



# Children with disability and SEN

Pupil  
Wellbeing  
Survey  
2024

Gloucestershire County Council

## Introduction

Having a special educational need or a disability (SEND) can affect a child's experience of education. Barriers to education that could be experienced by pupils with SEND include:

- The impact that the funding challenges bring
- Equitable access to available opportunities, facilities and support
- Lack of inclusivity
- Bullying/communication with peers
- Lack of timely access to specialist support

These can be mitigated by good communication with parents, building positive relationships with and between pupils and empowering pupils with SEND to ask for the help they need.

Pupils with SEND can be more vulnerable to some health harming behaviours and be less able to enjoy healthy lifestyle choices. This report looks at the experiences of pupils with SEND in Gloucestershire.

## The Pupil Wellbeing Survey

The Pupil Wellbeing Survey (PWS) and Online Pupil Survey™(OPS) is a biennial survey that has been undertaken with Gloucestershire school children since 2006. Children and young people participate in years 4, 5 (added in 2016) and 6 in Primary schools; years 8 and 10 in Secondary schools; and year 12 in Post 16 settings such as Sixth Forms and Colleges. A large proportion of mainstream, special and independent schools, colleges and educational establishments take part – representing 57.2% of pupils in participating year groups in 2024. 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 2024 PWS was undertaken between January and April 2024.

## 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 pupil population not the resident population.

Gloucestershire is a grammar authority, has a number of notable independent schools and several mainstream schools very close to the county's boundary these all attract young people from out of county. This results in the school population (particularly at secondary phase) having slightly different characteristics, especially regarding ethnicity, to the resident young people's population. 12.3% of Gloucestershire's resident population (2021 Census) were estimated to be from minority ethnic groups however 21.0% of Gloucestershire's school population were pupils from minority ethnic groups in January 2024 and 21.7% of the PWS cohort were pupils from minority ethnic groups in the 2024 survey.

Although a large proportion of the county's educational establishments took part in the survey some only had low numbers of students completing the survey in contrast others had high numbers. Although this does not 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 numbers of pupil 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

Schools can be categorised into statistical neighbour groups which groups schools together based on the type of school and the social profile of their pupils, such as 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 pupils. The IMD is based on the home postcode of pupils (collected in the January school census that corresponds with the time of the survey being live). This is aggregated to give an overall IMD score for the school, reflecting the deprivation levels experienced by pupils. The schools 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 schools are compared to other grammar/selective schools in their phase without reference to the IMD.
- Independent schools are compared to other independent schools 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 and alternative schools are compared to all other schools of this type in the same phase without reference to the IMD.

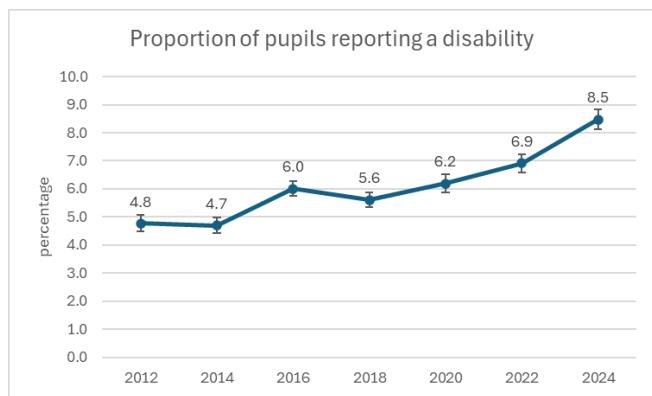
Throughout the whole survey we aimed to ask age-appropriate questions, this means the same question is occasionally asked in a slightly different way to younger and older pupils to ensure understanding. We also restrict some questions to older pupils only, for example questions about sexuality and gender identity (as opposed to biological sex), domestic abuse and sexual activity are only asked to secondary and further education/post-16 pupils. This approach ties in with the stage at which these topics are taught in the PSHE curriculum. All questions are voluntary, and pupils can choose to skip individual questions or sections if they feel uncomfortable or would prefer not to answer.

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## Prevalence of Special Educational Need (SEN) and Disability

In the 2024 survey 8.5% of pupils said they had a disability (2,088 pupils), this was significantly higher than in 2022 and has been rising since 2018.



