

# Pupil Wellbeing in Essex

**Robbie Cruikshanks**  
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EDUCATION  
POLICY  
INSTITUTE

A circular graphic element consisting of a white semi-circle on the left and a teal semi-circle on the right, partially overlapping the text box.

Research Area:  
School System and  
Performance

## About the Education Policy Institute

The Education Policy Institute is an independent, impartial and evidence-based research institute that promotes high quality education outcomes, regardless of social background. We achieve this through data-led analysis, innovative research and high-profile events.

Education can have a transformative effect on the life chances of young people, enabling them to fulfil their potential, have successful careers, and grasp opportunities. As well as having a positive impact on the individual, good quality education and child wellbeing also promotes economic productivity and a cohesive society.

Through our research, we provide insight, commentary, and a constructive critique of education policy in England – shedding light on what is working and where further progress needs to be made. Our research and analysis spans a young person's journey from the early years through to entry to the labour market. Our core research areas include:

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- School Performance, Admissions, and Capacity
- Early Years Development
- Social Mobility and Vulnerable Learners
- Accountability, Assessment, and Inspection
- Curriculum and Qualifications
- Teacher Supply and Quality Education Funding
- Higher Education, Further Education, and Skills

Our experienced and dedicated team works closely with academics, think tanks, and other research foundations and charities to shape the policy agenda.

## About the Essex Education Task Force

**The Essex Education Task Force** was established by Essex County Council in April 2021 as an independent body. At the heart of its work across Essex lie **Renewal, Equality** and **Ambition**. The two key aims are:

- To minimise the impact of the pandemic on all children and young people as quickly as possible, with a three to five-year overview of phases of regeneration.
- To capture and promote current innovation and best practice across the education system in Essex.

An initial budget of £1.5 million has already been invested in supporting the work of pre-school and early years settings, schools, further education, governors and the voluntary sector. A major investment has focused on launching the Essex Year of Reading 2022.

This report from EPI is the second in a series of three commissioned reports (a) to identify ‘the learning gaps’ the Task Force needs to address, and (b) to evaluate the impact of the Task Force’s work over the next three years.

**Roy Blatchford CBE, Chair, Essex Education Task Force**

## About the author

Robbie Cruikshanks joined EPI as a Researcher in March 2022. Prior to this, he worked as a sports data analyst covering professional rugby, and spent two years as a research consultant in the financial reporting sector, specialising in corporate governance and sustainability.

Robbie graduated with an MEng in Computer Science and Philosophy from the University of York in 2019.

## Contents

.....	1
About the Education Policy Institute .....	2
About the Essex Education Task Force .....	3
About the author .....	4
Contents.....	5
Executive Summary.....	7
Findings .....	7
Methodology.....	9
Part 1: Comparison to national data.....	11
Part 2: Wellbeing across the districts of Essex.....	15
Part 3: Wellbeing across gender in Essex.....	17
Year 6 .....	18
Year 7 .....	19
Year 11 .....	21
Part 4: Wellbeing across ethnicity in Essex.....	23
Year 6 .....	23
Year 7 .....	24
Year 11 .....	25
Part 5: Deprivation and wellbeing in Essex.....	26
Year 6 .....	26
Year 7 .....	27
Year 11 .....	29
Part 6: The impact of council-led school interventions in Essex.....	31
Disadvantaged strategy .....	32
Year 6 .....	32
Year 7 .....	33
Year 11 .....	35
Implementing TPP.....	36
Year 6 .....	36
Year 7 .....	37
Year 11 .....	39
Piloting supervision of safeguarding leads .....	41
Year 6 .....	41
Year 7 .....	42

Year 11 .....	44
Part 7: Conclusion and recommendations.....	46
Appendix .....	48
Appendix A: Underlying counts (rounded to the nearest five).....	48
Appendix B: Wellbeing survey questionnaire .....	50
Bibliography .....	52

## Executive Summary

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) has been commissioned by the Essex Education Task Force to carry out research on education recovery in Essex, including tracking pupil wellbeing.

This report investigates the results of the first round of a short wellbeing survey which took place in May 2022. The survey, based on the Good Childhood Index developed by the Children’s Society, asks pupils a series of questions about how they feel about various aspects of their life, such as their school, home, and friends.

Just under 7,950 pupils responded to the survey from 38 schools across the 12 districts of Essex.<sup>1</sup>

Pupils surveyed were from years 6, 7, and 11 (referred to as ‘headline year groups’), as well as pupils from years 4 and 9 whose results will be tracked in subsequent reports.

### Findings

- **Most pupils in Essex report wellbeing scores broadly in line with results observed in the most similar survey of pupils in the UK, the Good Childhood Report.** However, **pupils in Essex have lower wellbeing relating to their appearance** (26.7 per cent report low wellbeing for this item in Essex, 11.7 per cent nationally), and feel less happy about **how they use their time** (16.7 per cent report low wellbeing for this item in Essex, 6.1 per cent nationally).
- **In line with national trends, older pupils report lower rates of wellbeing than younger pupils.** 10.6 per cent of pupils in year 6 report low wellbeing, compared with 21.1 per cent of year 11 pupils.
- While there are no significant differences between younger boys and girls, from year 7 onwards **girls report lower rates of wellbeing than boys.** In year 7, 16.9 per cent of girls report low wellbeing, compared to 9.0 per cent of boys. In year 11, this gap widens to 26.7 per cent of girls compared to 13.1 per cent of boys.
- **Gender-diverse pupils** (pupils who self-reported their gender as transgender, non-binary, or otherwise gender-questioning) **report vastly lower rates of wellbeing,** with over 70 per cent of gender-diverse pupils in year 7 reporting low wellbeing in ‘appearance’, compared with 40.0 per cent of girls and 16.6 per cent of boys.
- **Overall, we did not find statistically significant differences between ethnic groups,** with the exception of year 11 pupils from black backgrounds reporting lower than average satisfaction with their school (37.6 per cent for pupils from black backgrounds reported low wellbeing in this domain compared to 25.0 per cent of white pupils).
- **Schools with higher levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility tend to have slightly lower levels of wellbeing.** For example, in year 7, 19.1 per cent of pupils in schools with the highest levels of FSM eligibility report low wellbeing, compared to 10.4 per cent of pupils in schools with the lowest eligibility. However, this relationship is weak and school-level

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<sup>1</sup> All 12 districts making up the Essex local authority were represented in the survey. Surveyed schools included 38 in total. A random sample of 65 primary and 62 secondary schools were invited to participate out of a total of 550 state-maintained schools in Essex. This random sample was supplemented by an opportunity sample to improve the number of primary pupils participating in the study.

disadvantage does not appear as strong an indicator of wellbeing as other characteristics investigated such as gender and age.

- **Schools that have implemented various council-led interventions have broadly similar rates of wellbeing to schools that have not implemented such interventions.** However, this survey is not designed to detect the impact of these interventions and therefore cannot be treated as conclusive evidence of their success.
- **Basildon has significantly lower rates of wellbeing when compared with Essex as a whole** (19.9 per cent of pupils in Basildon report low wellbeing when compared with 16.2 per cent for Essex as a whole). **Chelmsford has significantly higher rates of wellbeing than Essex as a whole** (11.6 per cent of pupils in Chelmsford report low wellbeing). Note this analysis does not control for underlying characteristics such as disadvantage which may affect differences in wellbeing between districts. We find other districts have significantly higher or lower rates of wellbeing compared with the average for Essex. However, smaller sample sizes for these other districts mean these rates should be treated with caution.

Given these findings, we recommend that Essex schools should focus on **building a positive culture around mental health via a 'whole school' approach** and target the specific issue of lower wellbeing among gender-diverse pupils through **anti-bias, anti-bullying, and bystander intervention training**, as well as **peer support and restorative justice programs**.

## Methodology

A random sample of schools in Essex were invited to participate in the survey, including 65 primary schools, 62 secondary schools and all 20 special schools. The random sample was stratified to represent the spread of schools across local authority districts in Essex. To reduce any overburden on Essex schools, the sample was adjusted where a selected school had recently been asked to be involved in other research with Essex County Council.

After this initial recruitment round, an open invitation was sent to all schools in Essex, and supplemental direct recruitment was done via Essex County Council to ensure sufficient numbers of participating primary schools. This led to 30 primary schools and 23 secondary schools being recruited to participate. Given the low number of special schools recruited, we took the decision not to include special schools in this first round and to explore how to improve inclusion and engagement in future survey rounds.

Schools were provided with guidance packs for facilitating the survey in the classroom, which included a letter to circulate to parents two weeks ahead of the survey opening and a distress protocol to follow. Schools were then provided with their own survey link which enables their pupil responses to be associated with the correct school.

There was some attrition between the number of final recruited participants and the number of schools which returned responses, 19 primary schools submitted responses (63 per cent response rate) and 19 secondary schools submitted responses (82 per cent response rate). This amounts to 1,460 primary pupil responses and 6,435 secondary pupil responses.

**Figure 1.1: Summary of school recruitment and response rates**

	Number randomly selected	Number recruited through random selection	Number of final participants	Number who returned responses
Primary	65	25	30	19
Secondary	62	14	23	19
Special	20	4	--	--

Pupils surveyed were primarily from years 6, 7, and 11 (referred to as 'headline year groups'), as well as pupils from Years 4 and 9 whose results will be tracked in subsequent reports as part of a longitudinal study. Pupils of selected year groups in participating schools responded to the survey online.

