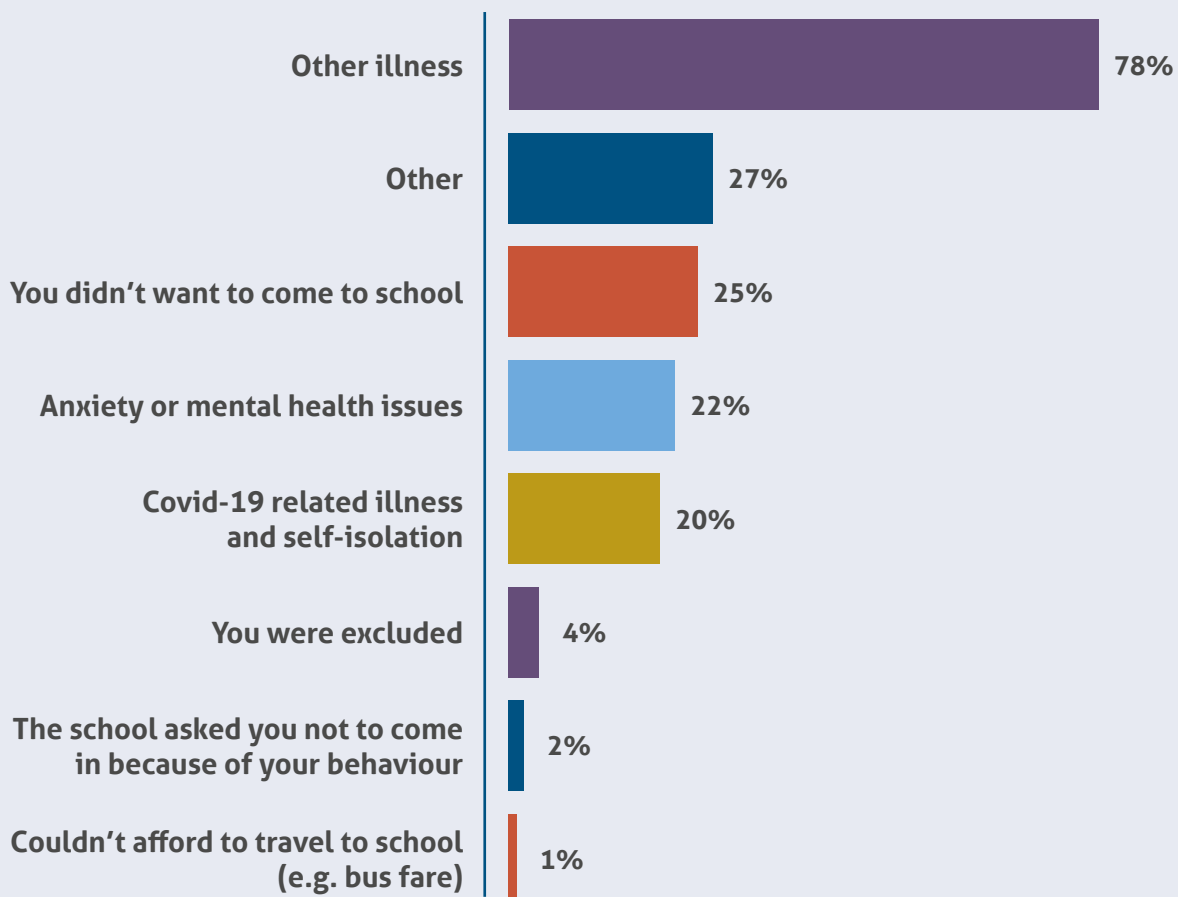
Unlike in our 2020-21 survey, Covid-19-related illness and self-isolation is no longer the top reason for absences.

27% gave "other" reasons for absence, including holidays, bullying, sports and competition, and injury or other medical issues. A concerning number of our pupils said that they didn't want to come to school (25%) or that they were absent due to anxiety or other mental health issues (22%).

While long or short-term exclusion account for relatively few of the absences, this still affected 63 pupils in our survey and is likely to be an under-representation, as pupils who are absent from school often are less likely to participate in surveys such as this one.