Older pupils in secondary and post-16 settings are asked what type of disability they have. Since 2020 the proportion of pupils specifying they had a physical disability has remained stable at 3.0% of all pupils. As a proportion of those who reported having a disability though the figure has been reducing from 36.3% in 2020 to 29.6% in 2024.

7.8% of all secondary and post-16 pupils reported a learning disability in 2024, this has been increasing since 2020 when it was 5.2%. As a proportion of those reporting a disability 3 in 4 (76.2%) reported a learning disability.

In the January 2024 Pupil Census 0.7% of pupils had a recorded physical disability (including *Visual impairment* and *Hearing impairment*) as their primary need, however many children have learning disabilities that severely impact their physical health (*Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty* and *Severe Learning Difficulty*), when these are included, it suggests 1.4% of pupils are likely to have a physical disability, this is in line with the proportion in the survey. Although the most severely disabled pupils are unlikely to have completed the survey, and therefore there is likely to be higher self-reported physical disability in the survey.

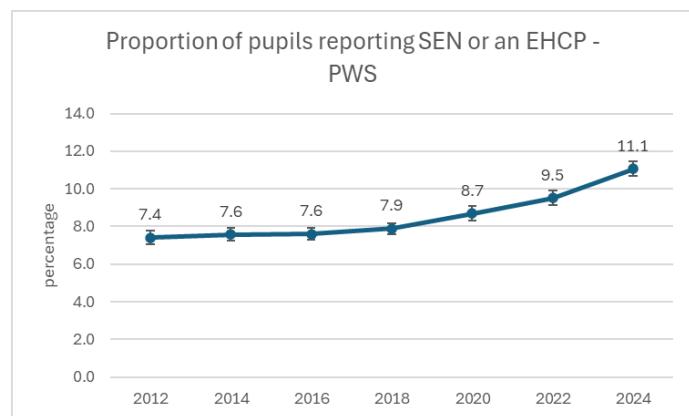


In the January 2024 Pupil Census 11.9% have a non-physical special educational need identified as their primary need (excluding *Social Emotional and Mental Health*). This is higher than those reporting a Learning disability in the 2024 PWS (7.8%).

Pupils might not see their need as a *learning disability* which might account for the lower proportion.

In the survey 11.1% reported they had *Special Educational Needs (SEN)* or an *Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)*, in the Pupil Census 18.9% of pupils have recorded SEN support or an EHCP. This suggests pupils with special educational needs are under-represented in the survey, although some pupils, especially younger pupils, may not be aware of their special educational needs and the support they receive.

The proportion of pupils reporting SEN/ EHCP has been increasing since 2018.



1.7% (425) of survey responses in 2024 were from pupils at *special schools* this includes maintained and independent special schools, alternative provision and hospital education. Of those nearly three-quarters (72.0%) were from maintained special schools, 19.5% from independent special

schools, 4.5% from alternative provision schools and 4.0% from hospital education.

The low number of pupils from special schools completing the survey may be due to the nature of their need precluding them.

Whilst there will be some crossover between groups, data in this report is separately given for pupils in special schools, pupils with SEN/EHCP and pupils with a disability.

Pupils at a special school (64.2%), those with a disability (54.3%) and pupils with an SEN/EHCP (55.4%) were significantly more likely to be biologically male than the survey cohort (48.7%).

Pupils at special schools (17.2%), those with SEN/EHCP (16.0%), and pupils with a disability (16.4%) were significantly less likely to be from a minority ethnic group than their less vulnerable peers (21.8%, 21.9%, 22.4%).

## Healthy living

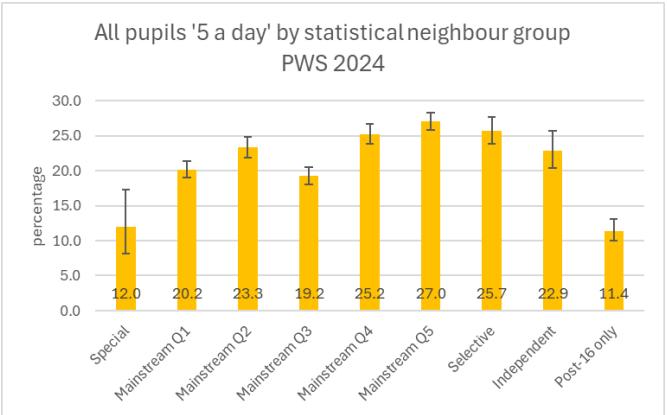
### Healthy eating

Eating healthily can help support growth and development as well as forming good habits for adulthood. The NHS recommends eating 5 portions of fruit and veg per day – ‘5 a day’.