The wellbeing survey used the methodology of the Good Childhood Index (GCI) which has been developed and used by The Children's Society since 2010. The GCI consists of:

- A multi-item measure of overall life satisfaction, wherein children rate how strongly they agree or disagree with five different statements about their overall life satisfaction. From this multi-item measure a pupil can score a total of 20, with a higher score indicating higher wellbeing.
- Ten single-item domain measures of happiness with different aspects of life such as appearance, choice and school. Children rate each of them on a scale from 0 ('very

unhappy’) to 10 (‘very happy’). In addition, we asked pupils their gender, ethnicity, year group, full name and date of birth. The full questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

In this report we provide an analysis of the effects of the following groups on pupil wellbeing in Essex:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Free school meal eligibility
- Council-led interventions:
  - Disadvantaged strategy
  - Trauma Perceptive Practice (TPP)
  - Supervision of Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs)

In this report, **low wellbeing** refers to scores below the midpoint – 10 for the overall life satisfaction score, and five for each of the individual wellbeing items.

The black bars on the plots indicate 95 per cent confidence intervals. We use these because our results are based on a sample of pupils, and so they are estimates with a certain degree of uncertainty. The confidence intervals signify that, if we were to run the same survey 100 times in Essex, then 95 per cent of the time the ‘true’ result would lie within the interval shown by the black bars on the plot. Intervals tend to be wider either when there is a small sample size or there is a large variation in pupils’ responses. Where two scores have overlapping confidence intervals, it is likely that the two scores share a similar ‘true’ result.

#### **Suppressed data**

To protect individual pupils, we do not report results based on 30 or fewer individuals. We also round all underlying counts to the nearest five. As a result, some charts have had variables suppressed or have been omitted entirely if the chart would breach these rules.

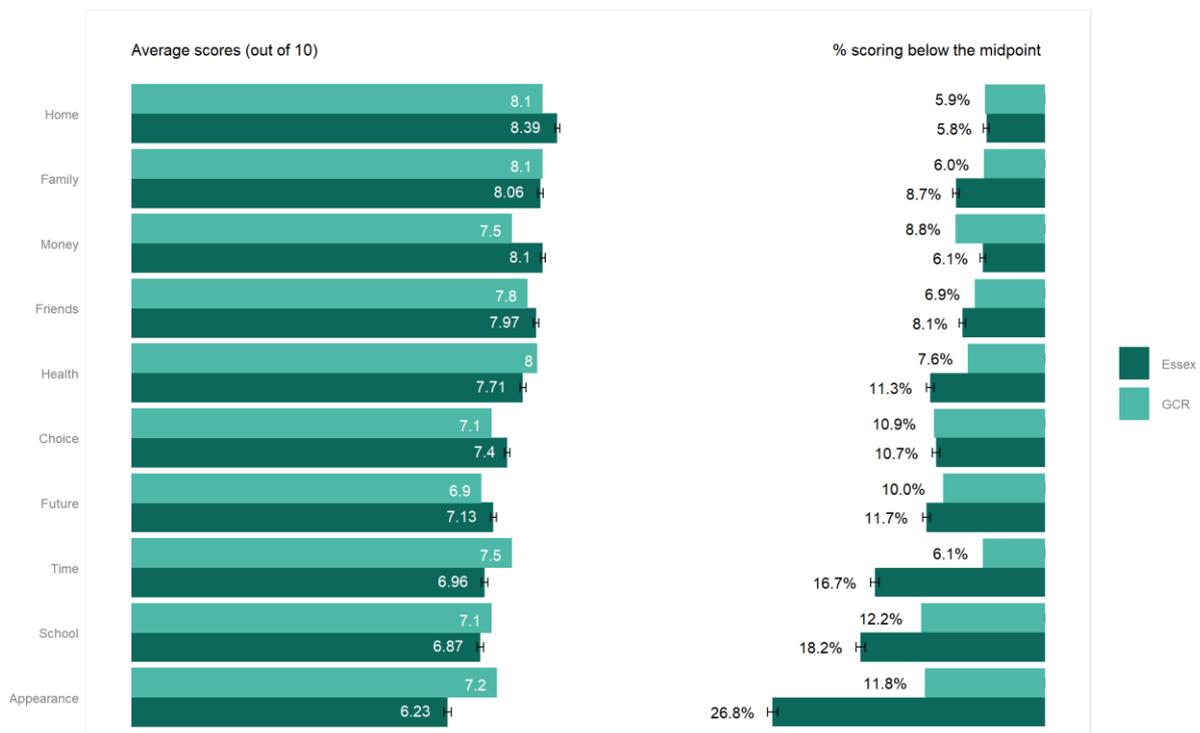
## Part 1: Comparison to national data

National data for the ‘Good Childhood Index’ (GCI) published by the Children’s Society in its annual Good Childhood Report provides the closest comparator available. The latest GCI data from 2021 was taken from a survey of just over 2,000 children from across the UK between the ages of 10 and 17.<sup>2</sup>

Comparisons with this national data should be treated with caution. The Essex data is clustered within schools, whereas national data was collected from a sample of pupils not nested within specific participating schools. Pupils within schools may be more similar to each other than pupils attending different schools. Secondly, the national data includes pupils between ages of 10 and 17 and national wellbeing results are not published by age in the Good Childhood Report. Essex data has a different age composition to the national data, covering school years 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11, and it is known that a key driver in level of wellbeing is age.

Figure 1.2 shows the average wellbeing scores and proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing for each of the individual wellbeing measures for pupils in all year groups surveyed in Essex against the same measures from the Good Childhood Report.

**Figure 1.2. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of pupils in Essex (years 4, 6, 7, 9, and 11) and children surveyed in the Good Childhood Report**



<sup>2</sup> The Children’s Society (2021) ‘The Good Childhood Report 2021’.

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/good-childhood-report-2021>

Overall, pupils in Essex are happy with their home and family, and less happy with how they feel about their appearance and school.

Compared with the national data, pupils in Essex are more concerned with how they use their time (16.7 per cent for Essex, 6.1 per cent nationally). Similarly, pupils in Essex are less happy with their appearance than pupils nationwide (26.8 per cent for Essex, 11.8 per cent nationally). Pupils in Essex also report slightly lower wellbeing relating to their school (18.2 per cent for Essex, 12.2 per cent nationally). For most other measures, Essex pupils report similar levels of wellbeing to their national counterparts.

The majority of pupils do not report low scores in the measure of overall life satisfaction, and several of the single-item measures, including how pupils feel about their happiness with regard to 'Home', 'Money', 'Family', and 'Friends', are consistently scored highly by pupils across year groups and characteristics, with very small numbers of pupils reporting low wellbeing in these areas.

However, pupils in older year groups, particularly in year 11, report consistently lower scores in all areas than their younger counterparts. This trend can be seen most notably in girls, who report low overall wellbeing at twice the rate of boys in year 11, despite scores being relatively on par in Year 6. These patterns closely mirror the national findings from the Good Childhood Report.

Figure 1.3 shows the proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing for each year group surveyed across Essex.

