



Preparing for Adulthood

**Pupil Wellbeing
Survey 2026**

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Introduction

Preparing for adulthood is an important part of children and young people's development. It involves building the confidence, knowledge and practical skills needed to move into adult life and to make informed choices about education, employment, relationships, health and independent living. This report considers preparation for adulthood across four key pillars: planning for employment and continued education, developing independent living skills, participating in the community, and maintaining good health. These areas are closely linked, as young people who feel confident, supported and connected are more likely to make a successful transition into adulthood.

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey (PWS) and Online Pupil Survey™ (OPS) is a biennial survey that has been undertaken with Gloucestershire students since 2006. Children and young people participate in Years 4, 5 and 6 in primary settings; Years 8 and 10 in secondary settings; and Years 12 and 13 in post-16 settings such as sixth forms and colleges. A large proportion of mainstream, special and independent settings, colleges and educational establishments take part, representing approximately 70.0% of students in participating year groups in 2026. The PWS asks a wide variety of questions about children's characteristics, behaviours and lived experience that could have an impact on their overall wellbeing. The 2026 PWS was undertaken between January and April 2026.

Limitations and caveats of the survey

Not all children and young people who are resident in Gloucestershire attend educational establishments in the county and similarly not all children and young people attending educational establishments in Gloucestershire are residents in the county. It is therefore important to remember this analysis is based on the student population not the resident population.

Gloucestershire is a grammar authority and has a number of notable independent settings, and several mainstream settings very close to the county's boundary; these all attract students from out of county. This results in the education population (particularly at secondary phase) having slightly different characteristics, especially ethnicity, to the resident young people's population. 12.3% of Gloucestershire's resident population (2021 Census) were estimated to be from diverse ethnic communities; however, 23.1% of Gloucestershire's education population were students from diverse ethnic communities in January 2026 and 23.4% of the PWS cohort were students from diverse ethnic communities in the 2026 survey.

Although a large proportion of the county's educational settings took part in the survey, some only had low numbers of students completing the survey; in contrast, others had high numbers. Although this doesn't impact the overall county analysis, as demographics are represented as expected at this geography, analysis by district and education phase might only have certain demographic groups represented due to low student take-up (for example, low numbers completing the survey in Tewkesbury at FE level). Where FE provision is situated also impacts the survey, as older students travel further to access FE provision.



Analysis of deprivation

Settings have been categorised into statistical neighbour groups which cluster settings with students of a similar socio-economic profile within the same type of setting (a similar level of

deprivation, affluence or personal/family characteristics).

We use Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to determine the relative deprivation of students. The IMD is based on the home postcode of students (collected in the School Census). This is aggregated to give an overall IMD score for the setting, reflecting the deprivation levels experienced by students. The settings are then split into quintiles based on their scores: quintile 1 is the most deprived and quintile 5 is the least deprived in Gloucestershire.

In addition:

- Grammar/selective settings are compared to other grammar/selective settings in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Independent settings are compared to other independent settings in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Post-16 only/Further Education (FE) colleges are compared to all other post-16 only colleges without reference to the IMD.
- Special settings are compared to all other schools of this type in the same phase without reference to the IMD.
- Vocational and alternative settings are compared to other settings in the same phase without reference to IMD.



General feelings about the future

Key takeaways:

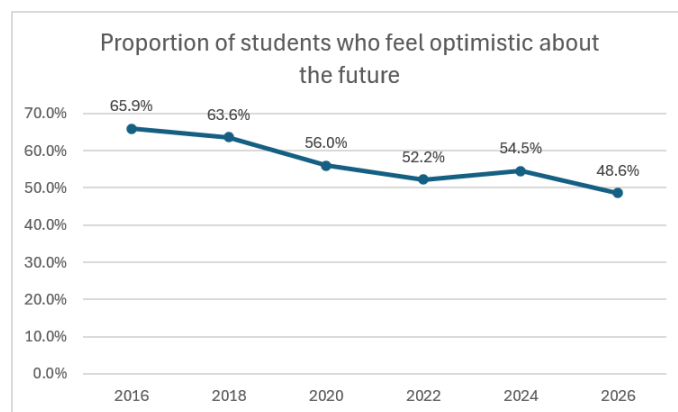
- Just under half of students reported feeling optimistic about the future generally, with optimism continuing to decline since 2016.
- However, around 8 in 10 students reported feeling confident about **their own future**, suggesting that personal confidence remains relatively high overall.
- Positive feelings about the future are consistently lower among females, older students, students with low mental wellbeing and students with vulnerable characteristics.
- Pride in achievements and feeling valued both reduce with age and are strongly associated with mental wellbeing.
- Inequalities are evident by sex, ethnicity, deprivation, district and vulnerability, suggesting that emotional readiness for adulthood is unevenly experienced across

Throughout childhood, many skills and attributes are developed to enable children to prepare for adulthood. These include optimism, confidence and pride in achievements. Optimism fosters resilience, improves problem solving, and protects mental health. It ensures young people move forwards when life gets difficult. Confidence is a crucial life skill that influences a child's ability to navigate social interactions, academic challenges, and future career opportunities. Having pride in their achievements helps young people build self-efficacy and reinforces work ethic.

Together, these traits create emotional maturity young people need to make a successful transition to adulthood.

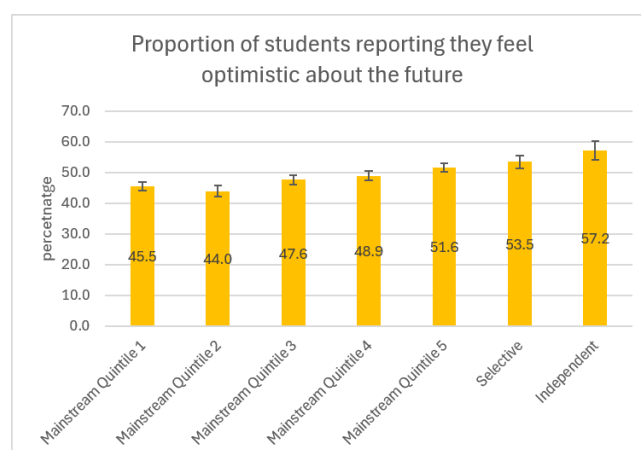
Optimism in the future

Just under half of all students (48.2%) said they felt optimistic about the future. The proportion of students feeling optimistic about the future has been declining since 2016 when almost two thirds felt optimistic about the future.

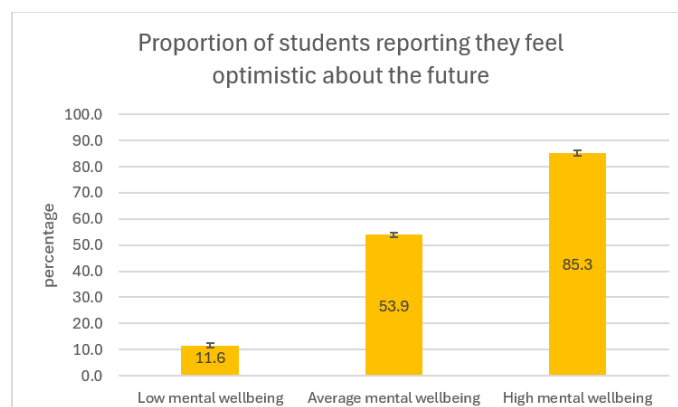


Feeling optimistic about the future was highest in Year 6 (51.9%) and lowest in Year 10 (44.5%). Females (44.5%) were significantly less likely to say they felt optimistic about the future than males (53.9%). Students in Cheltenham and Cotswold districts were more likely to feel optimistic about the future.

Feeling optimistic about the future appears to be linked to deprivation.



There appears to be a strong correlation between optimism about the future and mental wellbeing. Students with low mental wellbeing (LMW) were significantly less likely to feel optimistic about the future than those with average and high mental wellbeing.

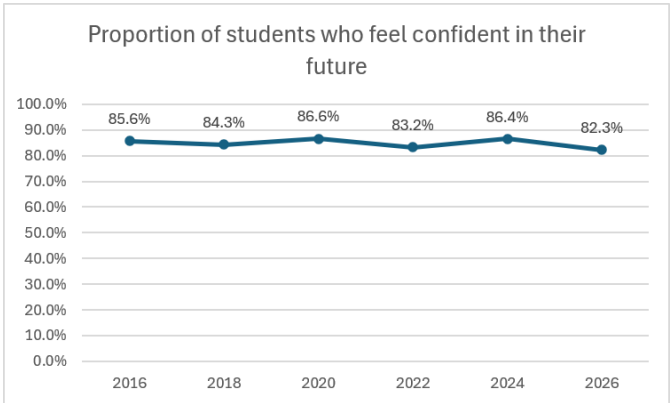


There was no difference in optimism in the future between students from different ethnic groups.

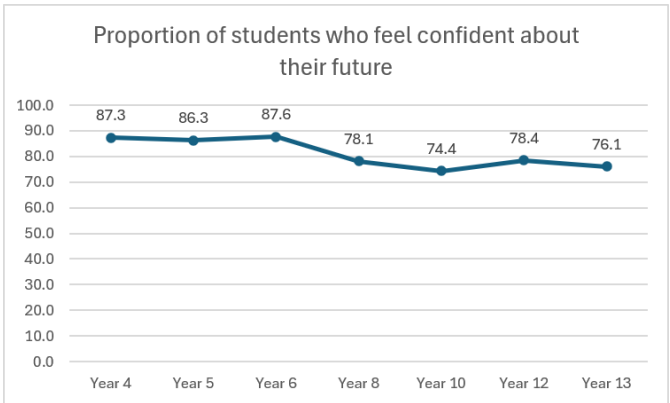
Students from vulnerable groups were more likely to not feel optimistic about the future than their less vulnerable peers, especially LGBTQ+ students (OR 2.3) and those experiencing 4+ ACEs (OR 2.4).

Feeling confident in personal future

8 in 10 students (83.1%) said they felt *quite confident/confident/extremely confident* about their future. The proportion of students who feel confident about their future has fluctuated slightly but remained between 8 and 9 in 10.