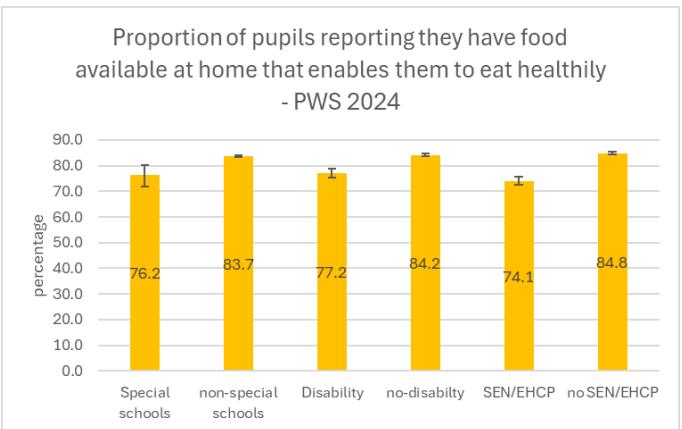
The proportion of pupils who reported they had a disability reporting eating ‘5 a day’ (21.5%) was in line with those with no disability (22.6%). Pupils with SEN/EHCP were also in line with reported eating 5 a day than those with no SEN (23.2% vs. 22.4%).

Four times as many pupils with a disability (12.5%) and over 4 times as many with SEN/EHCP (14.7%) reported eating no fruit or vegetables in a day than their less vulnerable peers (3.2% and 3.0%).

Pupils at special schools were significantly less likely to report eating ‘5 a day’ (12.0%) than pupils in all other statistical neighbour groups except those in post 16 settings (11.4%).



Being able to eat healthily relies on healthy choices being available to pupils. Pupils at special schools, those with a disability and those with SEN/EHCP were all significantly less likely to report the food available at home allowed them to eat healthily compared to their less vulnerable peers.



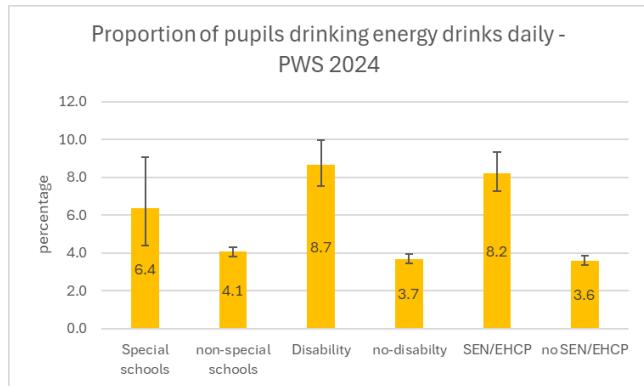
The proportion of pupils at special schools reporting they had healthy food available at home reduced significantly during the pandemic period from 77.1% in 2020 to 68.9% in 2022. However, in 2024 this has returned to pre-pandemic levels (76.2%).

There is no significant difference between pupils at special schools (56.5%), those with a disability (60.9%) and those with SEN/EHCP (60.1%) compared to their less vulnerable peers (59.3%, 59.1%, and 59.3% respectively) when reporting they eat unhealthy snacks at least daily.

Pupils at special schools (34.8%), those with a disability (28.2%) and those with SEN/EHCP (27.3%) were significantly more likely to report drinking sugary drinks at least daily than their less vulnerable peers (19.3%, 18.7%, and 18.6% respectively).

Pupils at special schools, those with a disability and those with SEN/EHCP were also significantly

more likely to report drinking energy drinks daily than their less vulnerable peers. Generally, pupils who drink energy drinks regularly are less likely to eat breakfast regularly and less likely to eat '5 a day'.