**Figure 1.3 Proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing in Essex by year group**

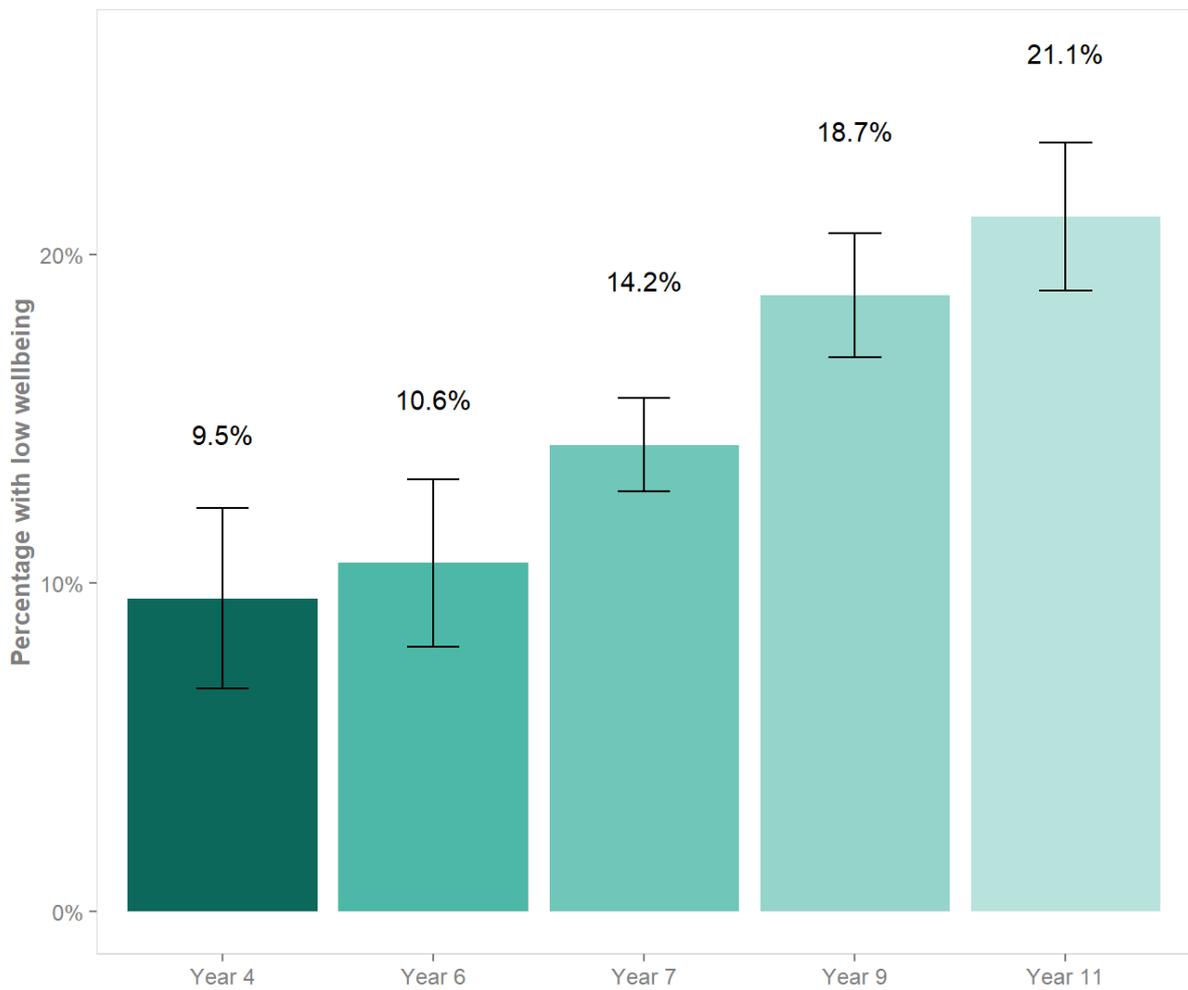
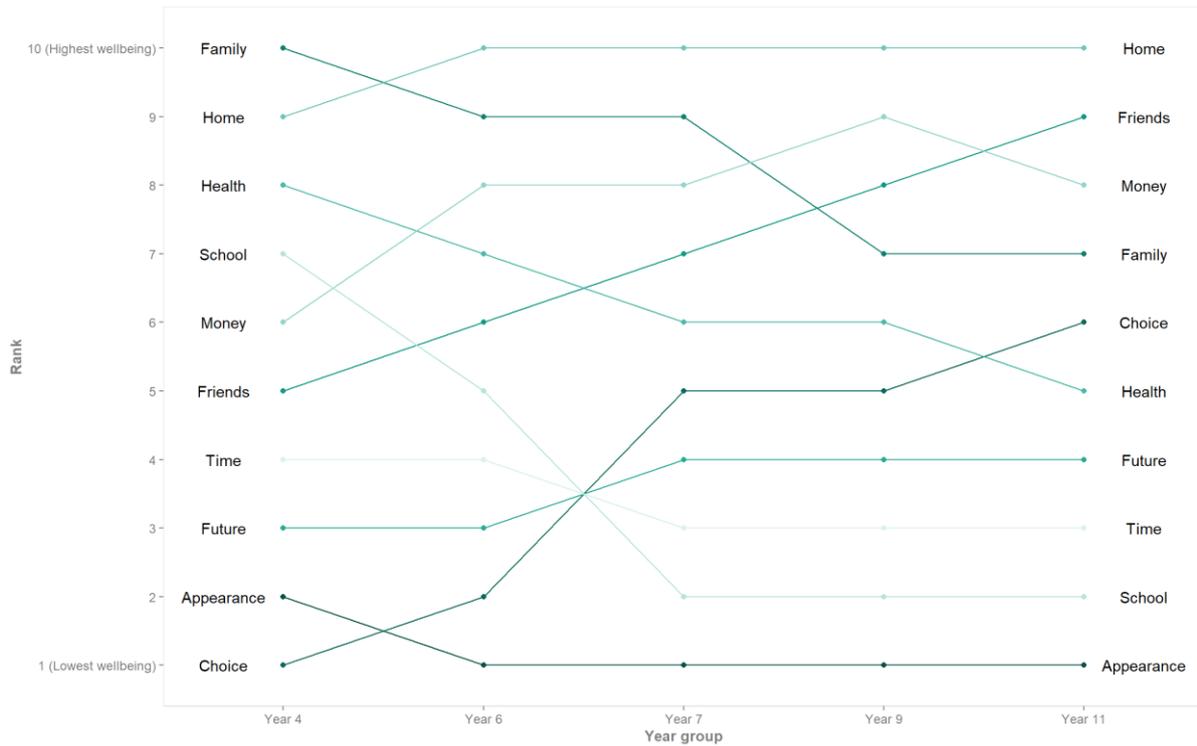


Figure 1.4 illustrates young people's happiness with different elements of their lives differs depending on their age. Younger age groups are least happy with the amount of choice they have, whereas older age groups are more satisfied with how much choice they have, but are less happy with their school. Appearance is an area of low wellbeing across all the year groups included from year 4 to year 11.

**Figure 1.4. Rank order of average wellbeing item scores by year group**



The Good Childhood Report and other studies into young people’s wellbeing such as the #BeeWell survey in Greater Manchester<sup>3</sup> found significant differences in wellbeing between children of different ethnic backgrounds. These findings are not observed in our data, with the results showing broadly similar rates of low wellbeing across ethnic backgrounds. There are some exceptions to this which are set out in the section on ethnicity, for example, 37.6 per cent of year 11 pupils with Black backgrounds report low wellbeing relating to their school, compared with 25.0 per cent of year 11 pupils with White backgrounds. Overall, we treat our analysis of the wellbeing of ethnic minorities in Essex as inconclusive due to the small sample sizes. For our headline year groups, most minority ethnic groups returned fewer than 100 responses.

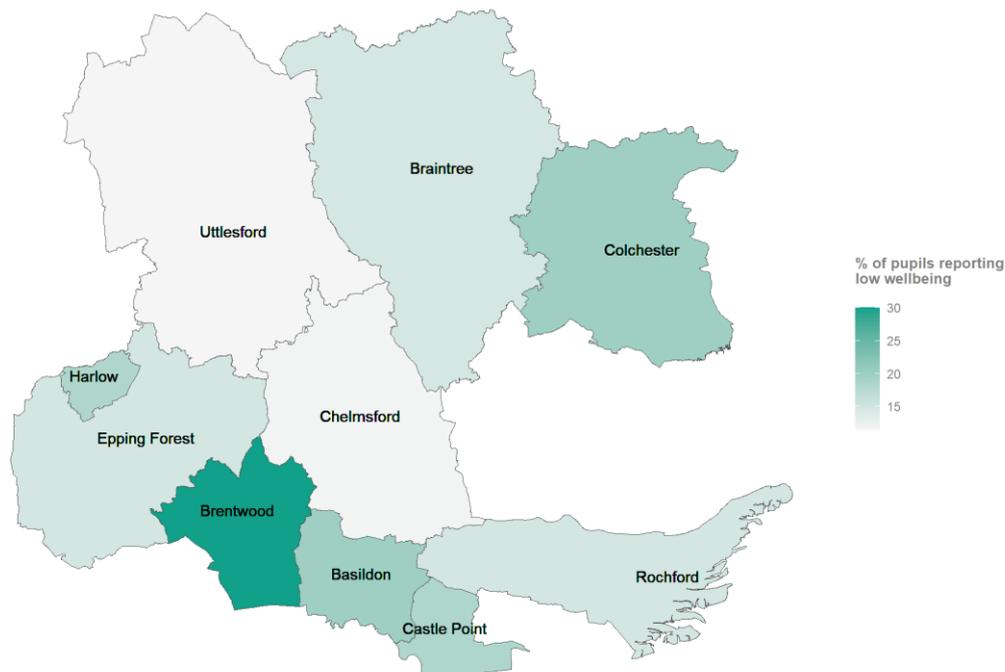
<sup>3</sup> #BeeWell survey (2021) ‘#BeeWell Inequalities Briefing’. <https://gmbeewell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/BeeWell-Inequalities-Evidence-Briefing.pdf>

## Part 2: Wellbeing across the districts of Essex

Figure 2.1 shows the proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing across the 12 local administrative districts of Essex where data is available. Darker green districts represent lower rates of wellbeing, with lighter shades representing higher rates. Figures are suppressed where the proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing represents fewer than 30 pupils, so where this the case these districts have been excluded from the map.