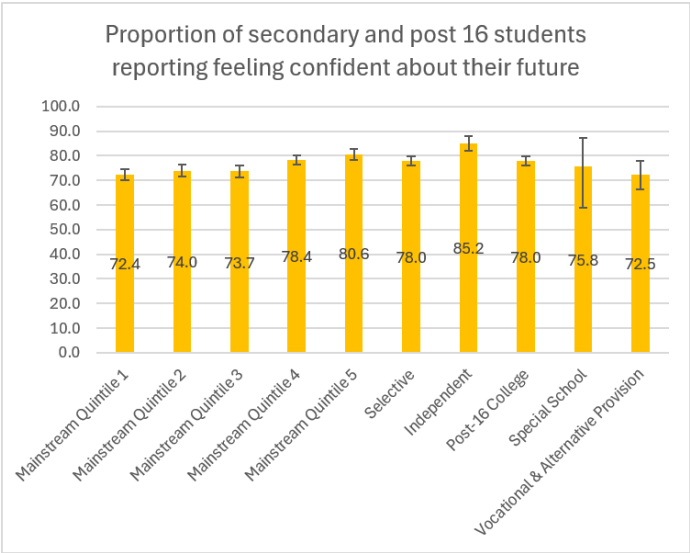
This appears to reduce as students age although not in a linear way. Confidence in their future reduces during the transition to secondary school.



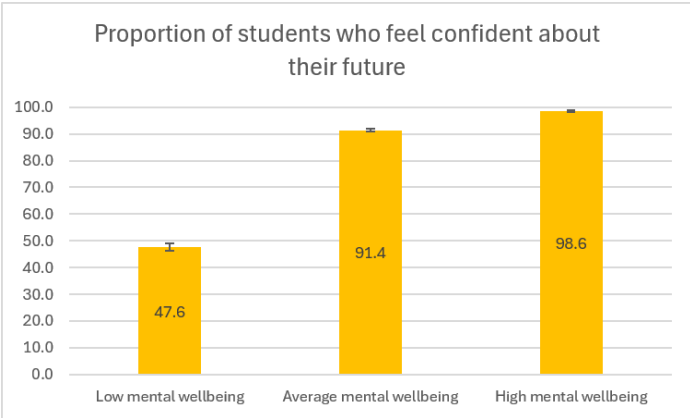
Females (78.6%) were significantly less likely to feel confident about their future than males (86.5%).



In mainstream settings the proportion of students reporting they feel confident about their future increases as deprivation decreases from 72.4% in quintile 1 (most deprived) to 80.6% in quintile 5 (least deprived).



Again, students with low mental wellbeing were significantly less likely to say they felt confident about their future. Although this may also be influenced by age, as older students are more likely to have both low mental wellbeing and feel less confident about their future.



The proportion of students who felt confident about their future was highest in Cheltenham (84.5%) and

Tewkesbury (83.3%) and lowest in Gloucester (80.6%) and Forest of Dean (81.2%).

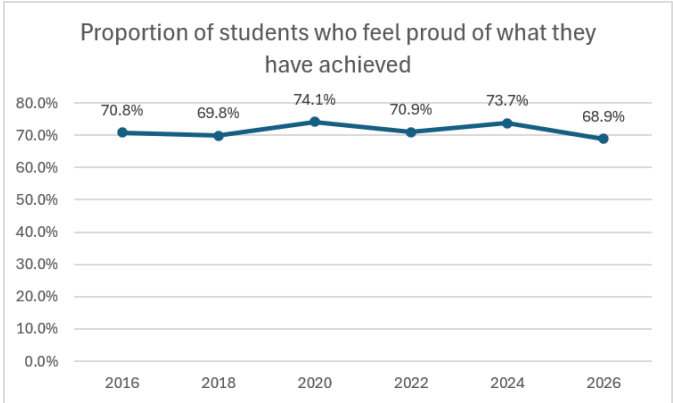
Students from diverse ethnic communities (80.5%) were significantly less likely to report they felt confident about their future than white British students (83.0%). This was particularly influenced by Mixed white and Black African students (77.1%) and white students who were not white British, particularly Gypsy Roma (72.0%) and white eastern European (78.2%).

Vulnerable students were more likely to say they were **not** confident about their future. Those with 4+ ACEs (*OR* 3.6), those seriously bullied (*OR* 3.0), LGBTQ+ students (*OR* 3.0), and neurodivergent students (*OR* 2.0) were significantly more likely to say they were not confident in their future.

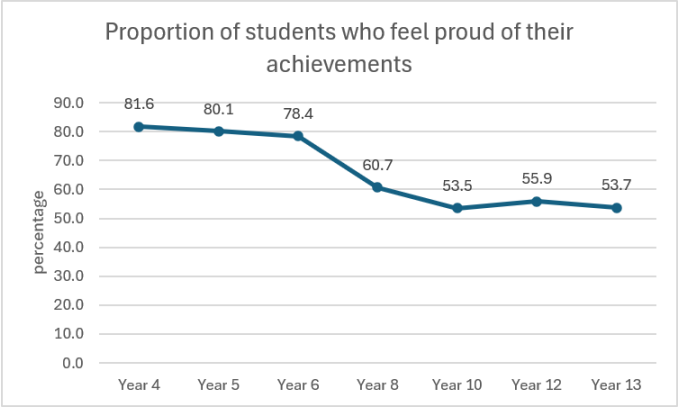
Feeling proud of achievements

Feeling proud is higher in primary age students and drops when students transition to secondary settings, remaining lower through post-16 education.

The proportion of students reporting they feel proud of what they have achieved has remained broadly stable - fluctuating around 7 in 10 over the last 10 years.



Pride in personal achievements drops significantly from 8 in 10 to 6 in 10 between primary (79.9%) and secondary education (57.4%).



Females (66.4%) were less likely to feel proud of their achievements than males (73.1%). Students from diverse ethnic communities (64.7%) were also less likely to feel proud than white British students (70.3%).

Students in Gloucester (65.2%) and Forest of Dean (66.4%) were the least likely to feel proud.

Only a quarter of students with low mental wellbeing (25.3%) reported feeling proud compared to 96.9% of those with high mental wellbeing.

Almost all more vulnerable students were significantly more likely to say they did **not** feel proud of their achievements than their less vulnerable peers. Those who were seriously bullied (*OR* 3.2) and students who had experienced 4+ ACEs (*OR* 3.8) were more than three times more likely to say they did not feel proud of their achievements. Students from all other vulnerable groups, except those eligible for FSM and with SEN were twice as likely to report they did not feel proud of their achievements.

In 2026 71.5% of students said they felt valued by their peers and adults around them.

Again, this reduced as students aged, with a higher proportion of primary students reporting they felt valued than secondary and post-16 students.

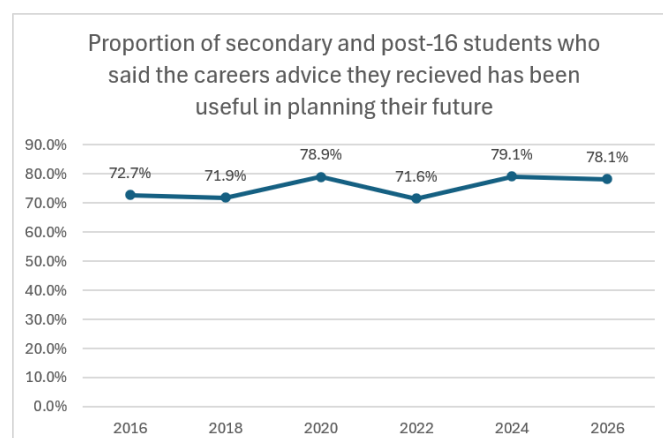
Planning for employment and continued education

Key Takeaways:

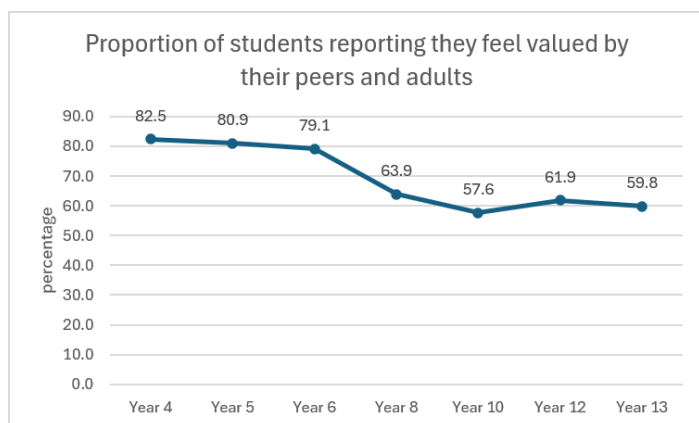
- Most secondary and post-16 students reported that careers advice was helpful, with post-16 students more likely than secondary students to find it useful.
- A significant minority of students remain unsure about their post-Year 11 plans, although uncertainty reduces between Year 8 and Year 10.
- Planned destinations vary by sex, setting type, deprivation, district, ethnicity and vulnerability.
- Students with vulnerable characteristics were generally less likely to plan to go to sixth form, college or university, and more likely to report uncertainty or poorer outcomes.
- Paid work increases substantially with age, but access to paid work appears to

Careers advice

Almost 8 in 10 of secondary and post-16 students said they felt the careers advice they had received had been *OK/useful/very useful* for planning their future in 2026.



Students in post-16 settings were significantly more likely to report their careers advice had been helpful (83.0%) than those in secondary education (75.5%).

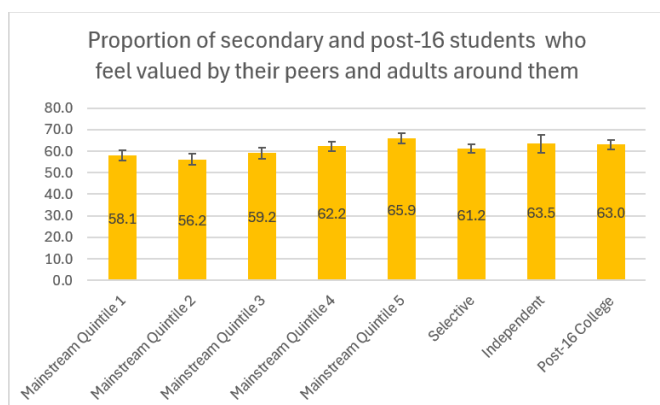


Female students (69.6%) were significantly less likely to feel valued than male students (74.8%).