## Exercise

It is important for health and wellbeing to be physically active; this may be more challenging for children with a disability.

Pupils at special schools (29.4%), those with a disability (40.3%) and those with SEN/EHCP (39.8%) were significantly less likely to report they did the recommended hours exercise per week than their less vulnerable peers, 49.0%, 49.5% and 49.8% respectively. They were also significantly less likely to say they found it easy to be physically active.

## Sleep

In 2018 60.7% of all pupils reported getting the recommended hours sleep, in 2024 this had fallen significantly to 51.2%.

Pupils with a disability (46.9%) and those with SEN/EHCP (48.0%) were significantly less likely to report getting the recommended amount of sleep. Sleep has been closely correlated to mental wellbeing.

Pupils at special schools (61.9%) were significantly more likely to report getting the recommended sleep and those at non-special schools (51.0%).

## Oral health

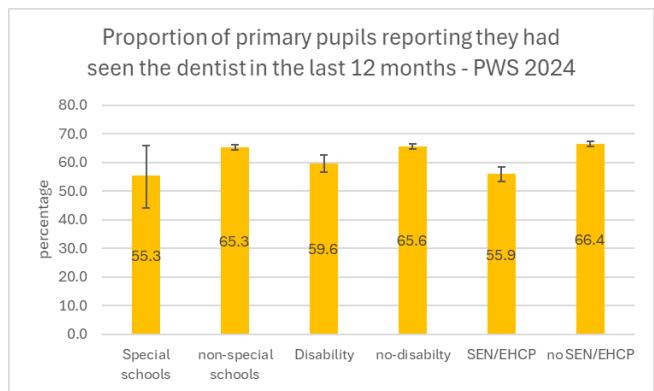
Primary age pupils are asked about their oral health and accessing oral hygiene services.

Pupils at special schools (64.5%), those with a disability (66.7%) and those with SEN/EHCP (67.1%) were significantly less likely to report

cleaning their teeth twice a day, than their less vulnerable peers (77.4%, 78.2%, 78.7%).



Pupils at special schools (55.3%), those with a disability (59.6%) and those with SEN/EHCP (55.9%) were significantly less likely to report they had seen the dentist in the previous 12 months.



## Mental Health and wellbeing

### WEWMB

In the PWS we use several measures to assess pupils' mental wellbeing. One of these is the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), an internationally recognised wellbeing measure. We use categorised scores to represent pupils with low, average and high mental wellbeing, the low mental wellbeing (LMW) score has been aligned with the NHS diagnosis of probable clinical depression.

Pupils with a disability (29.4%) and those with SEN/EHCP (25.7%) were significantly more likely to report LMW than those with no disability (22.5%), and those with no SEN (22.7%). Those who attended special schools were in line with their less vulnerable comparator peers.

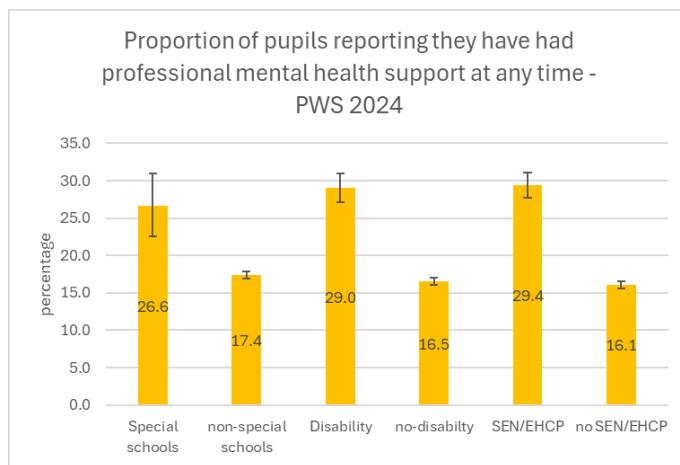
## Happiness

The proportion of children reporting they felt *Quite happy/Happy most of the time* in the last week was in line for pupils at special schools (59.1% vs. 61.8%); however, pupils with a disability (51.4% vs. 62.7%) and pupils with SEN/EHCP (55.4% vs. 62.5%) were significantly less likely to say they felt *Quite happy/Happy most of the time* than those with no disability and no SEN.