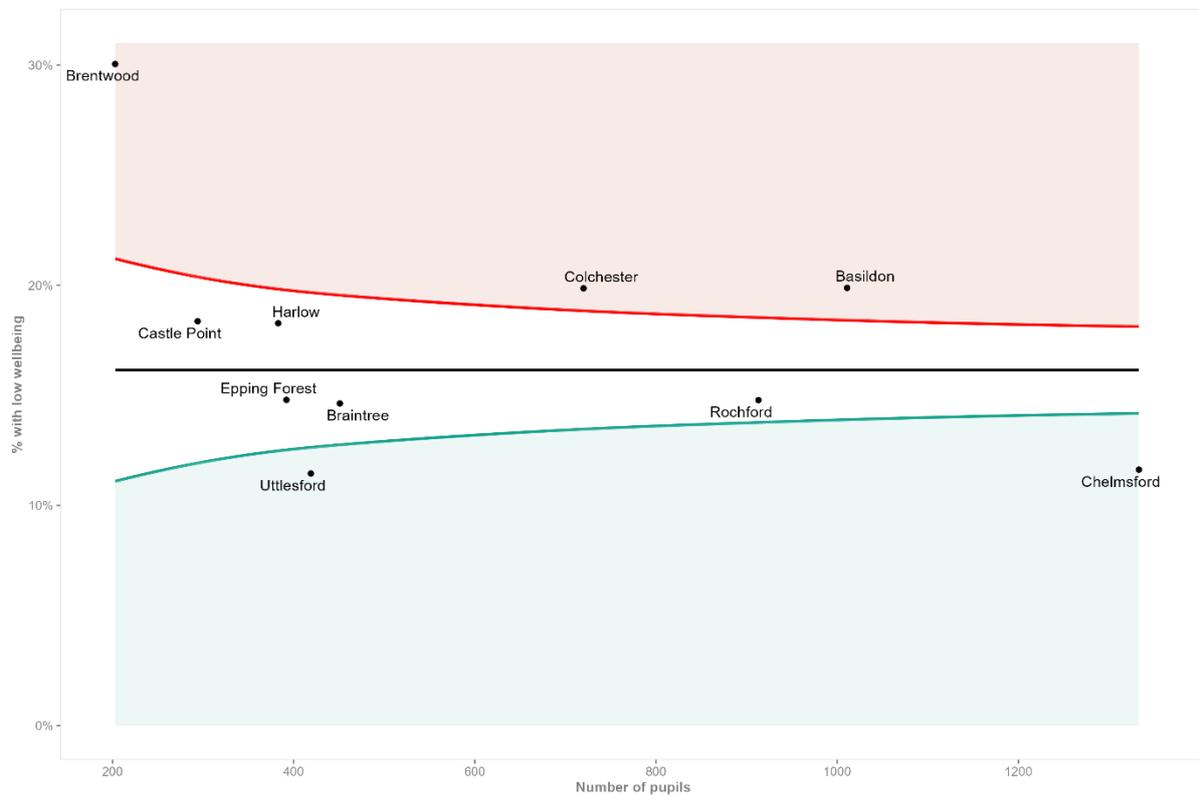
It is worth noting that despite the relatively large size of the survey sample, there is a high degree of variance across districts in terms of characteristics. In districts such as Brentwood, for example, respondent numbers are low and are mainly year 11 girls, which may explain the significantly lower rates of wellbeing seen in the district. Differences between district-level results arise mainly due to differences in the characteristics of the pupils sampled in each district, and this analysis cannot detect differences caused by different practices on the part of districts or schools. In future phases of the survey, we plan to gather a larger sample of Essex pupils from each district, to enable more fine-grained analysis at district-level.

**Figure 2.1. Proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing by district**



To better demonstrate districts with results that significantly differ from the Essex-wide mean, Figure 2.2 shows a ‘funnel plot’ of the same data to account for the expected variation from the Essex-wide mean at different population sizes.

**Figure 2.2. Funnel plot of proportion of pupils reporting low wellbeing by district**



The black horizontal line represents the Essex-wide average proportion (16.2 per cent). Funnel plots help us distinguish which variation is unusual, and which is expected. The red and green curves represent the 95 per cent confidence intervals around the Essex-wide average based on a given pupil count. Where districts submit a lower number of responses, we expect to see larger variation around the Essex mean due to relatively more 'noise' in the data. Where districts submit a larger number of responses, this 'noise' and random variation is 'averaged out' and we expect to see less variation around the Essex mean. Districts within the 'funnel' show a difference from the mean that is sufficiently small that we cannot rule out that it happened by chance. Districts falling outside of the funnel show results that are significantly different from the mean. Districts in the green zone show significantly higher wellbeing (low rates of low wellbeing), districts in the red zone show significantly lower wellbeing (high rates of low wellbeing).

## Part 3: Wellbeing across gender in Essex

Pupils taking the survey were asked to self-report their gender, with choices of 'Boy', 'Girl', and 'Other (please specify)'. Pupils reporting responses aligned with transgender, non-binary, or other gender-questioning gender identities have been assigned as 'gender-diverse'.

This section reports wellbeing findings for headline year groups: years 6, 7 and 11.

Overall, girls in Essex report significantly lower wellbeing scores than boys. This disparity is greater in later years, with over twice as many year 11 girls reporting low wellbeing than Year 11 boys, while in Year 6 boys and girls report broadly similar scores.

Gender-diverse pupils represent a small proportion (1.6%) of pupils who reported their gender, and as such cannot be included in many of the following plots to prevent identification. However, where results are reportable, these pupils report concerning lower rates of wellbeing, with over 70% of gender-diverse pupils in year 7 reporting low wellbeing in 'Appearance' (about 38 out of 55, numbers are rounded to protect identities).

One particularly worrying observation in relation to gender-diverse pupils was a small number of pupils (<15) selecting 'any other gender' and then filling in the free text box using a transphobic meme. This meme mocks non-binary gender self-identification and has been described by researchers as aggressive trolling.<sup>4</sup> We interpret this action as ridiculing the validity of trans and genderfluid identities, and we believe that the pupils using this meme will have understood the implications of their actions to varied degrees. Whilst the use of this meme is by no means prevalent among the wider pupil population in Essex, the pupils giving these responses were from a range of schools and districts, suggesting these pupils made the choice to give these responses independently.

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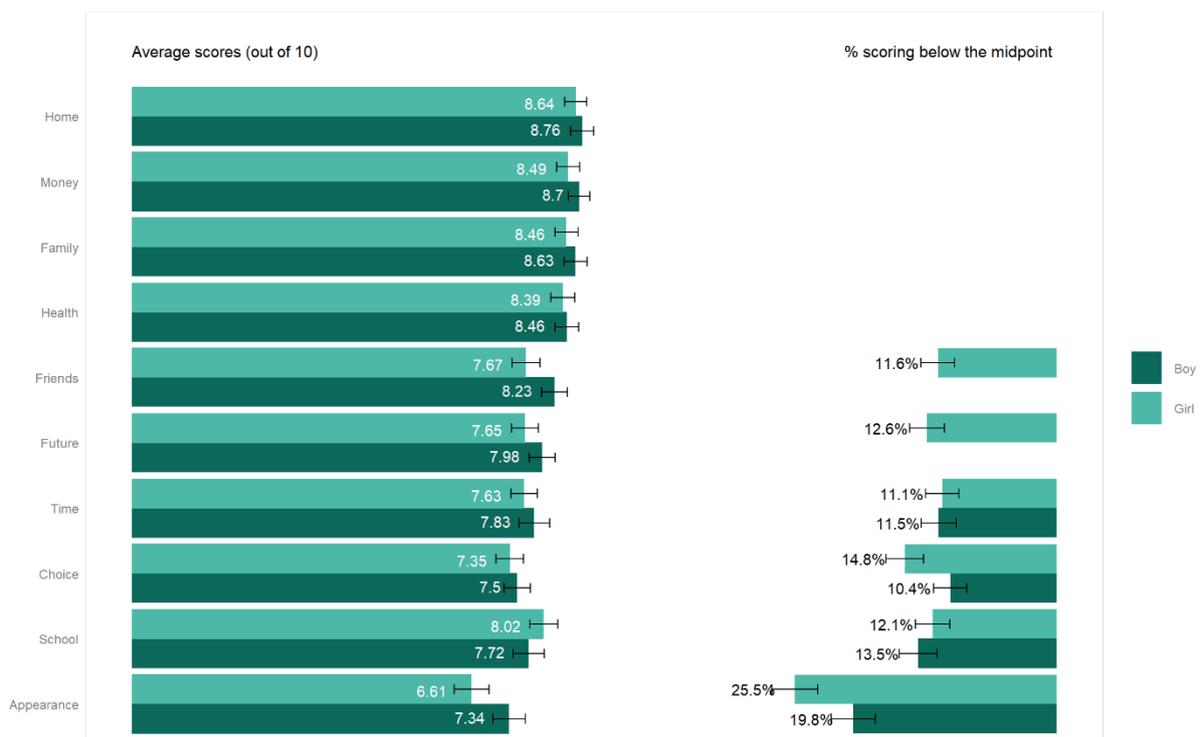
<sup>4</sup> "I sexually identify as an attack helicopter", [www.knowyourmeme.com](http://www.knowyourmeme.com), accessed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022. See "attack helicopter", discussed in Jaroszewski, Samantha & Lottridge, Danielle & Haimson, Oliver & Quehl, Katie. (2018). "Genderfluid" or "Attack Helicopter": Responsible HCI Research Practice with Non-binary Gender Variation in Online Communities. 1-15. 10.1145/3173574.3173881.

## Year 6

### Key findings

- Boys and girls in year 6 report broadly similar wellbeing scores across all wellbeing items.
- 'Appearance' stands out as the item with the largest differences between gender, with 25.5 per cent of Year 6 girls reporting low wellbeing in this area compared with 19.8 per cent for year 6 boys.
- Similarly, a significantly greater proportion of year 6 girls report low wellbeing in 'Choice' compared to year 6 boys (14.8 per cent and 10.4 per cent respectively).