Only a third of students with LMW (33.0%) reported feeling valued compared to almost all of those with high mental wellbeing (96.0%).

Students from diverse ethnic communities (67.3%) were significantly less likely to say they felt valued than their white British peers (72.8%)

There was little relationship between deprivation and feeling valued although in the secondary and post-16 phases those in the least deprived settings (65.9%) were significantly more likely to feel valued than those from the most deprived (58.1%).



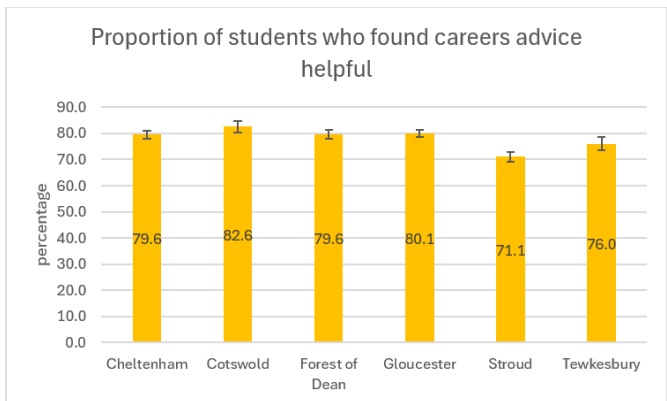
Students who identify as LGBTQ+ (*OR* 2.5) and those who were seriously bullied (*OR* 2.2) were significantly more likely to say they did not feel valued by their peers or adults around them.



In the secondary phase males (79.2%) are significantly more likely to say careers advice has been helpful than females (72.5%). By the post-16 phase there is no significant difference between the sexes although males are still more likely to say they find careers advice helpful (84.2% vs. 82.3%).

Students with vulnerable characteristics weren't significantly more likely to say they found careers advice less helpful than their less vulnerable peers. Although students with 4+ ACEs were more likely (OR 1.8) to say they found careers advice less helpful than those with less than 4 ACEs.

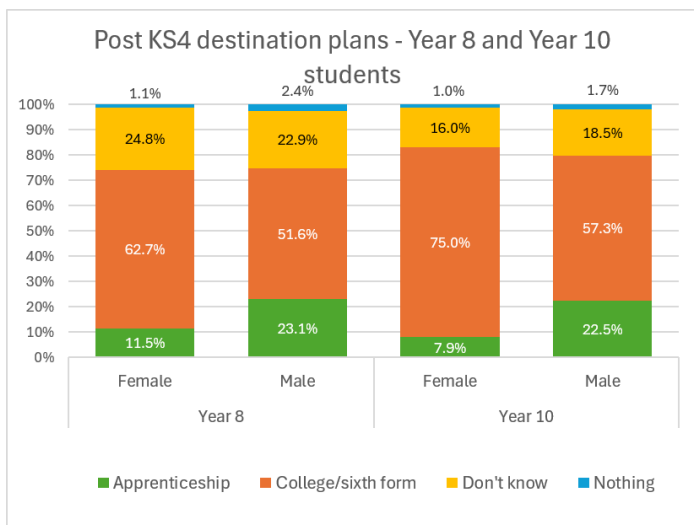
Students in settings in Stroud were significantly less likely to report they found the careers advice they received had been helpful in planning their future than any other district.



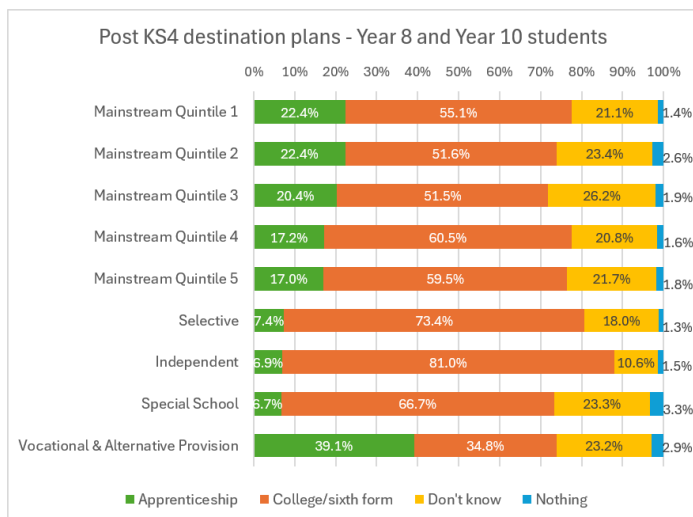
Planned destinations following Year 11 (KS4)



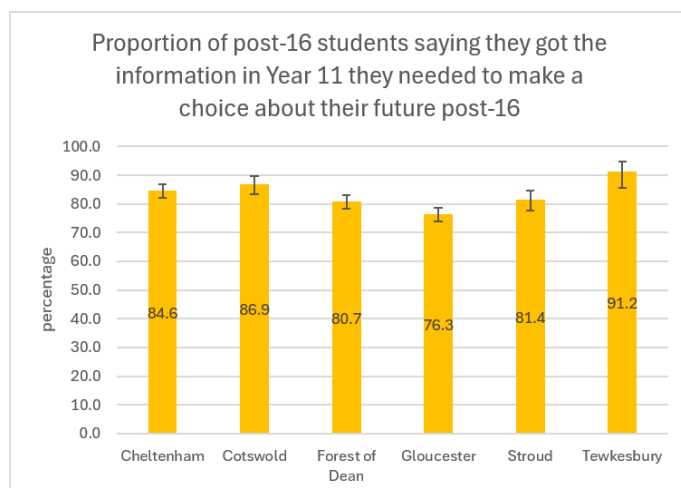
Students in Year 8 and Year 10 were asked what they plan to do after Year 11 (KS4). Overall; 17.2% said they planned to do an apprenticeship, 59.7% they planned to go to college/sixth form, 1.7% said they planned to do nothing and 21.3% didn't know. This was different between the sexes and changed as students aged; particularly not knowing what they planned to do next, which reduced between Year 8 and Year 10.



Students in mainstream settings were more likely than students in selective, independent and special settings to say they planned to do an apprenticeship, and this was also highest in the most deprived settings. Students at special settings were the most likely to say they planned to do nothing after Year 11.

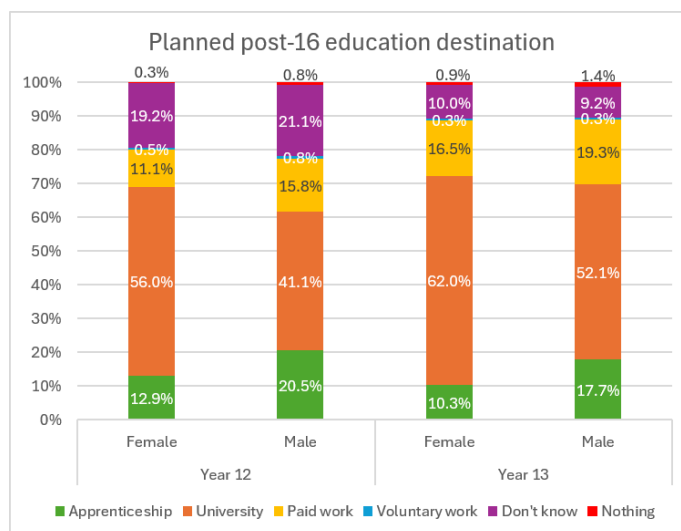
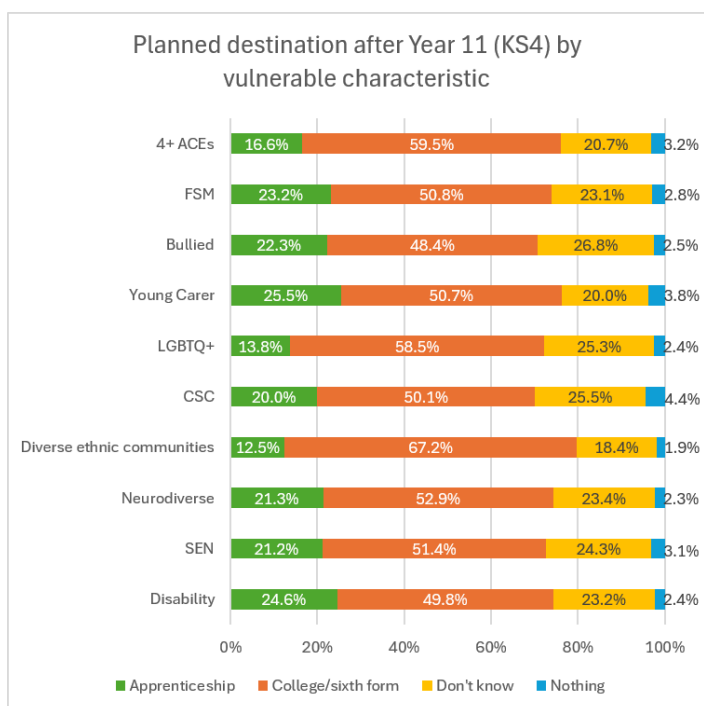


able to get all the information in Year 11 to understand their post-16 choices, although they may have attended a secondary setting elsewhere. .



Students with vulnerable characteristics also had different plans after Year 11 than their less vulnerable peers. Typically, except for those from diverse ethnic communities, students with vulnerable characteristics were less likely to plan to go to sixth form/college than their less vulnerable peers.

Students in post-16 settings were also asked what they planned to do after leaving college/sixth form. There was a reduction in the proportion of students who said they didn't know between Year 12 and Year 13 for both males and females. In both year groups males were more likely to say they planned to do an apprenticeship after sixth form/college.