## Support for mental health

Pupils with SEN/EHCP (29.4%) and disability (29.0%) were more likely to say they had received support for mental health but were also more likely to say they found it difficult/very difficult to access help.

Pupils from special schools were significantly more likely to say they had received support from a health professional for mental wellbeing than those not at special schools. This was driven by those saying they were receiving support at the time of the survey (26.6% vs. 17.4%). The proportion saying they had accessed professional mental health support in the past was the same for those at special schools (10.4%) and those at mainstream schools (10.5%).



1 in 6 pupils who were not receiving professional mental health support felt they needed it. Pupils with SEN/EHCP were more likely to say they didn't receive professional mental health support because; *Still on waiting list, It was too difficult to get to my appointment*. Pupils with a disability were more likely to say they didn't receive professional mental health support because; *Still on waiting list* and *Didn't like to talk to strangers*.

## Health harming behaviours

### Smoking cigarettes

The proportion of pupils that had ever tried smoking has been declining from 15.2% in 2012 to 9.2% in 2024. Pupils at special schools (13.6%) were significantly more likely to report they had tried smoking and significantly more likely to report smoking regularly<sup>1</sup> than those not at special schools (3.8% vs. 1.5%). Pupils with a disability were two and a half times more likely to report trying smoking and twice as likely to be regular smokers than those without a disability (3.5% vs. 1.3%). Pupils with SEN/EHCP were in line when reporting trying cigarettes but were significantly more likely to report being regular smokers than those with no SEN/EHCP (2.4% vs. 1.4%).

### Vaping

In 2016 (when questions about vaping were introduced) 1 in 10 pupils said they had ever vaped by 2024 this had increased to 1 in 7 and was highest in Y12 pupils (45.0%).

Pupils at special schools and those with a disability were significantly more likely to have tried vaping and significantly more likely to vape regularly than their less vulnerable peers. There was no significant difference in those with SEN/EHCP through.

Vaping status PWS 2024 - all phases		
	Tried vaping %	Vaped Often/most days %
Pupils at special schools	22.4	15.3
Pupils at non-special schools	14.4	11.0
Pupils with a disability	19.4	7.5
Pupils without a disability	14.1	3.8
Pupils with SEN/EHCP	15.6	4.9
Pupils with no SEN	14.4	4.0

<sup>1</sup> Quite Often (weekly)/Most days

## Drinking alcohol

The proportion of pupils saying they have never tried alcohol has increased from 45% in 2012 to 57.3% in 2024.

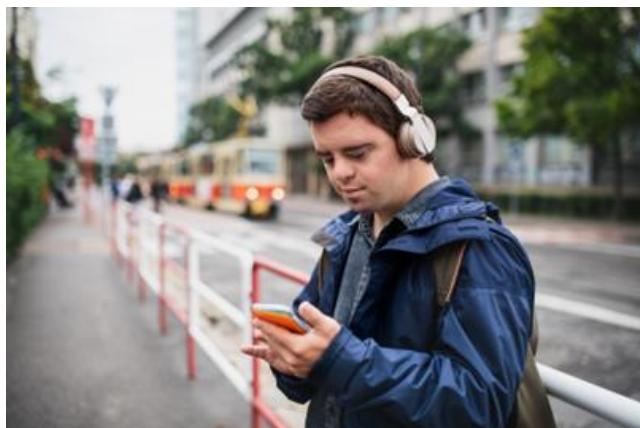
Pupils at special schools (35.5%) and those with SEN/EHCP (37.2%) were significantly less likely to report trying alcohol than their less vulnerable peers (42.0% and 42.4% respectively). In contrast pupils with a disability (44.6%) were significantly more likely to report trying alcohol than their less vulnerable peers (41.6%). Pupils with a disability (6.6%) were also significantly more likely to report drinking alcohol regularly (*Quite often/Most days*).

## Drugs

12.0% of secondary and Post-16 pupils reported ever trying drugs; Cannabis was the drug they had most likely to have tried (11.6%).

There was no significant difference in the proportion of pupils at special schools, and those with SEN/EHCP reporting trying drugs and their less vulnerable peers. Pupils with a disability (15.0%) were significantly more likely to report trying drugs than those without a disability (11.7%).