**Figure 3.1. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by gender**

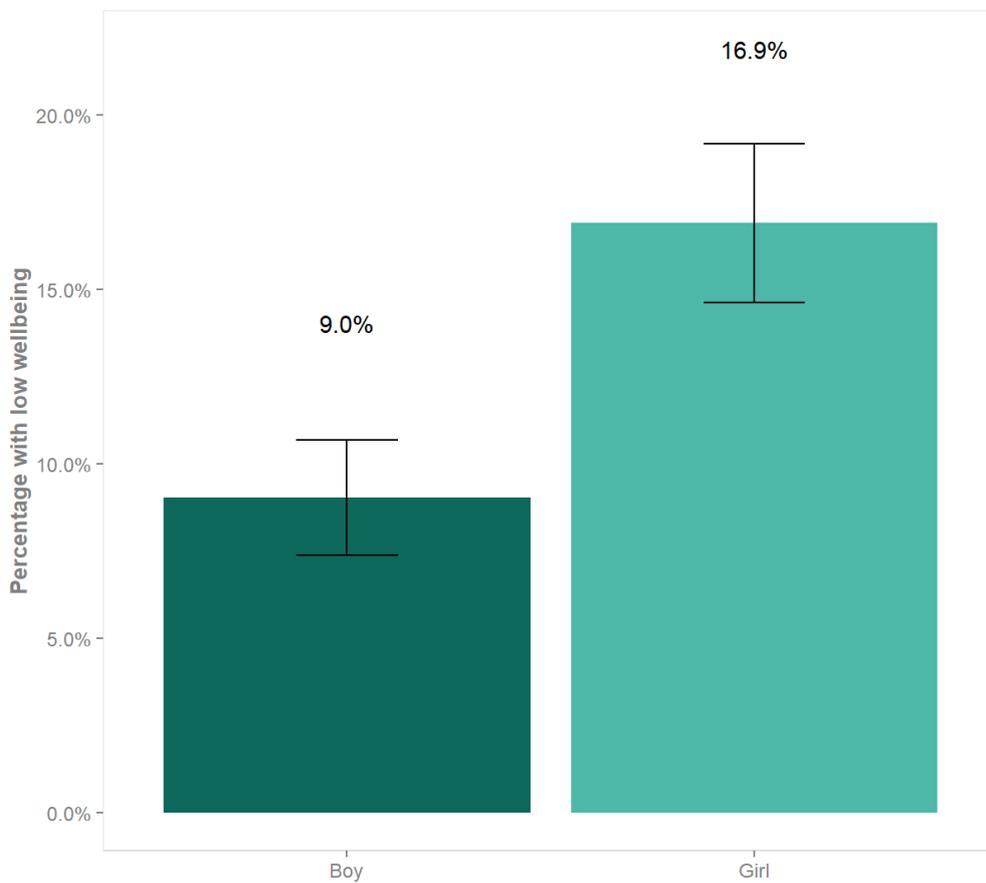


## Year 7

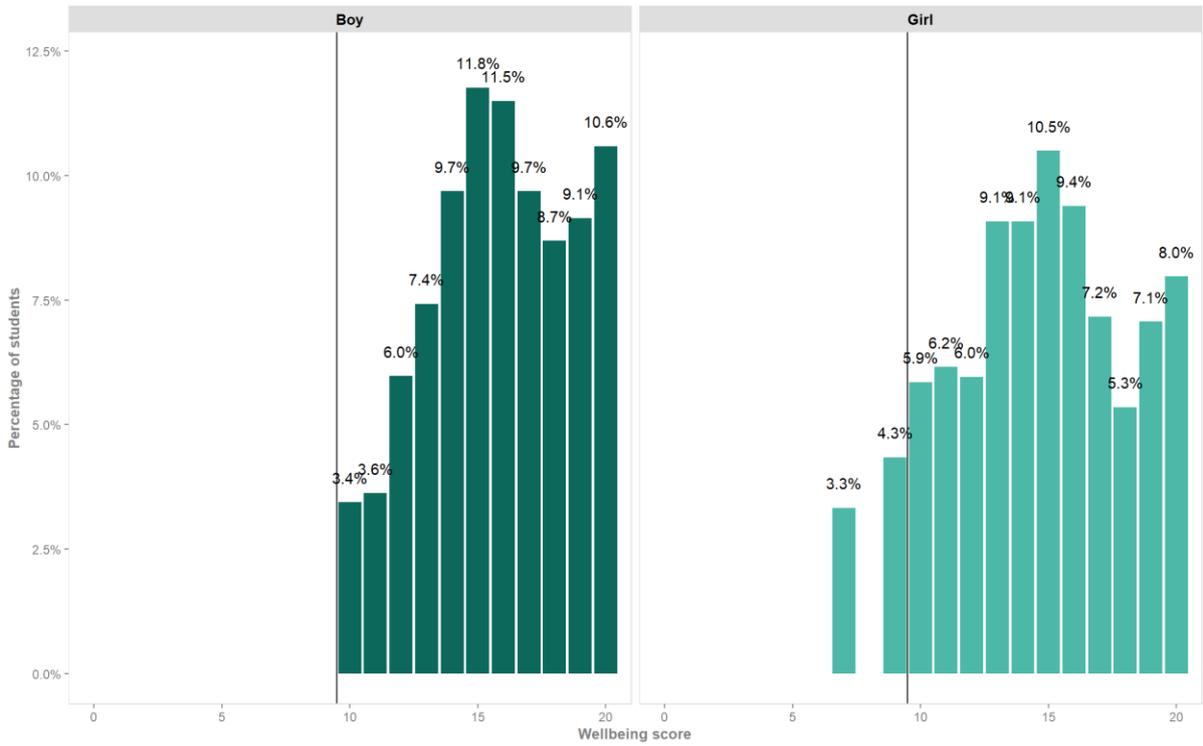
### Key findings

- Girls in year 7 report significantly lower rates of wellbeing than boys, with almost twice the proportion of girls reporting overall wellbeing scores below the mid-point than boys.
- Year 7 boys report higher scores than girls on average across all wellbeing items, with the most significant discrepancy in 'Appearance', where the average score for girls is 1.1 points lower than boys (5.7 and 6.8 points for boys and girls respectively).
- Gender diverse pupils in year 7 report significantly lower wellbeing than both boys and girls, with 70 per cent of gender-diverse pupils reporting low wellbeing in 'Appearance'. These pupils also have particularly low wellbeing scores across 'Health', 'Future' and 'School' domains.

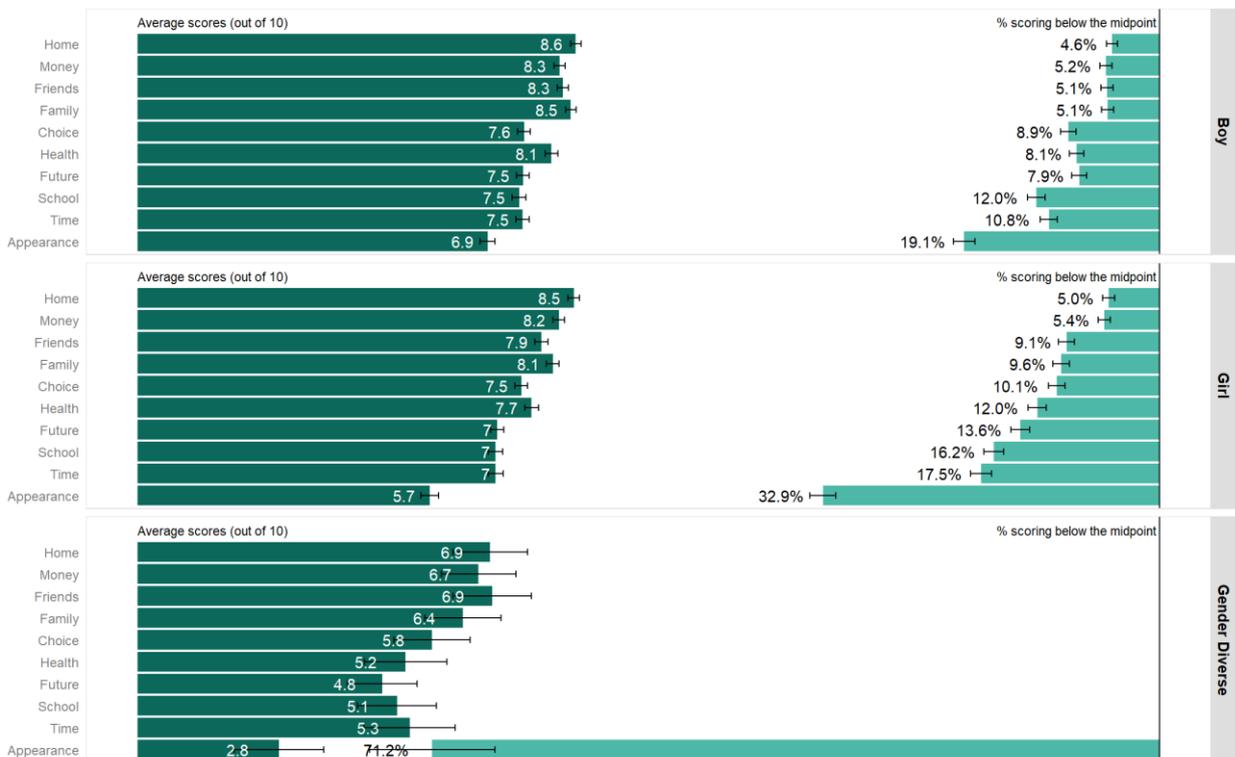
**Figure 3.2. Proportion of year 7 students reporting low wellbeing by gender**