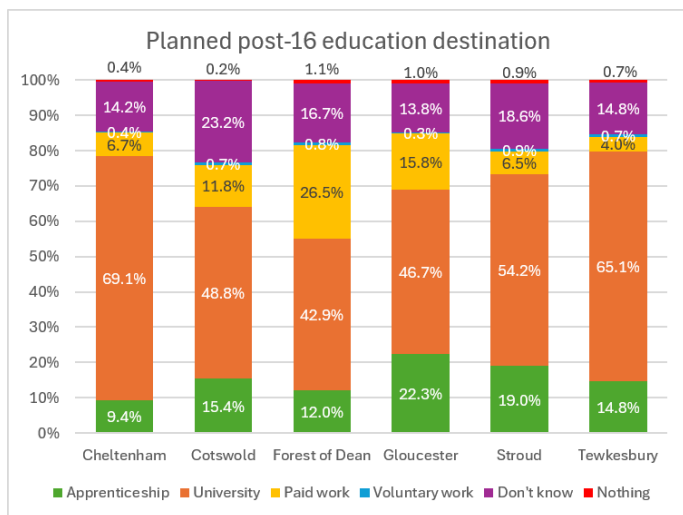


Planned destinations following post-16 education (KS5)

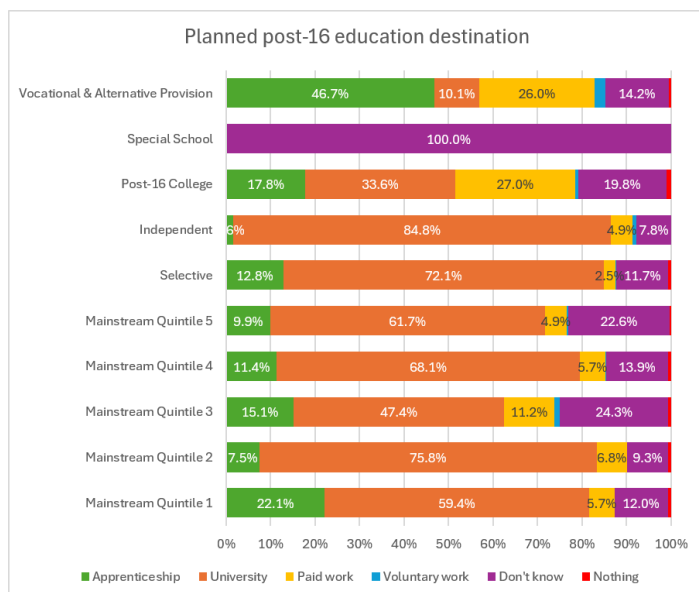
8 in 10 post-16 students said during Year 11 they were able to get all the information they needed to give a picture of the range of choices available to them after Year 11.

Students in Gloucester were the most likely to say they planned to start an apprenticeship after post-16 education. Students in Forest of Dean were the least likely to say they planned to go to university and the most likely to say they planned to go into paid work.

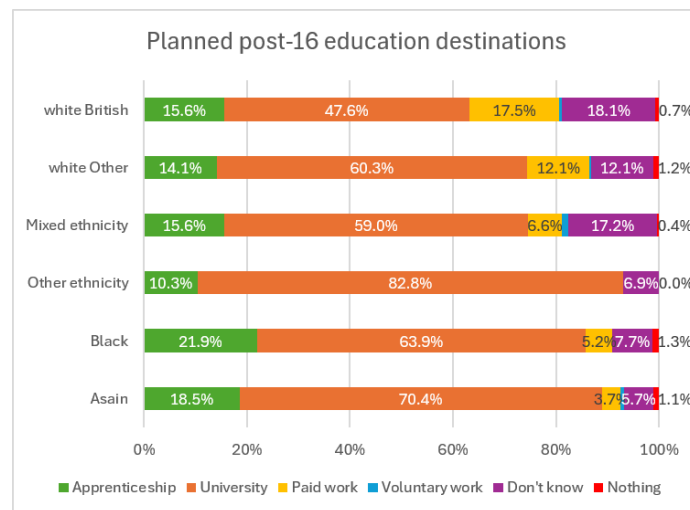
Students in Gloucester settings (in post-16 education) were the least likely to say they were



Students at independent settings were the most likely to say they planned to go to university. Students in post-16 colleges were the most likely to say they planned to go into paid work. All of post-16 students in special settings said they didn't know what they were going to do next, although numbers were very small and half of students in special settings chose not to answer the question.



Students from white British backgrounds were the least likely to say they planned to go to university, and the most likely to say they planned to go into paid work after post-16 education. White British students were also the most likely to say they didn't know what they were going to do next.



Students from vulnerable groups were overall less likely to say they planned to go to university apart from LGBTQ+ students. Planning to go to university was lowest in students with

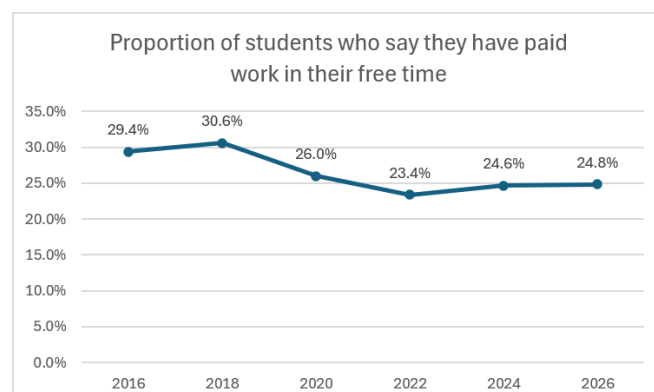
- Disability (39.9%)
- Known to social care (41.4%)
- Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) (42.2%)
- Bullied (42.9%)

Students known to social care (22.1% vs. 15.4%) and those eligible for FSM (18.5% vs. 15.7%) were significantly more likely to say they planned to go into an apprenticeship than their less vulnerable peers.

Students from all vulnerable groups were more likely to say they planned to do nothing after post-16 education than their less vulnerable peers. This was especially high in those reporting being bullied regularly where 1 in 10 said they planned to do nothing after post-16 education.

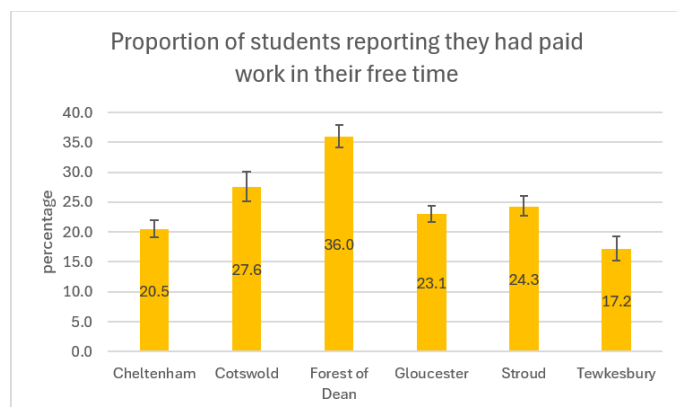
Paid work

The proportion of secondary and post-16 students who said they had paid work in their free time has been broadly similar since 2022.

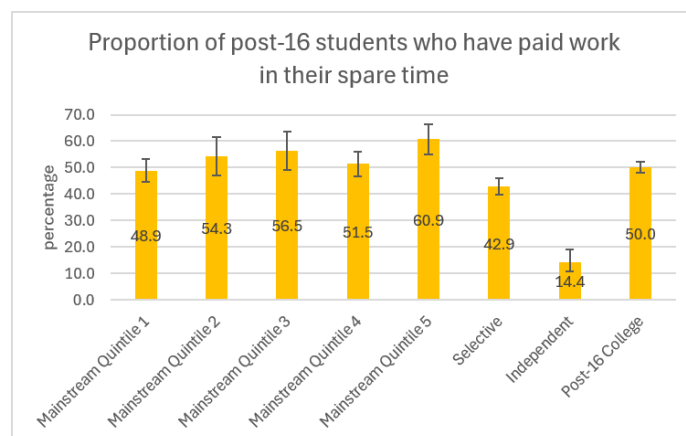


Having paid work increases as students age, from 8.1% in Year 8 to 53.7% in Year 13.

Students in Forest of Dean were significantly more likely to say they had paid work than all other districts and students in Tewkesbury (17.2%) were the least likely.



When looking at post-16 students only, there appears to be some association with deprivation and having paid work. Students in quintile 1 settings (most deprived) (48.9%) were significantly less likely to have paid work than students in quintile 5 (least deprived) (60.9%). Students at independent settings were the least likely to have paid work (14.4%), although were more likely to come from a more affluent background.



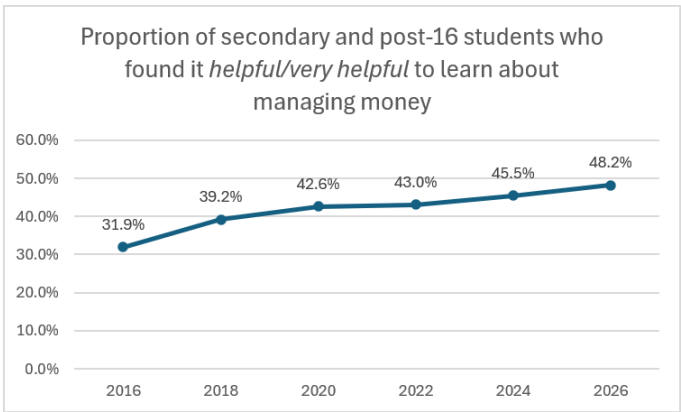
Independent living skills

Key takeaways:

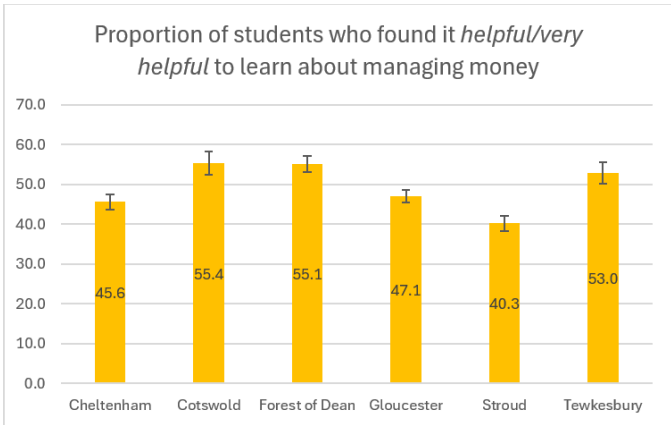
- Students increasingly report that learning about managing money is helpful.
- Money management and cooking skills were the most identified areas where students wanted more support.
- A notable proportion of students also wanted more information about fake news, AI, relationships and parenting skills.
- Reading habits decline as students age, particularly during the early teenage years.
- Reading is associated with mental wellbeing and academic confidence, although the relationship is not always linear and varies by phase and deprivation.