## Have you been absent from school this school year for any of the following reasons? (Tick all that apply)



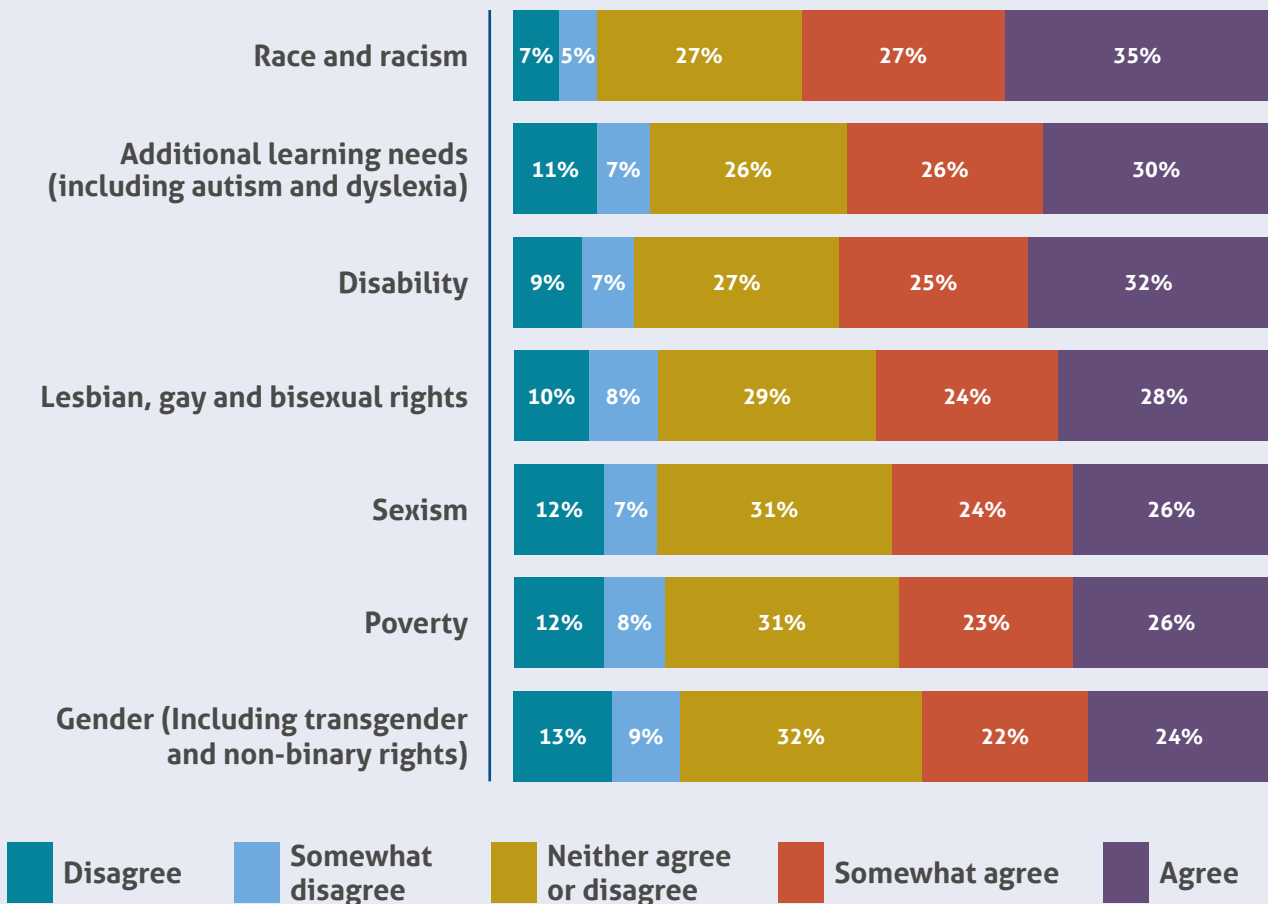
# Inclusion

**73% of pupils agreed that their school provides a safe, inclusive environment for all pupils.**

84% agreed that their school takes reports of sexual harassment seriously and 87% agreed that their school takes reports of racism seriously. However, we found differences in agreement by gender and ethnicity to the statements on sexual harassment and racism. 90% of boys agreed that their school takes reports of sexual harassment seriously, compared to 80% of girls and 67% of pupils who preferred to self-describe. Only 67% of pupils from a minority ethnic background agreed that their school takes reports of racism seriously, compared with 89% of other pupils.

Pupils were also asked whether their school encourages them to discuss the following social identities and forms of discrimination. There was variation in the proportion agreeing with these statements, with 62% agreeing that their school encourages discussion of race and racism, and only 46% of pupils agreeing that they discuss gender (including transgender and non-binary rights).