**Figure 3.3. Distribution of wellbeing scores of year 7 pupils by gender**



**Figure 3.4. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 7 pupils by gender**

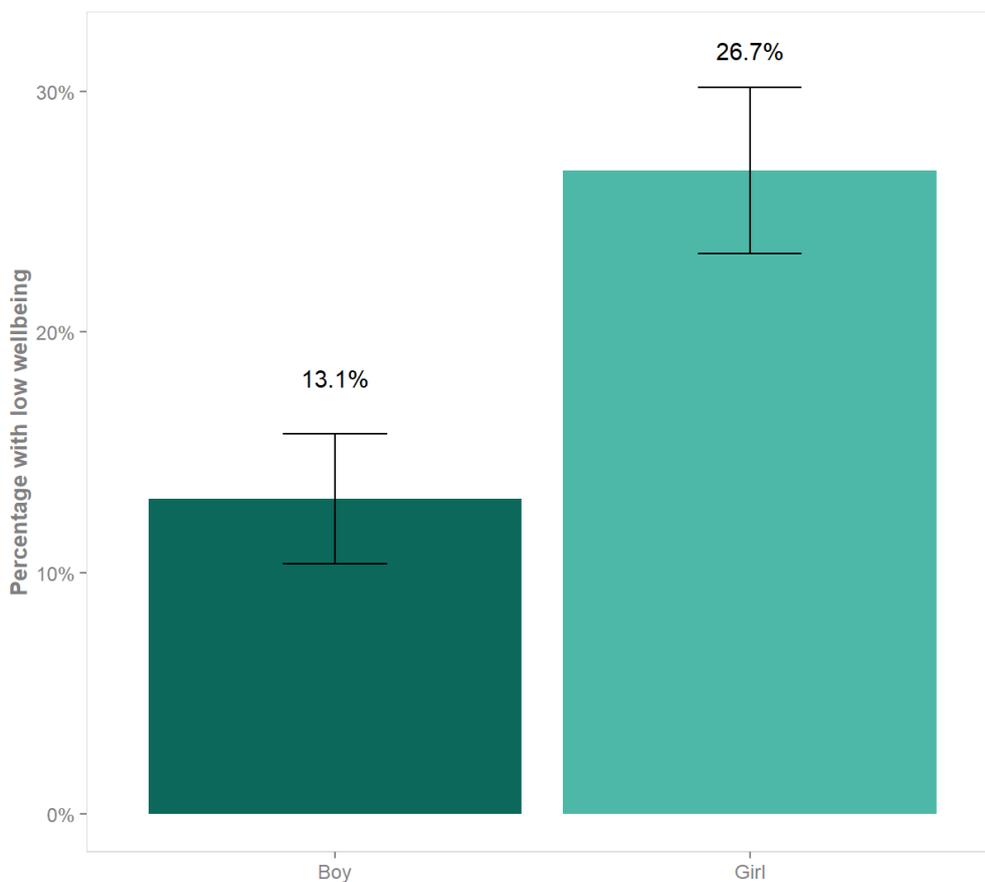


## Year 11

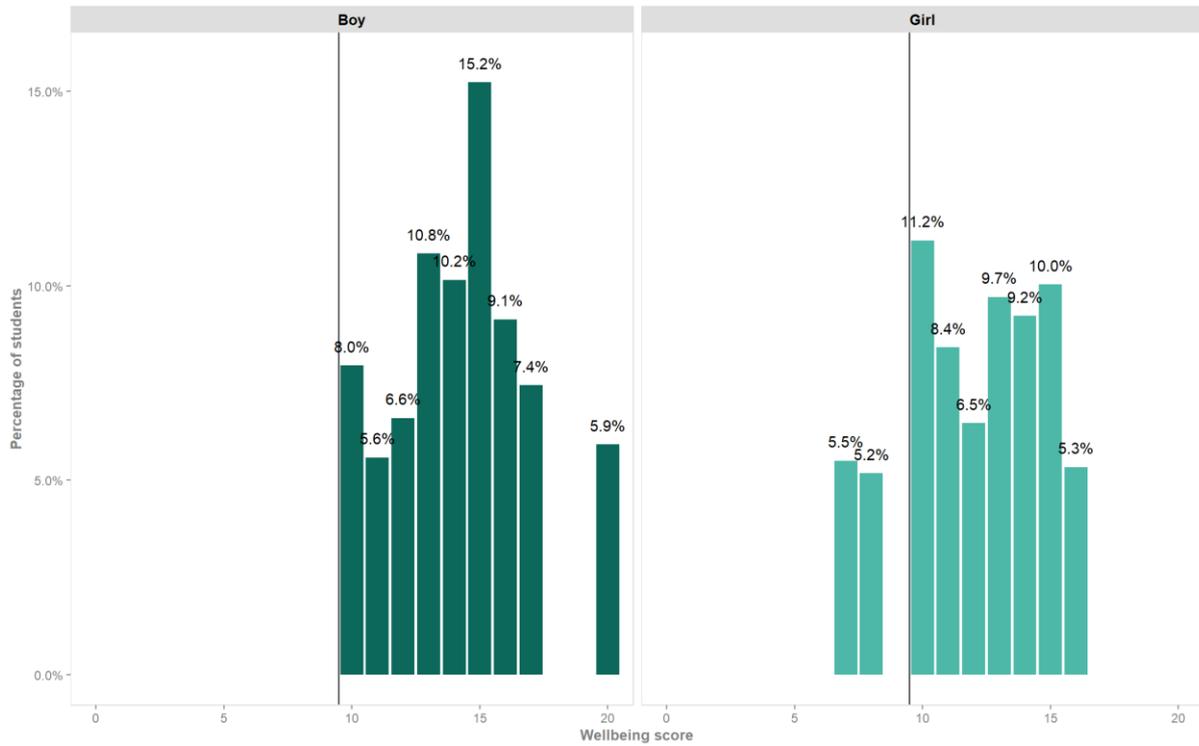
### Key findings

- In year 11, the gap between rates of low wellbeing for boys and girls remains similar to the picture in year 7 with over twice as many girls as boys reporting low wellbeing (13.1 per cent and 26.7 per cent). However, the increase in rates of low wellbeing between year 7 and year 11 is greater for boys than girls.
- Girls in year 11 report lower scores in all areas than boys, most significantly in 'Appearance' and 'School'.
- Forty per cent of year 11 girls reported low wellbeing in 'Appearance', with 'School' and 'Time' closely behind (30.6 and 30.9 per cent respectively).

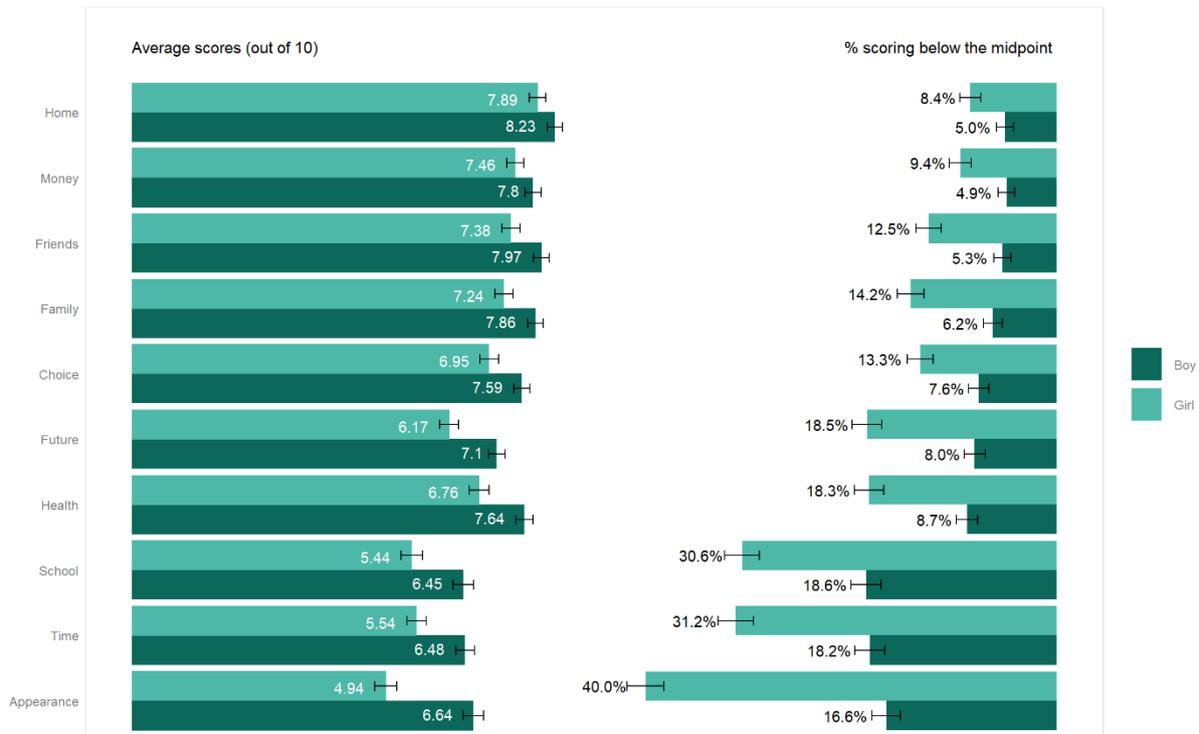
**Figure 3.5. Proportion of year 11 students reporting low wellbeing by gender**



**Figure 3.6. Distribution of wellbeing scores of year 11 pupils by gender**



**Figure 3.7. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 11 pupils by gender**



## Part 4: Wellbeing across ethnicity in Essex

Pupils taking the survey were asked to report their ethnic background, with choices of ‘Asian or Asian British’, ‘Black, Black British, Caribbean or African’, ‘Mixed or multiple ethnic groups’, ‘White’, or ‘Other (please specify)’. Where possible, free text responses were categorised in accordance with the list of ethnic groups provided in the 2021 Census of England and Wales.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that for non-white groups, pupil counts are too small to draw concrete conclusions on the differences in wellbeing due to ethnicity. Further, these small counts prevent us from being able to see intersectional effects, such as the differences in wellbeing between pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and gender.