Managing money

Moving towards adulthood means students learn more skills to help them prepare for independent living. Secondary and post-16 students were asked how helpful they found it to learn about managing money. The proportion of students saying they found it helpful to learn about managing money has been steadily increasing since 2016.



There was some variation between district of setting and finding it helpful to learn about managing money.



Adult skills

Students were also asked what topics they felt they needed more support or knowledge in.

To help them prepare for independent living:

- 31.0% wanted to know more about money management
- 15.3% wanted to know more about fake news and AI
- 26.2% wanted to know more about cooking skills
- 14.7% wanted to know more about relationships
- 10.9% wanted to know more about parenting skills



Reading

Reading prepares students for adulthood by building critical thinking skills, expanding their vocabulary, and teaching practical knowledge for work and daily life.

Research¹ suggests reading for pleasure in early childhood increases cognitive performance and mental wellbeing in later teenage and young adult years.

In 2026 a question about reading habits was expanded to all students where previously it was only asked to primary students.

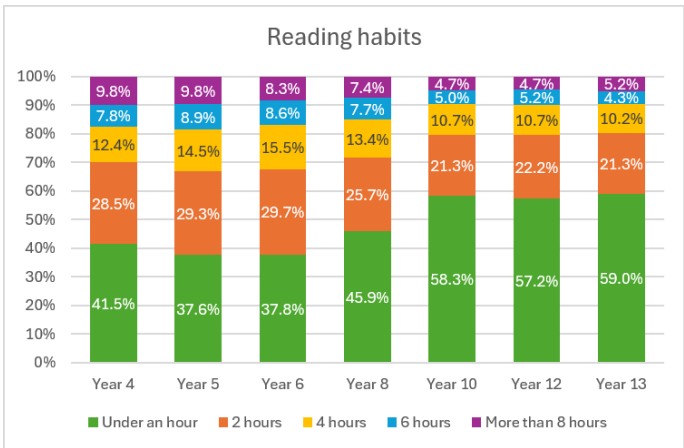
Research from the National Literacy Trust² suggests in 2026, 1 in 5 (20.3%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they read daily in their free time.

In the PWS 14.8% of all students said they read for 6 or more hours a week, 53.9% said they read for 2 or more hours a week.

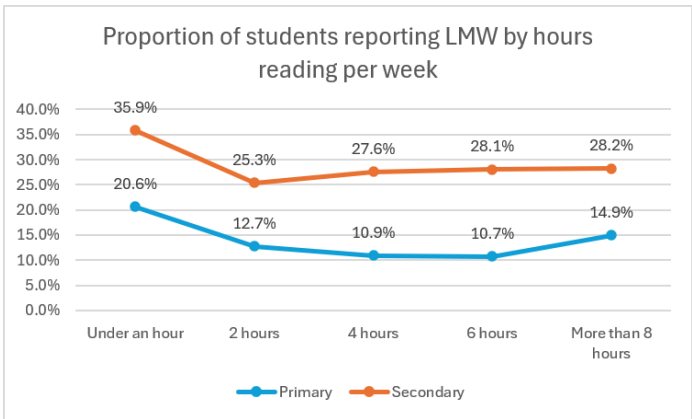
The chart below shows time spent reading decreases as students age particularly in the early teens.

¹ <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/reading-for-pleasure-early-in-childhood-linked-to-better-cognitive-performance-and-mental-wellbeing>

² <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-reading-in-2026/>

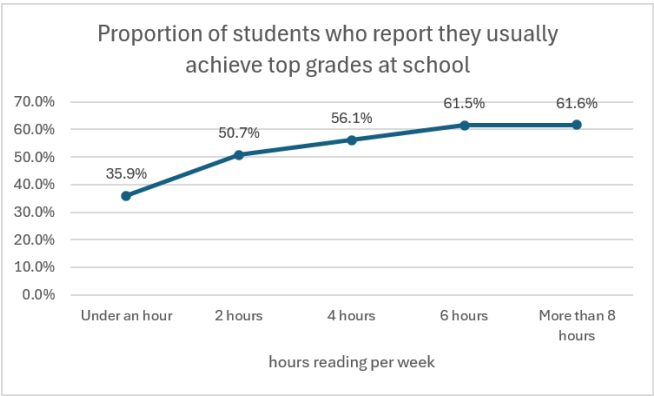


In the primary and secondary phases, students with high mental wellbeing were significantly more likely to report reading for 2 or more hours per week than those with low mental wellbeing (70.0% vs. 49.4% and 62.7% vs. 42.4% respectively). Similarly, the proportion of students with low mental wellbeing is highest in those who read less than an hour a week. However, the link between reading and wellbeing doesn't appear to be linear. The highest proportion of low mental wellbeing is seen for those reading less than an hour per week, while a similar proportion is found for reading for 2 hours or more.

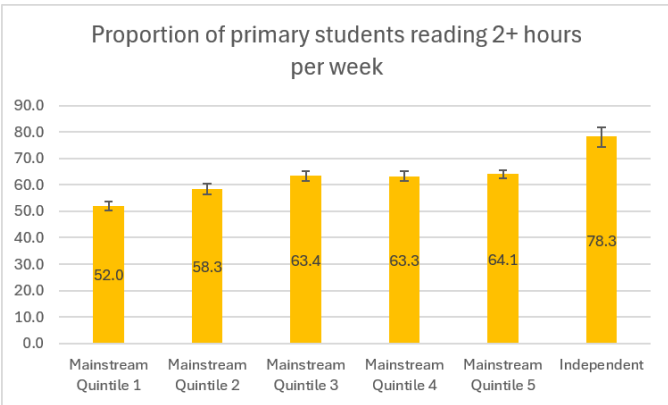


Feeling like they have achieved top grades at school does appear to have a linear correlation with reported hours reading per week. As the number of hours a student reads increased so did the

proportion who reported they often get top grades at school.

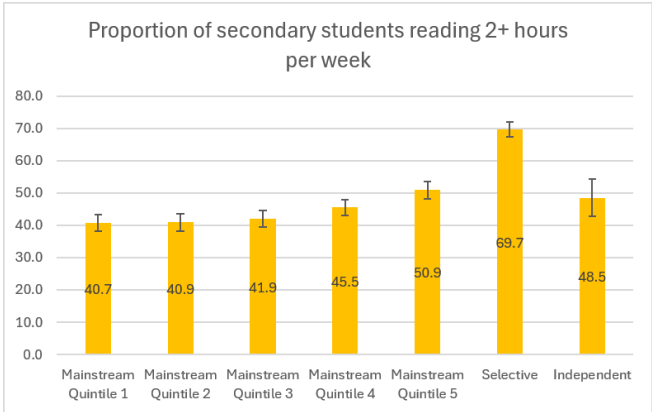


Deprivation appears to have a complex relationship with hours reading. In the primary phase the proportion of students reading 2 or more hours increases as deprivation decreases between quintile 1 (most deprived) and quintile 3 before plateauing in less deprived mainstream settings. Primary students in independent settings were the most likely to report reading 2 or more hours a week in the primary phase.



In the secondary phase there is no significant difference in the proportion of students reporting reading 2 or more hours per week between quintile 1 and 3, however, between quintile 3 and quintile 5 (least deprived) settings the proportion of students reading more than 2 hours increases as deprivation

decreases. Selective setting students were the most likely to report reading 2 or more hours a week in the secondary phase.



There is no correlation with deprivation and reading in the post-16 phase.

Participating in the community

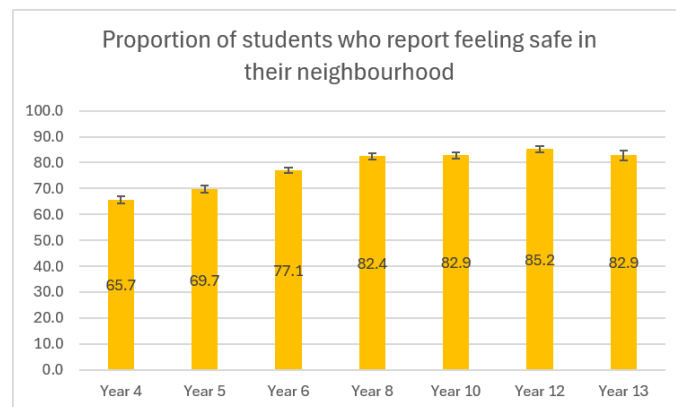
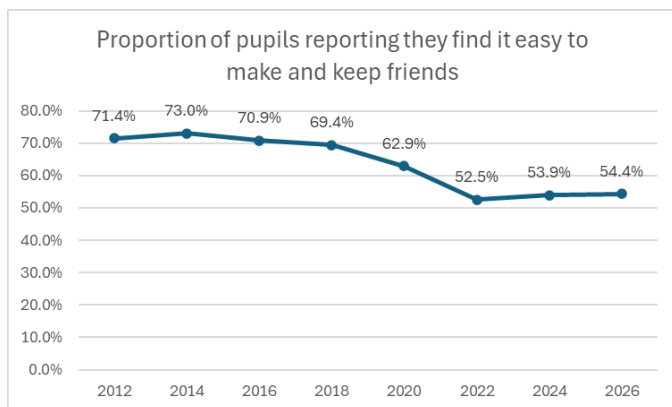
Key Takeaways:

- The proportion of students who find it easy to make and keep friends has improved slightly since 2022 but remains below earlier levels.
- Feeling safe in the neighbourhood has also improved since the pandemic period, but remains linked to deprivation, particularly in secondary settings.
- Around 1 in 5 secondary and post-16 students reported doing voluntary work, with higher levels among females and students in Stroud.
- Just over half of students said they felt they belonged to their school community, with lower levels reported among females compared with males, students from diverse ethnic communities compared with white British students, students in more deprived settings compared with those in less deprived settings.
- Interest in environmental issues, politics and global affairs suggests some students want greater opportunities to engage with wider social and community issues.

Friendships

Making friends and learning how to form relationships is an essential part of a young person’s development and is a skill they will use throughout their lives. Having friends boosts a young person’s self-esteem and confidence.