## My school encourages us to discuss...



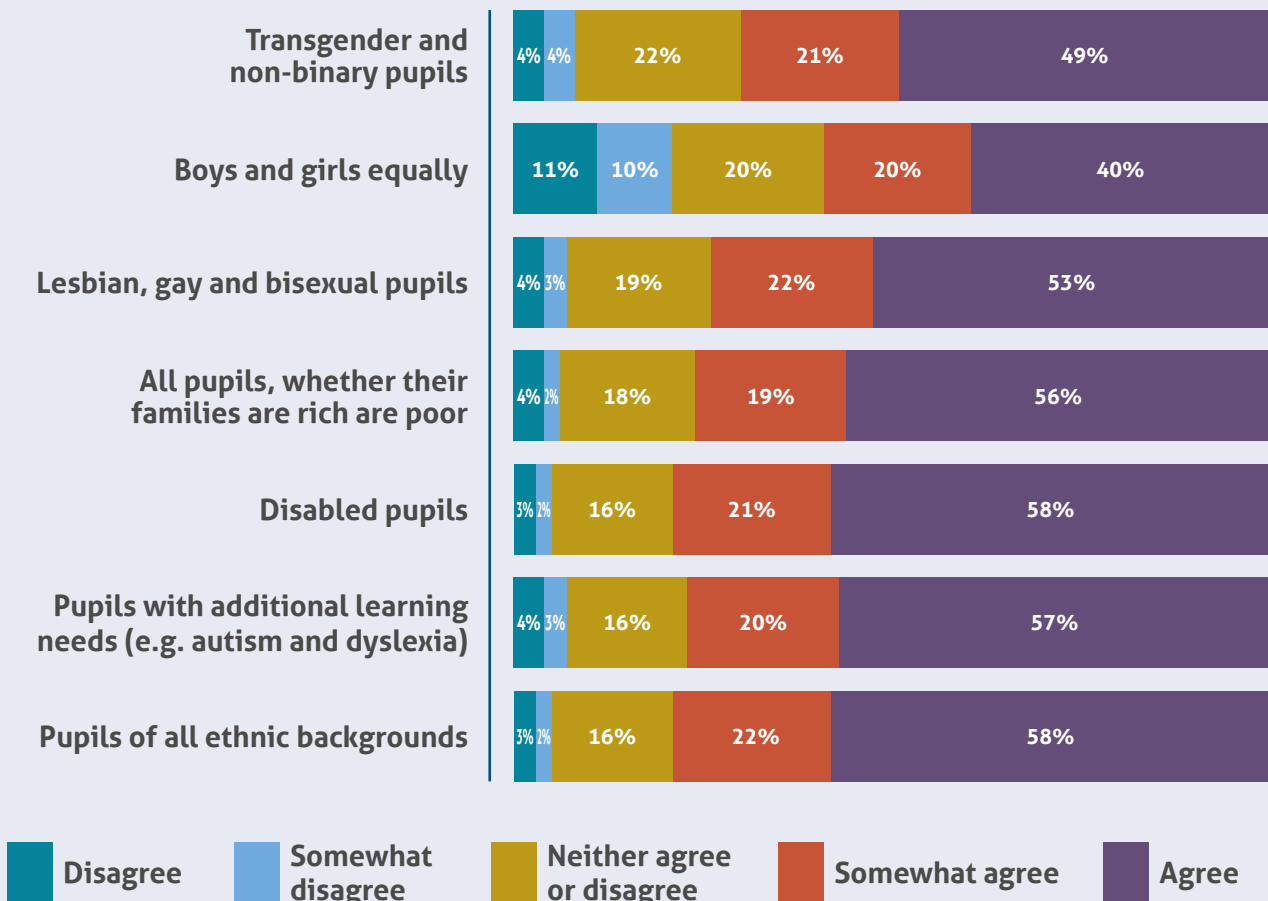


While the majority of pupils agreed that their school encourages discussion of race and racism, there was a difference by ethnicity of pupils: 18% of pupils from a minority ethnic background disagreed with this statement (selecting either 'disagree' or 'somewhat disagree'), compared to 10% of other pupils. Welsh schools are now required to teach Black and minority history and experiences in Wales, but the results suggest that not all schools are doing so yet.