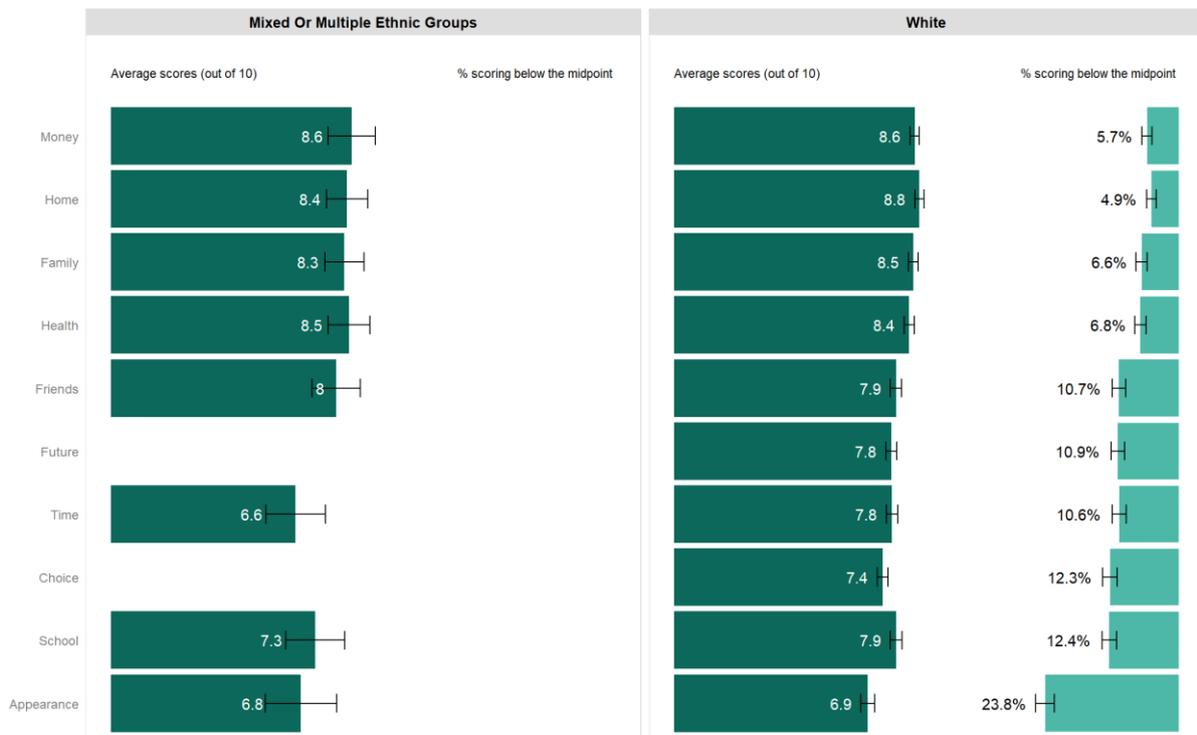
Overall, the survey revealed no significant differences in wellbeing between ethnic groups, with scores across all wellbeing items remaining broadly similar to scores found in year groups as a whole.

### Year 6

#### Key findings

- In year 6, average wellbeing scores across ethnicities are broadly similar.

**Figure 4.1. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by ethnicity**



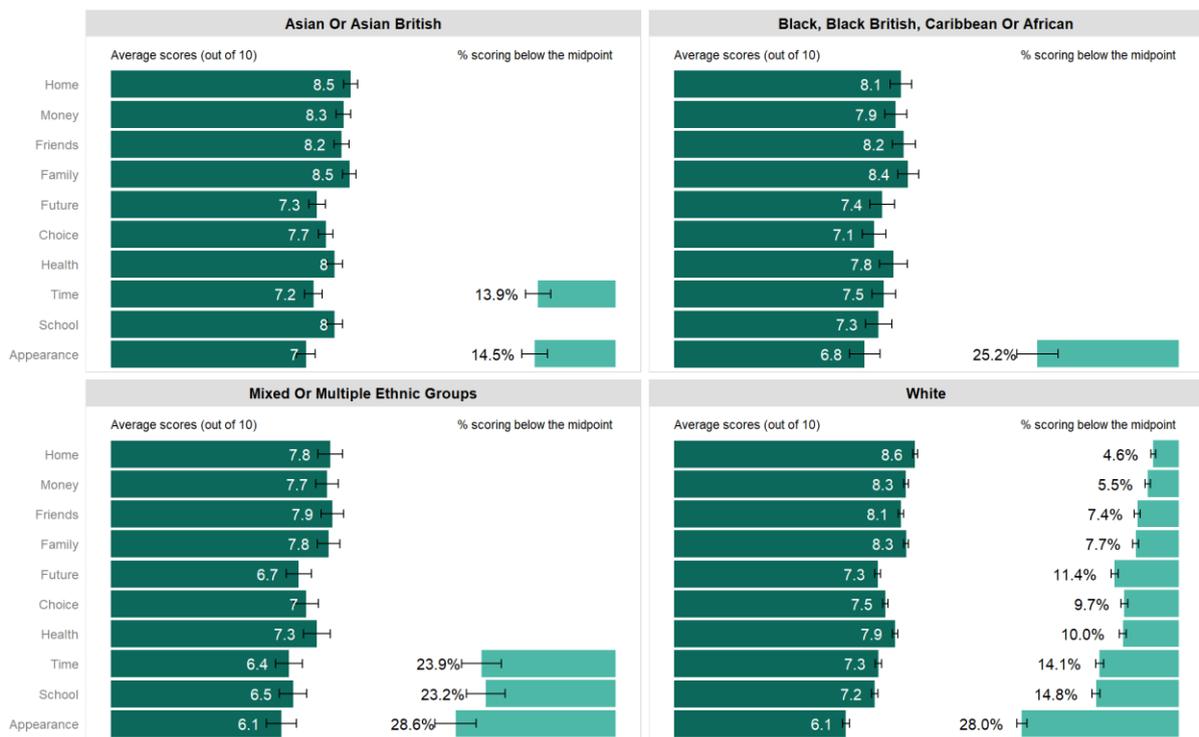
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups>

## Year 7

### Key findings

- In year 7, average wellbeing scores across ethnicities are broadly similar, with pupils from mixed or multiple ethnic groups reporting slightly lower average scores than other ethnicities.
- Year 7 pupils from mixed or multiple ethnic groups report particularly low wellbeing with how they use their time. Note that pupils in year 6 from this ethnic group also have lower average scores in this item compared with pupils from white backgrounds.
- Year 7 pupils with Asian backgrounds have higher rates of wellbeing related to their appearance in comparison with other ethnic groups, with 14.5 per cent reporting low wellbeing related to their appearance compared with more than 25 per cent for other ethnic groups. However, roughly two-thirds of year 7 pupils with Asian backgrounds are boys, which may suggest this finding is driven more by underlying gender numbers than any difference relating to ethnicity.