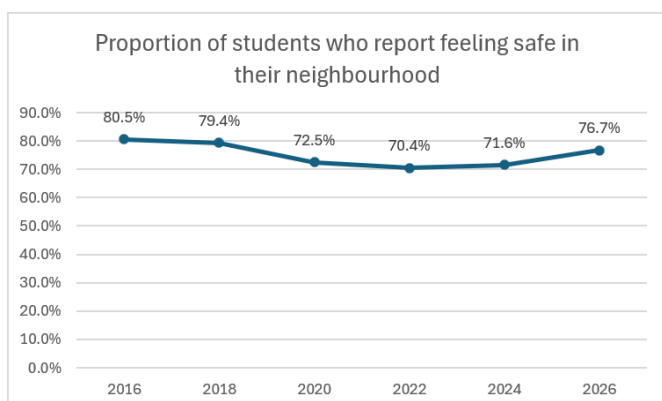
The proportion of students saying they find it easy to make and keep friends had been in decline between 2012 (71.4%) and 2022 (52.5%) with a particularly stark drop during the pandemic period. Since 2022 this has not recovered markedly aside from a small year on year increase. In 2026, there was an increase (54.4%) in students reporting that they found it easy to make and keep friends.



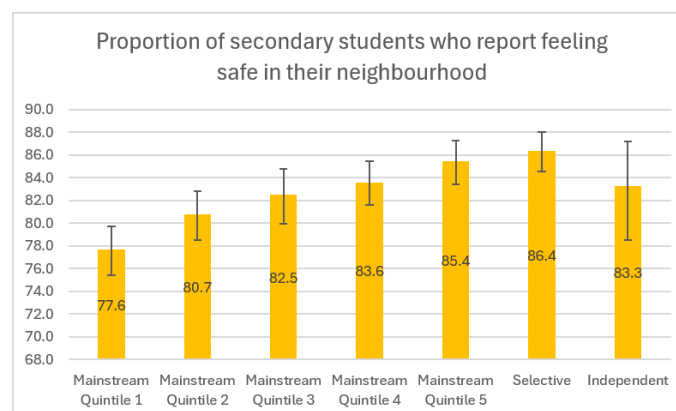
Safety in the community

Being part of a community helps young people develop confidence, resilience, and identity. Feeling safe in their neighbourhood will help students be part of the community.

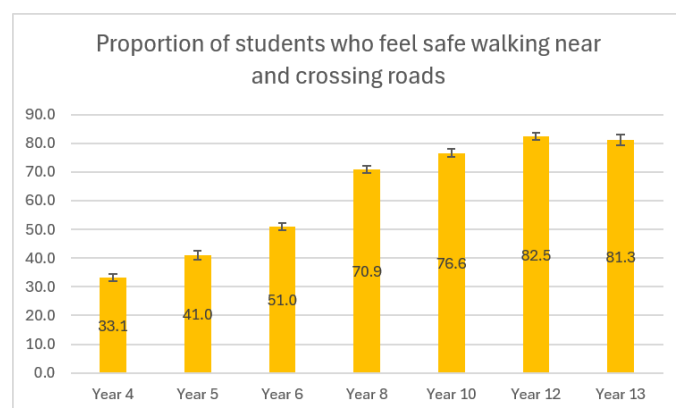
The proportion of students saying they felt *safe/very safe* in their neighbourhood had been declining between 2016 and 2022 but has slowing increased since.



Feeling safe in their neighbourhood was strongly linked to deprivation. This was particularly evident in the secondary phase where 77.6% of students at quintile 1 (most deprived) settings reported feeling safe compared to 85.4% in quintile 5 (least deprived) settings and 86.4% in selective settings.



58.0% of students said they felt safe walking near or crossing roads. This increased as students aged.



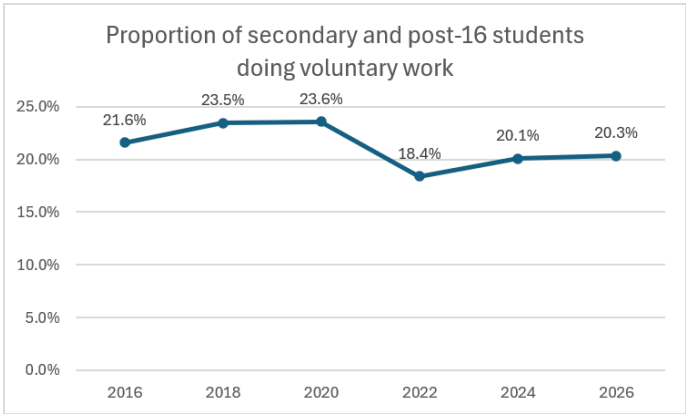
Feeling safe in their neighbourhood increases as students aged.

8 in 10 (79.4%) of students said the education they had received about staying safe had been *helpful/very helpful*. Students in primary settings were the most likely to say the education they had received about staying safe had been *helpful/very helpful*.

Youth volunteering

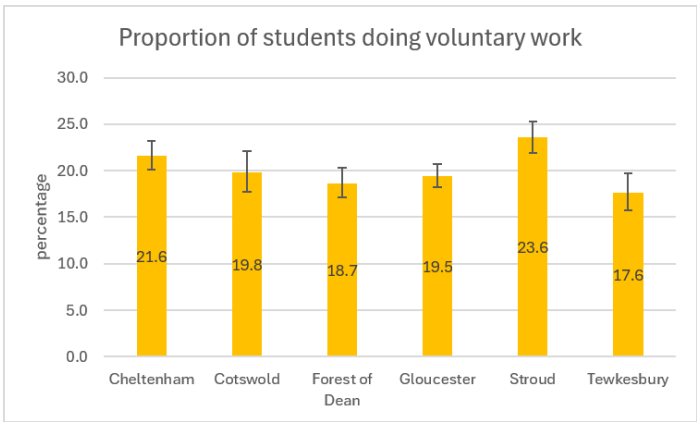
Youth volunteering provides a supportive space for personal development and understanding adult responsibilities whilst strengthening local neighbourhoods.

1 in 5 secondary and post-16 students said they did voluntary work; this was in line with 2024.



Females (22.6%) were significantly more likely to say they did voluntary work than males (18.0%).

Students in Stroud were the most likely to report doing voluntary work.



Giving to others has been shown to improve mental wellbeing and is one of the NHS Five steps to wellbeing³.



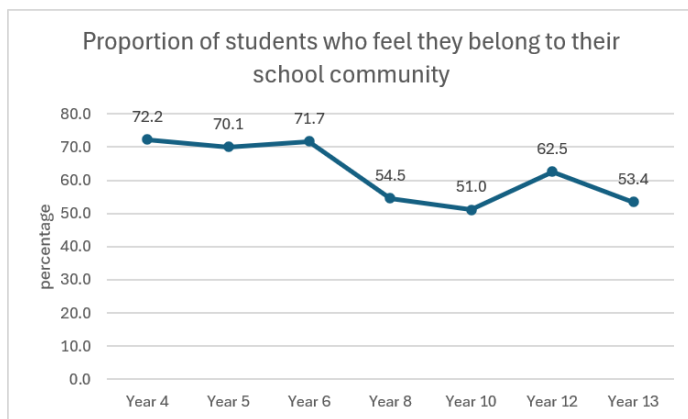
Students with HMW were more likely to report they did voluntary work than those with LMW. LGBTQ+ students with HMW were the most likely to volunteer (37.3%), significantly higher than heterosexual/cis students (22.8%). The impact of voluntary work on wellbeing appears to have a greater impact on LGBTQ+ students. LGBTQ+ students who volunteered were twice as likely to have HMW than those who didn't volunteer (*OR* 2.1), however, this increased likelihood wasn't observed in heterosexual/cis students (*OR* 1.2). It is important to note impact of volunteering on wellbeing appears to also be more pronounced for biological females; the LGBTQ+ cohort is made up of more biological females so this could be a confounding factor.

Belonging

Just over half (55.3%) said they felt like they belonged to their school community. Females (51.9%) were significantly less likely to say they felt they belonged to their school community than males (60.9%).

Belonging appears to reduce between primary and secondary phases.

³ <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>



Students from diverse ethnic communities (60.7%) were significantly less likely to say they felt they belonged in their school community than white British students (65.0%). This was particularly evident in students from Other ethnicities (55.9%), Other white ethnicities (55.2%) and Mixed ethnicities (59.1%).

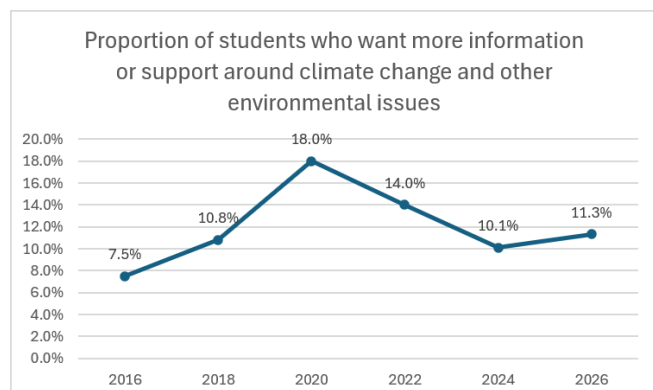
Students from quintile 1 (most deprived) (59.9%) settings were significantly less likely to report they felt they belonged in their school community than those in less deprived settings (quintile 5 – 68.5%, selective – 68.3%, Independent – 73.2%).

Students with vulnerable characteristics were significantly less likely to report they felt they belonged in their school community, specifically:

- Students with LMW (30.0%)
- Students with 4+ ACEs (34.1%)
- Students who were bullied (38.1%)
- LGBTQ+ students (38.2%)

Caring about the community

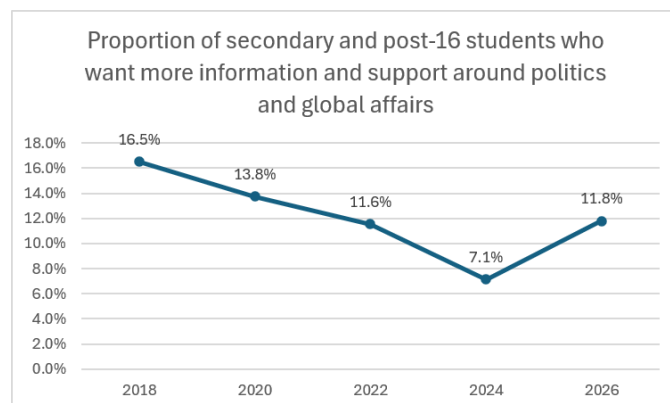
In 2026 around 1 in 10 students wanted more information and support around climate change or other environmental issues.