## Excessive screen time



In the UK, the average media/screen usage of a teenager is estimated to be 6-7 hours per day. The mean screentime in PWS 2024 was 4-6 hours for pupils at both secondary and Post 16 phases and between 0-3 hours for primary phase pupils. Excessive media/screen time has been classified in the survey for pupils who report having 7+ hours of media/screen time per day.

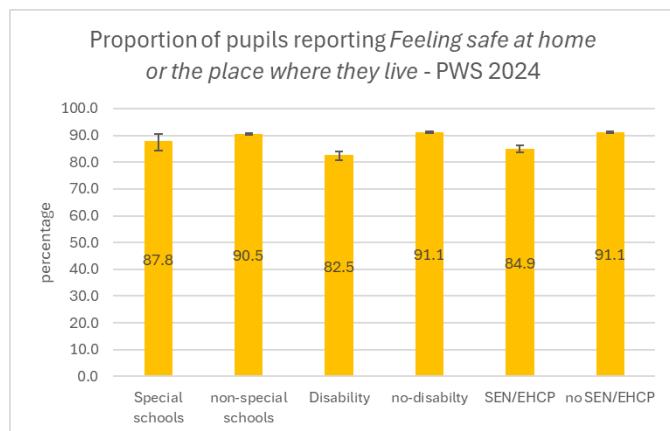
In 2024 1 in 4 (26.5%) pupils reported excessive media/screen time, slightly less than in 2022.

1 in 3 pupils with disability (36.8%) or SEN/EHCP (33.0%) reported excessive screentime, significantly higher than their less vulnerable peers, pupils at special schools were also significantly higher (38.8%).

## Feeling safe

### Safe at home and safe in neighbourhood

The proportion of pupils saying they feel safe where they live has been increasing since 2012 from 86.0% to 90.4% in 2024, and was in line pre and post pandemic. However, for pupils at special schools (87.8%), those with a disability (82.5%) and those with SEN/EHCP (84.9%) the proportion who reported they felt safe at home was significantly lower than less vulnerable pupils.



They were also less likely to report feeling safe outside in the neighbourhood they lived in than less vulnerable pupils.

## Domestic Abuse



In 2024 just over a quarter (28.1%) of pupils reported ever witnessing domestic abuse, coercive control or teen relationship abuse (subsequently referred to collectively as 'domestic abuse') which was in line with the values in both 2020 and 2022.

Around 1 in 6 pupils in 2024 reported ever being a victim of domestic abuse, this is a reduction from previous surveys.

Pupils with a disability (32.7%) and those with SEN/EHCP (32.7%) were significantly more likely to report they had ever *witnessed* domestic abuse. 1 in 5 pupils with a disability (19.8%) and 1 in 5 pupils with SEN/EHCP (20.0%) reported *being a victim* of domestic abuse, significantly higher than their less vulnerable peers.

Pupils at special schools were less likely to have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse.

### Bullying

In 2024, a quarter (28.8%) of all pupils said they had experienced serious bullying in the past year, and 7.5% of pupils reported being a regular victim of bullying in the previous year. This has declined since 2012 when it was 9.9%. Pupils with a disability (13.2%) were twice as likely to report being regularly bullied than their non-disabled peers (6.9%), and with SEN/EHCP were also more likely to report regular bullying (11.4%). Those at special schools were less likely to report regular bullying (5.4%), although not significantly.

## Relationships

### Living situation

Just under three quarters (71.9%) of pupils reported that they live full-time with both their parents, which is similar to the number in 2022 (73.3%). 11% of pupils reported living part-time with both their parents in separate houses, 13.7% reported living in a single parent family.

Pupils at special schools (61.2%), those with a disability (63.7%) and those with SEN/EHCP (63.8%) were significantly less likely to live with both parents. Pupils with a disability (6.1%) and those with SEN/EHCP (5.5%) support were both around twice as likely to report living somewhere other than with their parents than their less vulnerable peers (3.0%). Pupils at special schools were 3 times more likely to live somewhere other than with their parents (10.4%).