There were significant differences in pupils' perceptions of whether their school values and respects specific groups according to gender and ethnicity. Only 64% of pupils from a minority ethnic background selected 'agree' or 'somewhat agree' in response to the question about whether their school values and respects pupils of all ethnic backgrounds, compared with 81% of their peers. 72% of girls, 69% boys and 58% of pupils who preferred to self-describe agreed (either 'agree' or 'somewhat agree') that their school values and respects transgender and non-binary pupils. Pupils eligible for FSM were less likely to agree that their school values and respects "all pupils, whether their families are rich or poor" – 68% of these pupils either agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement compared with 77% of other pupils.



### My school values and respects...



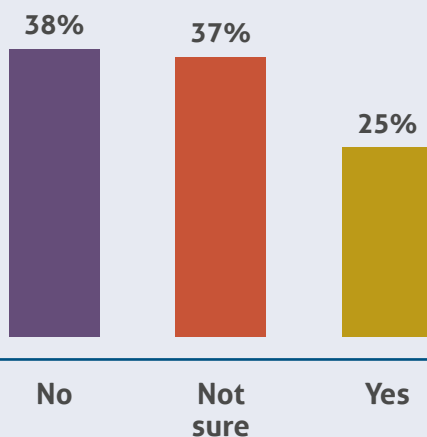
Disagree
  Somewhat disagree
  Neither agree or disagree
  Somewhat agree
  Agree

# Politics and civil engagement

**25% of pupils thought Wales should be an independent country.**

This increased by year group, but with only 24% of year 8 pupils, 25% of year 10 pupils and 32% of year 12 pupils agreeing.

## Should Wales be an independent country that is not part of the UK?



**12% of pupils said they'd taken part in a protest over the last year.**

When asked what they'd protested about, the most popular option was school issues, including school uniform, exclusion and toilets. The second was the climate crisis and the third was Palestine. Several pupils also protested for Welsh independence, and a number mentioned their opposition to the Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme.

### Protest issues

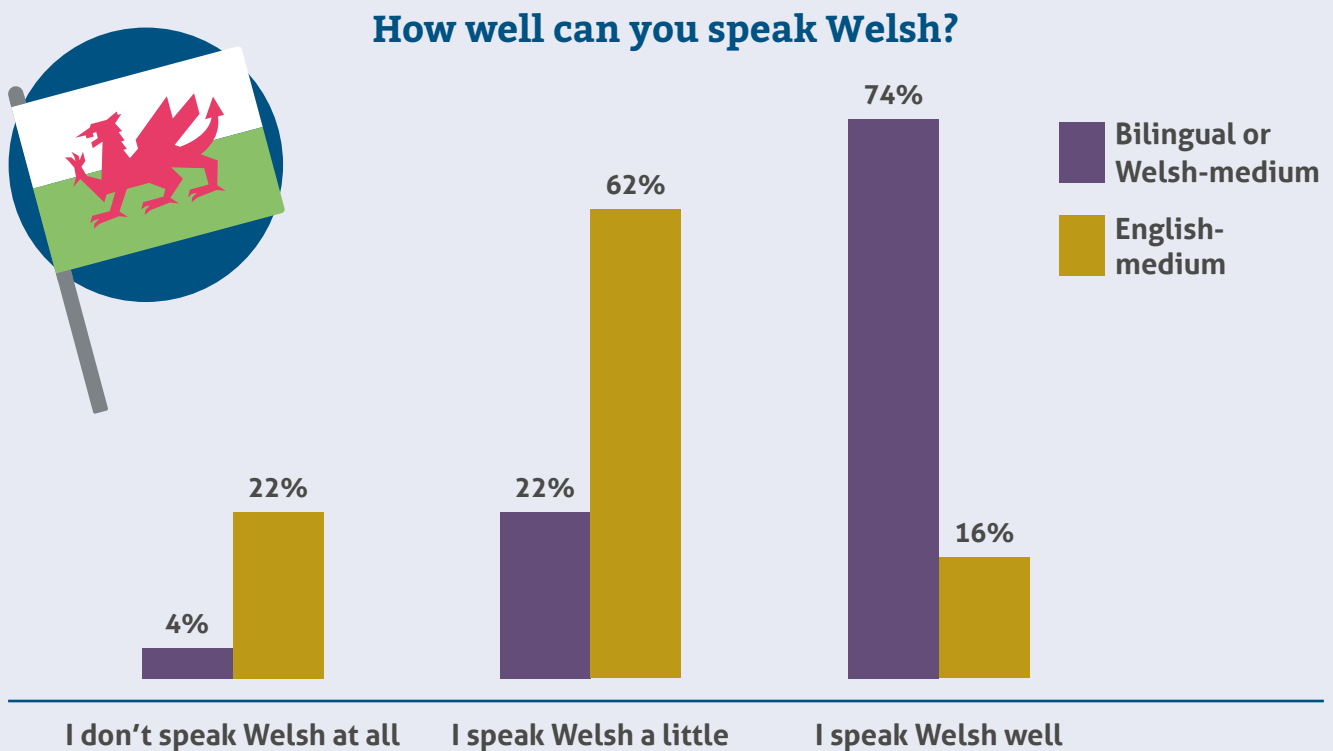
1	School issues
2	Climate crisis
3	Palestine
4	Independence for Wales
5	Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme



# Language

9% of pupils told us that everyone at home speaks a language other than English or Welsh, with 26% saying that some family members at home speak other languages. Some were happy to share which languages their families speak, giving us a picture of the linguistic diversity of Welsh schools. These include mostly languages of Europe, South Asia, the Middle East, and West Africa.

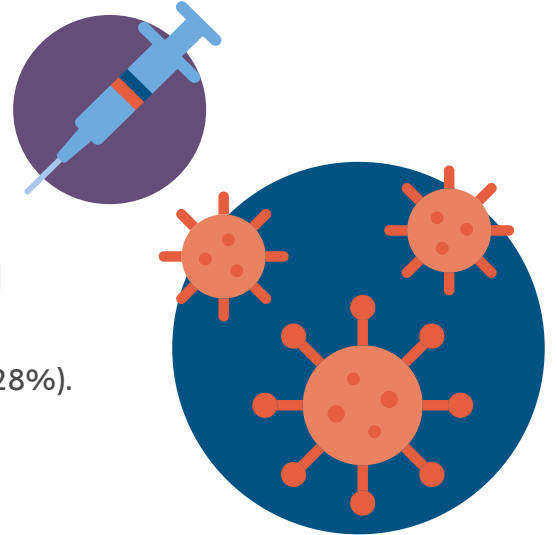
74% of pupils at Welsh- or bilingual-medium schools told us they 'speak Welsh well'. At English-medium schools (including those schools with significant use of Welsh), the proportion was 16%. Instead of comparing schools, we can use these self-reported figures to gauge the confidence and attitudes of pupils within schools of the same language medium.



Our pupils at bilingual- or Welsh-medium schools had more confidence in learning a new language (25% "not confident at all") than pupils in English-medium schools (18% "not confident at all"). The highest proportion of pupils selected that they were "somewhat confident" in learning a new language, regardless of the amount of Welsh spoken at home. The proportion of pupils who were "very confident" in learning a new language was highest among pupils with languages other than English or Welsh spoken by everyone in the home.

32% of this year's sample told us that they don't speak Welsh with anyone, though the majority of pupils (66%) speak Welsh with their teachers. 43% of pupils who speak Welsh with their teachers come from non-Welsh-speaking homes, though 19% out of the 43% do have Welsh speakers in their extended families. 49% of pupils at English-medium schools responded that they speak Welsh with their teachers, which emphasises the importance of Welsh-speaking teachers in improving children's communicative competence within English-medium schools.