Females (12.2%) were significantly more likely to be concerned about the environment than males

(11.1%). The proportion of students who wanted more information and support around climate change or other environmental issues decreased through primary school and halved between primary and secondary school but was then consistent to the end of post-16 education at around 1 in 20.

After a period of decline the proportion of secondary and post-16 students who wanted more information and support around politics and global affairs increased in 2026.



Maintaining good health into adulthood

Key Takeaways:

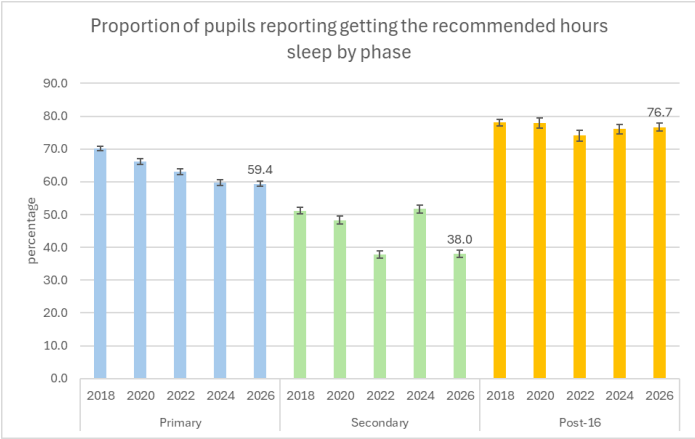
- Reported sleep has declined significantly since 2018, with secondary students least likely to get the recommended amount.
- Less than half of students reported meeting the recommended level of physical activity, and the gap between boys/young men and girls/young women has widened again in 2026.
- Demand for more information and support around physical activity and getting fit has increased.
- Visiting the dentist and regular handwashing show inequalities by deprivation.
- Mental wellbeing remains central to preparation for adulthood, and has improved since 2024, with scores varying by sex and age.
- Relationships, sex and health education was reported as relevant and useful by just over half of students, but usefulness appears to drop during the transition to secondary school.
- A notable proportion of students who had intercourse reported using no contraception, and knowledge of emergency contraception remains an important area for continued education.

Healthy habits

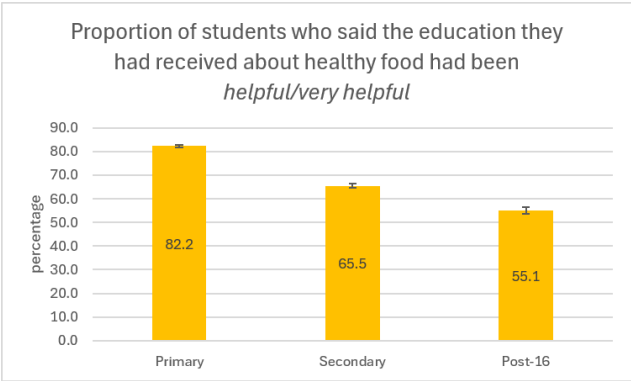
Sleeping for an adequate number of hours each night has a positive effect on mental health and helps students feel prepared for the day.

In 2018, 65.6% of all students reported getting the recommended number of hours sleep. In 2026, this had fallen significantly to 55.7%. In 2026, the proportion of students getting the recommended number of hours sleep is the lowest amongst in the secondary phase with only a third (38.0%) reporting sleeping the recommended amount. However there

has also been a steady decline in the number of primary students getting the recommended amount between 2016 and 2024. Older students in the post 16 phase were the most likely to say they got the recommended number of hours sleep (76.7%). Between 2024 and 2026 there has been a stabilisation in primary students reporting getting the recommended sleep but a significant reduction in secondary students. In post-16 students, the proportion reporting getting the recommended sleep has been consistent between 2022 and 2026.

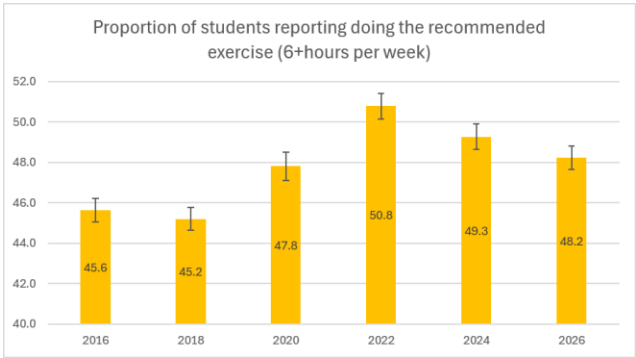


Almost three quarters (72.7%) of students said the education they had received about healthy food had been *helpful/very helpful*. This appears to decline with age.

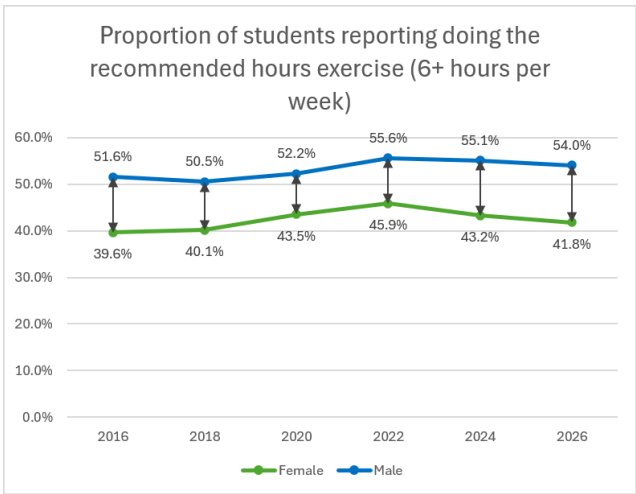


In 2026 48.2% of all students completing the PWS reported doing the recommended level of physical activity (6+ hours per week).

The levels of exercise of students in Gloucestershire had been rising between 2016 and 2022; however, this has been decreasing between 2022 and 2026. Physical activity levels have reduced between 2024 and 2026 but not significantly so.



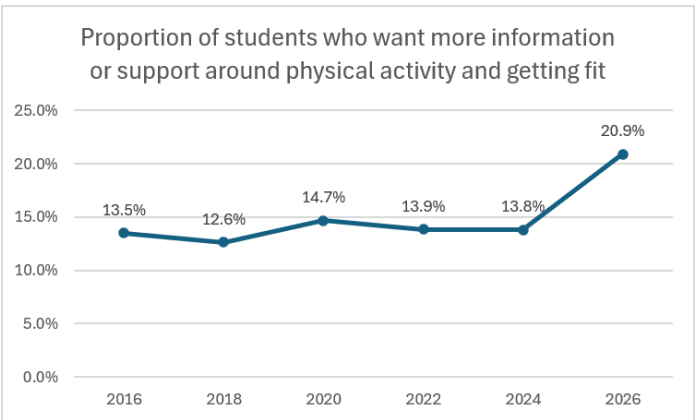
Girls and young women are less likely to report doing the recommended amount of exercise than boys and young men. Since 2016 the gap between the sexes had been reducing, from 11.9 percentage points in 2012 to 9.6 percentage points in 2022. However, in 2026 the gap has increased to 12.2 percentage points. During this period levels of exercise in girls and young women had been increasing slowly whereas there was a significant drop in the level of exercise in boys and young men between 2012 and 2018. Since 2022 exercise levels reported by boys and young men has stabilised and levels in girls and young women has started to reduce again.



Further detail is included in the *Exercise Children & Young People* deep dive.

Almost three quarters (73.5%) of students said the education they had received around staying healthy and keeping physically active had been *helpful/very helpful*. This reduced as students aged. Females (73.2%) were significantly less likely to say the education around staying healthy and keeping physically active had been *helpful/very helpful* than males (75.5%).

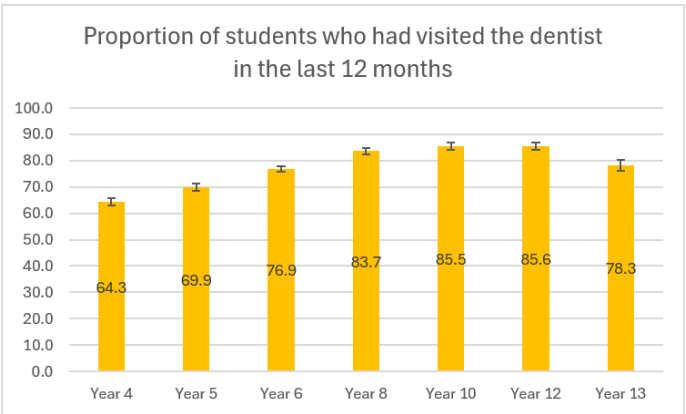
The proportion of students who said they wanted more information or support around physical activity and getting fit rose significantly in 2026 to about 21% having been stable since 2016 at around 14%.



The proportion of students who said they wanted more information or support around physical activity and getting fit declined as students aged from 29% in Year 4 to 13.2% in Year 13.

Hygiene

Just over three quarters of students said they had been to the dentist in the last 12 months. Younger students were the least likely to say they had been to the dentist in the last 12 months.

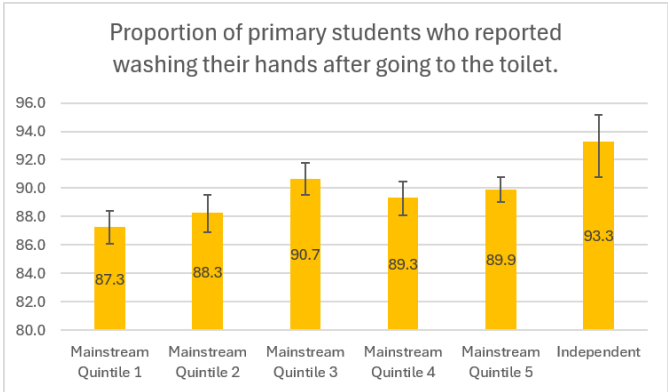


Students in quintile 1 (most deprived) settings were the least likely to have visited the dentist in the last 12 months (67.6%) and this was significantly lower

than all other statistical neighbour groups. Students at selective settings were the most likely to report they had visited the dentist in the last 12 months (88.9%).