### Support in a time of need

Most young people say they have a trusted adult to go to for help when they were worried (84.3% in 2024) and this has been similar since 2018.

However, pupils with a disability (78.1%) and those with SEN/EHCP (81.4%) and were significantly less likely to report having someone to turn to for help when they were worried (vs. 84.8% of those with no disability and 84.6% of those with no SEN). There was no significant difference for pupils at special schools.

### Making and keeping friends

The proportion of pupils saying they find it easy to make and keep friends has been in decline since 2012 (71.4%) however there has been a stark drop that started pre-pandemic and continued during the pandemic period (69.4% in 2018 vs. 53.9% in 2024).



Neuro-diverse children such as those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and those with other learning and physical disabilities can find it particularly hard to make and keep friends. Only 43.9% of pupils with SEN/EHCP said they found it easy to make and keep friends, significantly lower than those with no SEN (55.2%). The difference between pupils with a disability, those at special schools and their able peers was more stark, in 2024 only 42.1% and 40.7% respectively reporting finding it easy to make and keep friends vs. 55.0% and 54.2%.

### Sexuality and gender

Pupils at special schools (56.2%) were significantly less likely to report identifying as heterosexual than

any other group. International research<sup>2</sup> suggests that a larger proportion of disabled than non-disabled people are sexual minorities.

Pupils at special schools (58.2%), those with a disability (61.5%) and those with SEN/EHCP (62.3%) were significantly less likely to report being Cis gendered than comparator less vulnerable pupils (80.0%). Pupils at special schools (4.0%), those with a disability (8.2%) and those with SEN/EHCP (6.8%) were more likely to report being transgender, gender fluid or non-binary than less vulnerable pupils (2.6%).

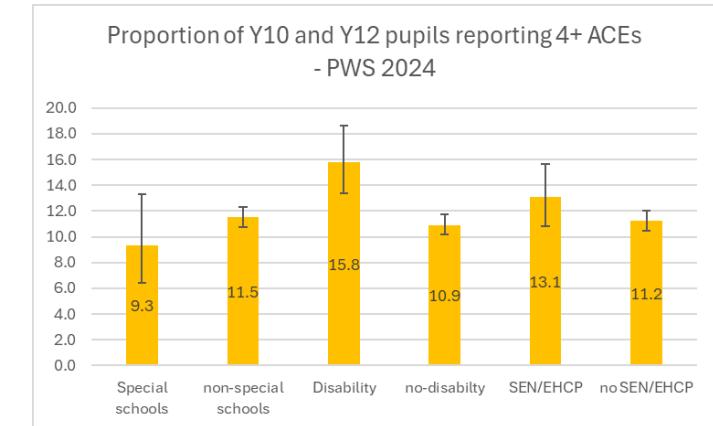
### Sexual health

In 2024 12.0% of pupils (in Y8 and above) reported engaging in sexual activity; this was lower than in 2020 (17.7%) and 2022 (14.0%).

The majority of pupils who had intercourse protected themselves by using a condom the last time they had intercourse, this was no different with those with a disability and SEN/EHCP. Pupils at special schools were significantly less likely to say they used a condom the last time they had sex.

### Adverse Childhood Experiences - ACEs

Experiencing 4 or more ACEs has been linked with worse health and life outcomes. In 2024 pupils in both Y10 and Y12 were asked to tick which ACEs they had experienced in a change to the previous methodology. Overall, 1 in 10 (11.4%) pupils reported 4 or more ACEs, there was no significant difference in pupils at special schools (9.3%), or SEN/EHCP (13.1%) and their less vulnerable peers. Pupils with a disability (15.8%) were significantly more likely to report experiencing 4+ ACEs than those with no disability (10.9%).



## School experience

### Enjoying school

Just over half of all pupils (56.9%) report they enjoy school; those at special schools were significantly more likely to say they enjoyed school (64.7%); however, a lower proportion of those with a disability (49.5%) and those with SEN/EHCP (53.2%) reported they enjoyed school.

Pupils at special schools (57.6%) were more likely to report feeling happy at school *quite often/most of the time*. Those with a disability (42.6%) and those with SEN/EHCP (49.0%) were significantly less likely to report they enjoyed school.