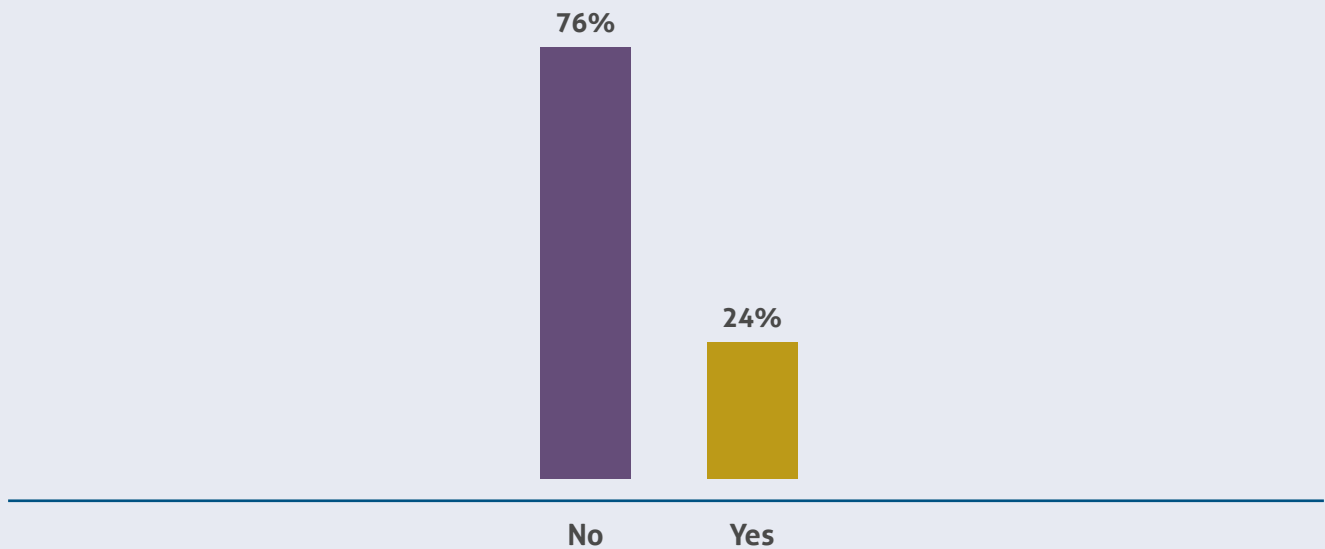
# Vaccines



**In one school, nearly a third of pupils had missed the opportunity to be vaccinated.**

At most schools, the rates were closer to a quarter (around 23-28%). The lowest proportion was 18% of pupils missing the vaccine (in two schools).

## Have you missed an opportunity to be vaccinated at your current school (including nasal spray)?



**Of the 24% of pupils who missed the opportunity to get a vaccine, a third were absent from school the day the vaccine was offered.**

26% gave 'other' reasons including many who had an issue with obtaining parental permission (either forgetting or having an issue with the electronic system). 23% said that their parents or carers did not want them to get the vaccine on that day. In addition, 'I was too scared' was another common response.

# Heroes and villains



This year we repeated a question asked in our first survey in 2012-13, in which pupils named the three famous people they most admired, and the three they most disliked.

Our aim was to understand how young people's social values have changed over time. We also wanted to know whether there would be high levels of admiration for controversial and misogynist figures such as Andrew Tate, given the widespread concern about the influence of such people on boys in particular.

As in 2012-13, we found that pupils mostly admired pop and sports stars. However, the type of athletes has changed over the last decade: two Welsh rugby players made the top 10 heroes in 2013, when Wales secured their second consecutive Six Nations win. In 2024, only football players are represented, perhaps a reflection of Wales's lack of recent success on the rugby pitch.

There were also changes to the types of people they disliked: in 2012-13, the villains were mainly athletes and musicians, with only one political figure in the top 10, represented by David Cameron. However, in 2023-24, we find four political figures in the top five. These include Conservative and right-wing figures, with Rishi Sunak at number 2 and Donald Trump at number 3. The results suggest that Andrew Tate may not be as admired as feared: he was the fourth most disliked figure, and did not rank amongst the top 10 most admired, receiving only six likes overall.

	Heroes 2013	Heroes 2024		Villains 2013	Villains 2024
1	Jessie J	Cristiano Ronaldo	1	Justin Bieber	Taylor Swift
2	Taylor Swift	Taylor Swift	2	One Direction	Rishi Sunak
3	Beyonce	Lionel Messi	3	Nicki Minaj	Donald Trump
4	One Direction	Gareth Bale	4	Lady Gaga	Andrew Tate
5	Lionel Messi	Adam Sandler	5	Simon Cowell	Adolf Hitler
6	Leigh Halfpenny	Ryan Reynolds	6	Harry Styles	Jojo Siwa
7	Cristiano Ronaldo	Olivia Rodrigo	7	Katie Price	Vladimir Putin
8	Jessica Ennis	Adele	8	Wayne Rooney	James Charles
9	George North	Kanye West	9	Luis Suarez	Harry Styles
10	Rihanna	Eminem	10	David Cameron	Kanye West



Taylor Swift appears to be the most divisive figure – she was the second most admired (in both surveys) and the most disliked of all in 2024.

# Funding

The WMCS is based at Cardiff University and is funded by the Welsh Government.

# About us

The Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD) is a national, interdisciplinary, social science research institute. We have been designated by the Welsh Government as a national research centre.



[wiserd.ac.uk](http://wiserd.ac.uk)



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# How to get involved

If you work at a school and would like to participate in the WMCS, please get in touch:  
[WMCS@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:WMCS@cardiff.ac.uk)

WISERD works in partnership with a wide range of different organisations. If you would like to find out more about our research, are interested in working with us on a joint event or would like to co-produce a piece of research, please get in touch.