Students in primary settings (89.2%) were significantly less likely to report regularly washing their hands after going to the toilet than secondary (94.1%) and post-16 students (93.4%).

In the primary phase there appears to be a link between deprivation and hand washing, where regular hand washing after using the toilet decreases as deprivation increases. However, this is not observed in secondary or post-16 settings.



Mental wellbeing

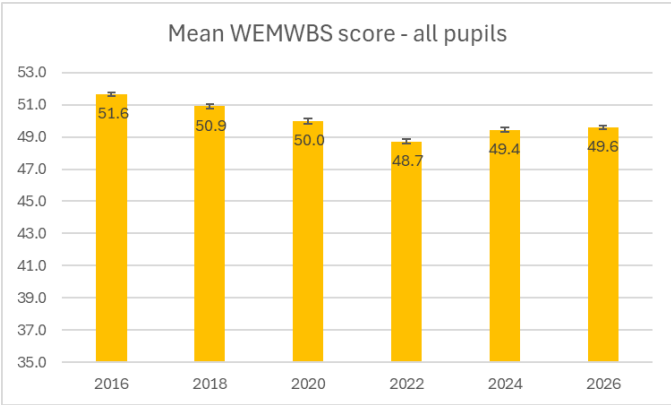
Mental wellbeing and resilience are key factors in successful preparation for adulthood.

The survey asks a number of questions relating to mental wellbeing and the ability to cope with adversity. Since 2016, the primary measure used in the survey to capture overall wellbeing is the Warwick & Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS).

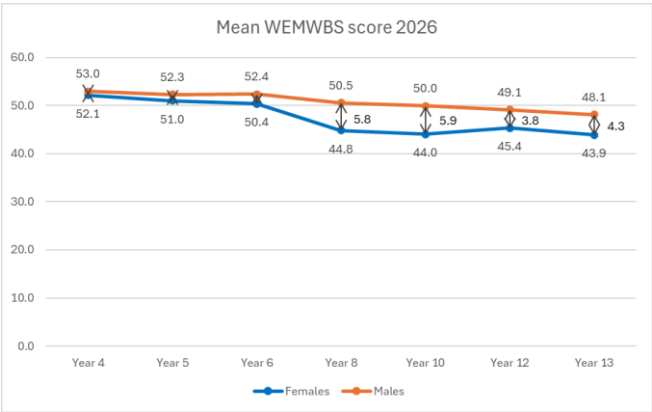


In Gloucestershire, the mean WEMWBS score among students was 49.6. While this represents an improvement since 2024, it remains slightly below the average level of happiness reported by adults in

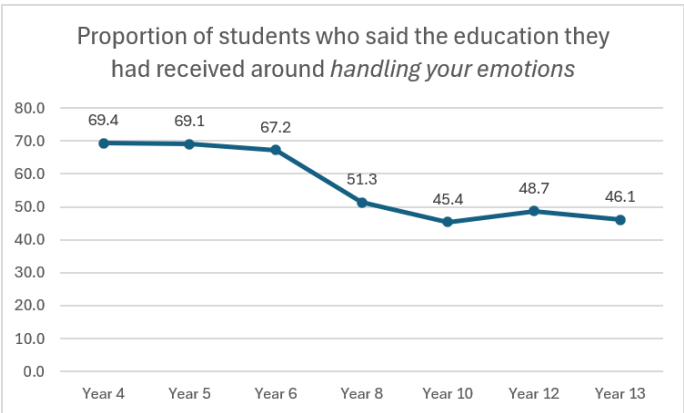
England (2011-2019 - between 50.1 and 52.6 among men and between 49.6 and 52.3 among women).



There is a distinct difference between the mean scores of males and females and by year group as students get older. Males are always higher but the gap widens from Year 8.



In 2026 just over half (59.1%) of students said the education they had received around handling their emotions had been *helpful/very helpful*. This was highest in younger students.



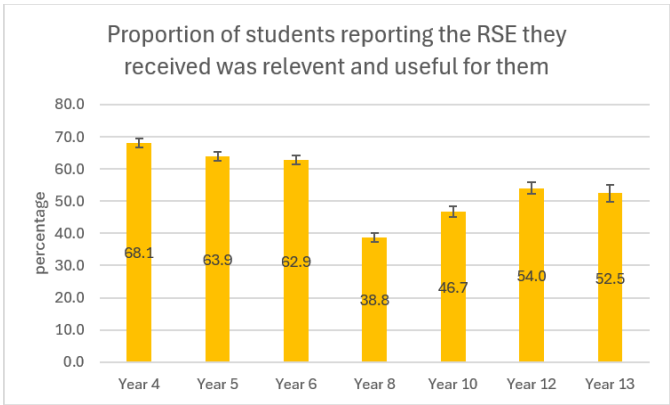
Just over half of students (55.7%) said the education they had received about emotional and mental health and coping with stress had been *helpful/very helpful*. There was very little difference by age or statistical neighbour group.

Further detail is included in the *Mental health and wellbeing to Children and Young People* deep dive.

Sexual health

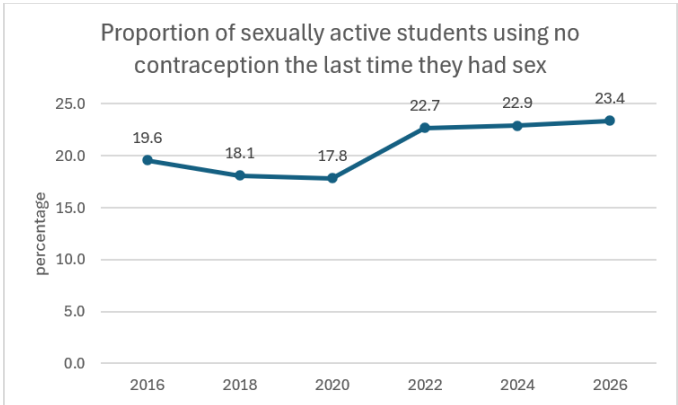
Knowing how to establish and maintain healthy romantic relationships can help adolescents develop into well-functioning adults with healthy adult relationships. Healthy dating during the teenage years can be an important way to develop social skills, learn about other people, and grow emotionally.

In 2026 56.2% of students said the relationships, sex and health education (RSE) they received was relevant and useful. This appeared to drop dramatically in the transition to secondary education.

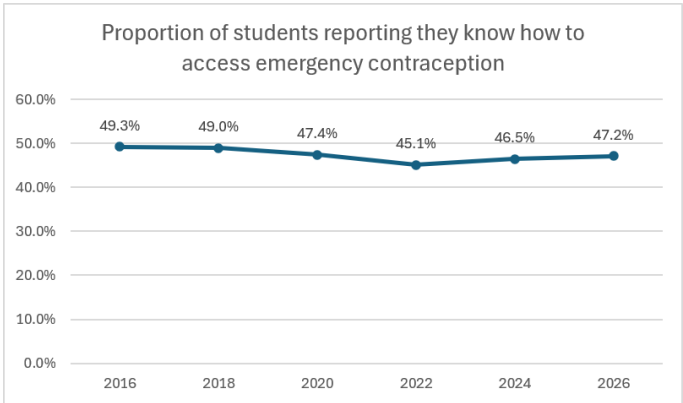


The majority of students who had intercourse protected themselves by using a condom the last time they had intercourse (51.6%), this was reported as higher in males than females (55.5% vs.47.6%). A third of students said they had used the contraceptive pill the last time they had sex (37.2%); this was reported as higher in females than males (44.0% vs. 32.4%).

In 2026, 23.4% of students who had intercourse reported using no protection the last time they had sex and a further 1.8% reported using emergency contraception after the last time they had intercourse. The proportion of students reporting they used no contraception increased between 2020 and 2022 and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Just under half of students reported they knew how to access emergency contraception; this has been fairly stable over the last 10 years. Of those who had had intercourse, 80.4% said they knew how to access emergency contraception compared to 41.2% of those who had not.



In 2026 5.1% of students said they would like more information about Safer sex and contraception, this was a reduction on the previous figures (9.8% in 2020). Students at special settings were the most likely to say they would like more information about *Safer sex and contraception* (15.0%). 4.7% of all students said they would like more help or advice with Sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Again, this was highest in students in special settings (12.5%) but was also higher in selective (6.5%) and independent settings (7.4%).

29.3% of primary students wanted more information and support around puberty and growing up. Females (36.0%) were significantly more likely to want more information and support around puberty and growing up than males (23.6%).

Further detail is included in the *Relationships and healthy sexual behaviours* deep dive.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings show that many students in Gloucestershire feel broadly confident about their future and are developing some of the skills needed to prepare for adulthood. However, there are clear signs that some aspects of preparation for adulthood have weakened over time.

Optimism about the future has continued to decline since 2016, while sleep, physical activity and some measures of community connection remain below earlier levels. Some indicators, such as friendships and feeling safe in the neighbourhood, have stabilised or improved since the pandemic period, but they have not fully returned to previous levels.



The analysis highlights consistent inequalities by sex, deprivation, ethnicity, mental wellbeing and vulnerability. Females were less likely than males to feel optimistic, confident, proud, valued or that they belonged, and were also less likely to report doing the recommended level of physical activity.

Students in more deprived settings were less likely to feel confident about their future, feel safe in their neighbourhood, have visited the dentist, regularly wash their hands in the primary phase, or report a strong sense of belonging. These patterns suggest that wider social and economic inequalities

continue to shape how prepared young people feel for adult life.

Mental wellbeing appears to be one of the strongest and most consistent factors linked to preparing for adulthood. Students with low mental wellbeing were substantially less likely to feel optimistic, confident, proud or valued, and were also less likely to feel they belonged in their school community.

Students with vulnerable characteristics, including those known to social care, those eligible for FSM, those with 4 or more ACEs, disabled students, students who had been bullied and LGBTQ+ students, were also more likely to report less positive outcomes across several measures. This indicates that inequalities are not isolated to single issues but often cluster across emotional wellbeing, future planning, community participation and health.

Taken together, the findings suggest that support for preparing for adulthood should continue to be universal, but with a stronger focus on groups who are less likely to report positive outcomes. This includes ensuring careers advice, independent living skills, health education and opportunities for community participation are accessible, relevant and targeted where need is greatest. Addressing these inequalities early is likely to be important in improving young people's confidence, resilience and ability to make a successful transition into adulthood.