Most pupils report their school gives them useful skills and knowledge (66.2%), a higher proportion of pupils at special schools (72.7%) reported they felt their school gave them useful skills and knowledge. Pupils with a disability (57.3%) and those with SEN/EHCP (62.2%) were significantly less likely to report school gave them useful skills and knowledge.

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0968759.2019.1689925>

## Feeling safe at school

Around three quarters of pupils report they feel safe in school (73.3%). Pupils at special schools (78.4%) were more likely to report they felt safe at school (78.4%). Pupils with an SEN/EHCP (66.1%) and those with a disability (63.8%) were significantly less likely to report they felt safe at school.

## Getting help at school

Around two-thirds of pupils reported they got the help they needed at school with learning (62.4%), however, pupils with a disability (53.4%) and those with SEN/EHCP (59.3%) were significantly less likely to report they got all the help they needed from school with learning. Pupils at special schools were more likely to say they got enough help at school with learning (72.7%) although not significantly.

## Isolation, suspension and exclusion, and absenteeism

Pupils in quintile 1 schools were the most likely to report often being in trouble (13.5%) and those in selective schools (5.3%) and post-16 colleges were the least likely (5.0%). Being in trouble appears to be linked to deprivation, with the proportion reducing as deprivation decreases.

In 2024 15.6% of pupils reported having an isolation, suspension or exclusion, this increased significantly between 2018 and 2020 (completed pre-covid).

Experience of an isolation, suspension or exclusion appears to be linked to deprivation. In mainstream secondary schools experiencing an isolation, suspension or exclusion appears to reduce as deprivation decreases with pupils in quintile 5 schools and selective schools having the lowest reported level of exclusions. Experience of an isolation, suspension or exclusion in special schools were higher at 15.8% in 2024, although not significantly.

A significantly higher proportion of pupils from the following groups reported an isolation, suspension or exclusion:

- Those bullied regularly
- Those known to social care

- Those with a disability
- Those receiving SEN support
- Young carers
- Those eligible for FSM
- Those with low mental wellbeing

Pupils were asked how many school days (each school day includes 2 sessions) they had missed in the previous term (in the 2024 survey this would have been Autumn term 2023). Pupils may miss school due to both authorised and un-authorised reasons.

Persistent absence is a measure used by the Department of Education to track when a pupil's overall unauthorised absence equates to 10% or more of their possible sessions. In the survey it isn't possible to determine if pupil reported absence is authorised or unauthorised and so a comparison to nationally published figures isn't appropriate. The most recent nationally published data shows 20% of Gloucestershire pupils were persistently absent in 2022/23<sup>3</sup>.

In the 2024 survey just under 1 in 3 pupils (31.8%) reported being absent from school for 10% or more of sessions in the previous term (authorised and unauthorised), compared to over 1 in 3 pupils (35.5%) in the 2022 survey (Autumn term 2021).

A significantly higher proportion of pupils with a disability (38.9%) and those with SEN/EHCP (36.3%) reported being absent from school for 10% or more of sessions in the previous term. There was no significant difference for pupils in special schools (28.7%). Pupils with SEND were also more likely to report they had been absent for 16 days or more in the previous term (special school – 9.9% vs 7.4% non-special school, disability – 13.3% vs 6.9% non-disability, SEN/EHCP – 11.8% vs 7.0% non-SEN).

<sup>3</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence->

in-schools-in-england/2023-24-autumn-and-spring-term



## Future aspirations

Pupils with a disability (69.1%) and those with SEN/EHCP (73.3%) reported they felt confident about their future, this was significantly lower than their less vulnerable peers (78.7% and 78.4%). No difference was seen between pupils in special schools (80.0%) and non-special school pupils (77.8%).

Around 7 in 10 (67.0%) post-16 pupils report they expect to continue in education or training after further education, however; pupils in special schools (42.8%), those with a disability (50.4%) and those with SEN/EHCP (51.2%) were significantly less likely to report they expected to continue in education.

Pupils with a disability (57.4%) or SEN/EHCP (61.8%) were significantly less likely to report they felt proud of what they had achieved in their life, than less vulnerable pupils. There was no significant difference between pupils at special schools (67.1%) and those at non special schools (66.0%)