**Figure 4.2. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 7 pupils by ethnicity**

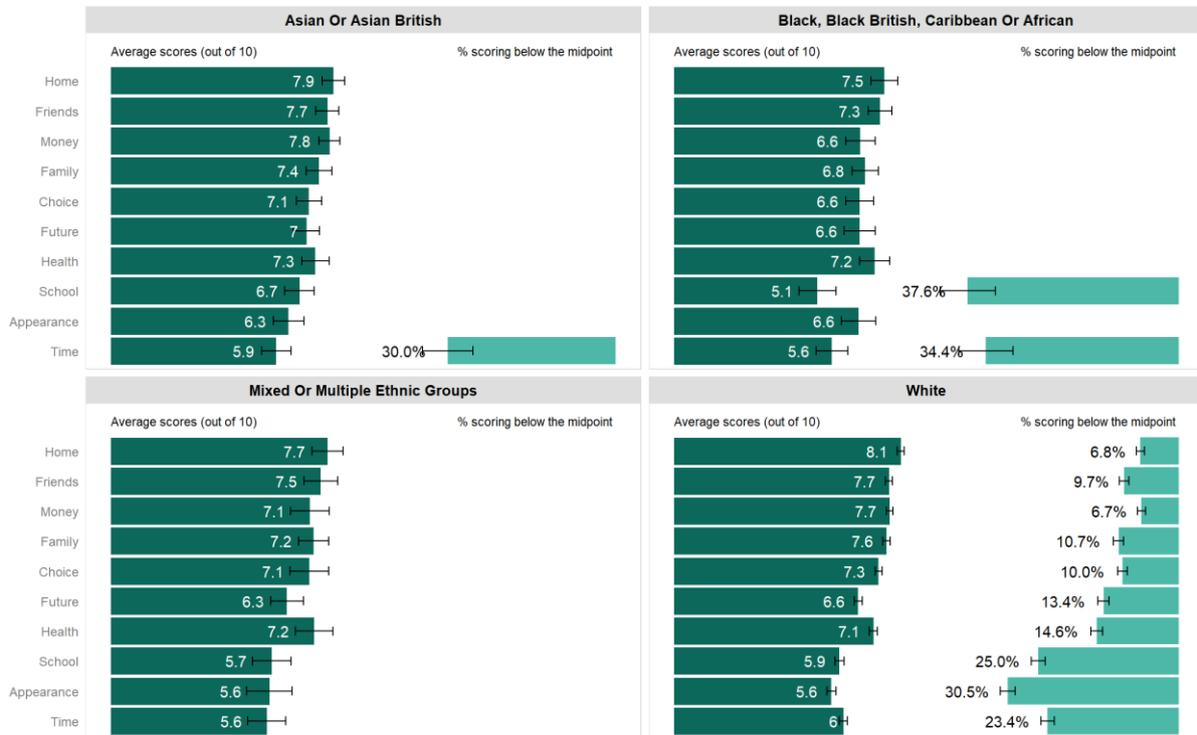


## Year 11

### Key findings

- In year 11, average wellbeing scores across ethnicities are broadly similar, with pupils from Black backgrounds reporting slightly lower average scores than other ethnicities.
- Year 11 pupils with Black backgrounds report lower wellbeing related to their school, with 37.6 per cent reporting low wellbeing compared with 25.0 per cent of pupils with White backgrounds.
- Pupils of Asian and Black backgrounds in year 11 also report low wellbeing related to how they use their time, 30.0 per cent and 34.4 per cent have low wellbeing respectively, compared with 23.4 per cent of pupils with White backgrounds.

**Figure 4.3. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of Year 11 pupils by ethnicity**



## Part 5: Deprivation and wellbeing in Essex

Data on school characteristics was gathered using the Get Information About Schools<sup>6</sup> service. This data includes flags to denote the proportion of pupils within that school eligible for Free School Meals. The measure used in this analysis is FSM quintiles, which categorise all schools in England into five equally sized groups based on the proportion of FSM-eligible pupils.

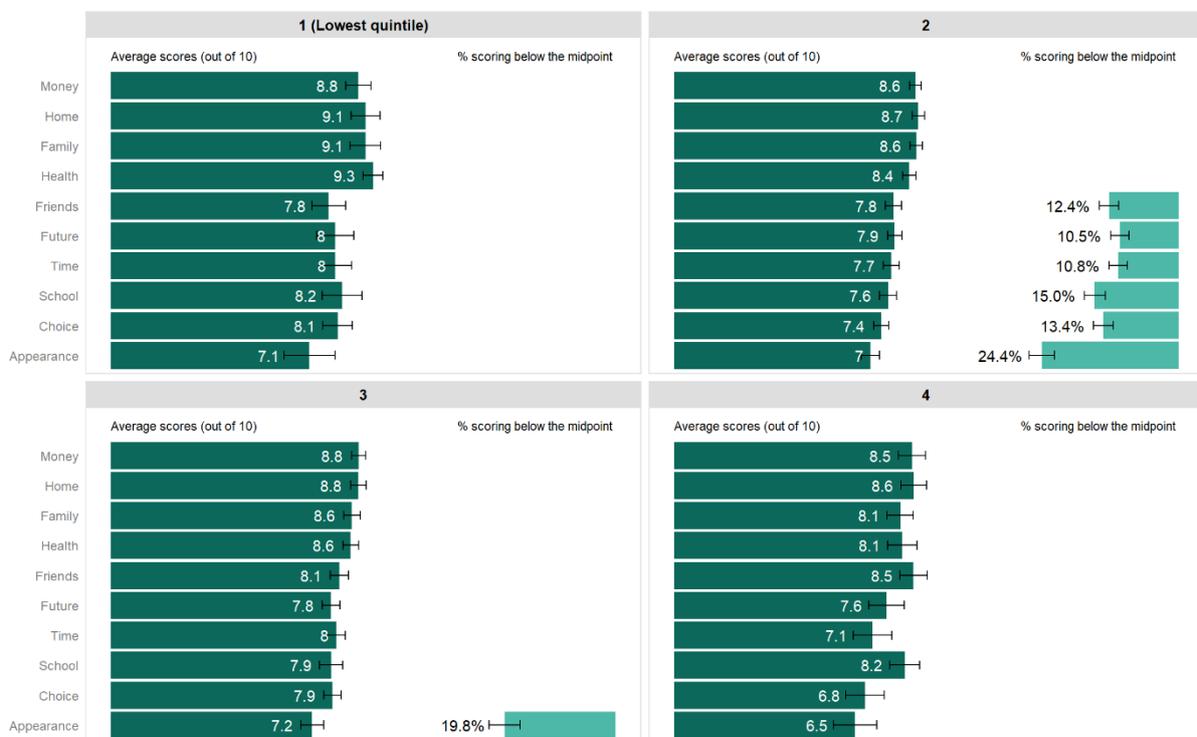
Overall, the data suggests a weak positive correlation between rates of low wellbeing and FSM eligibility, however this trend becomes weaker above the third FSM quintile. In effect, this means pupils in schools flagged as within the two least deprived quintiles report higher wellbeing scores on average than pupils in schools flagged as within the three most deprived quintiles.

### Year 6

#### Key findings

- In year 6, the data suggests a weak positive correlation between free school meals (FSM) quintiles and lower rates of wellbeing.
- Average scores for 'Choice' and 'Appearance' are significantly lower in the most deprived quintile (6.2 and 6.3 respectively) when compared with the least deprived quintile (8.1 and 7.1 respectively).

**Figure 5.1. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by FSM quintile**



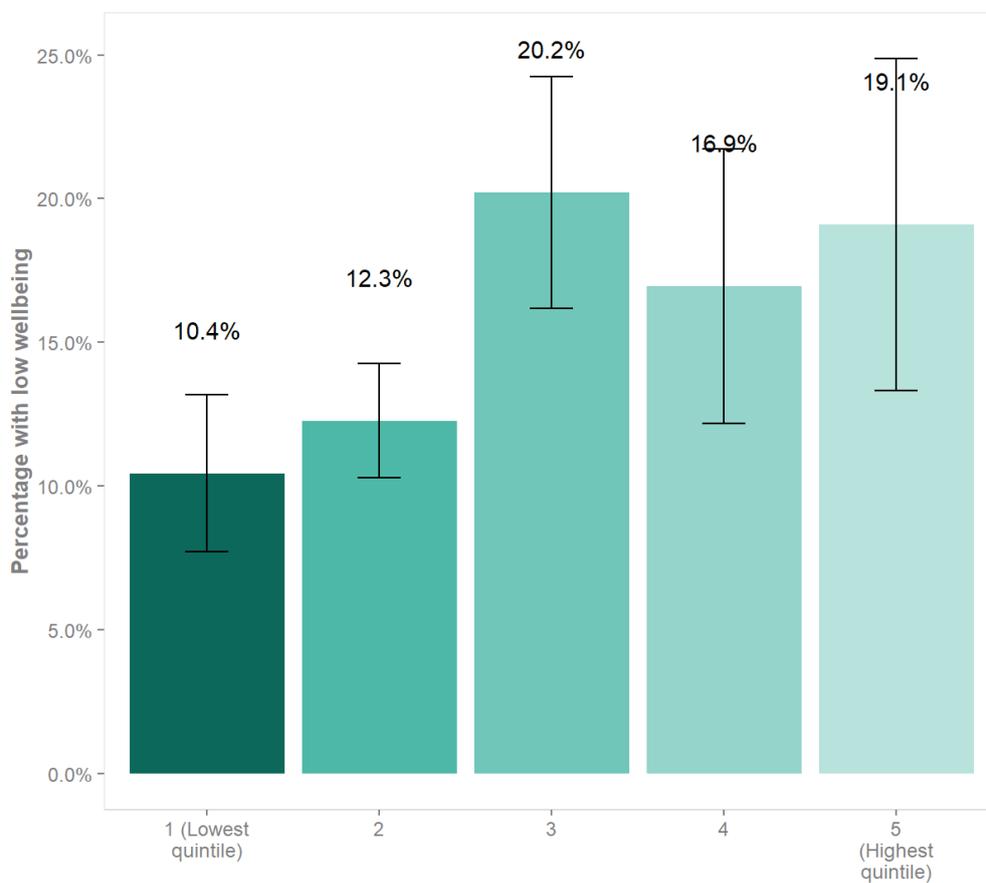
<sup>6</sup> Get Information About Schools (2021). Accessed 14/09/2021.

## Year 7

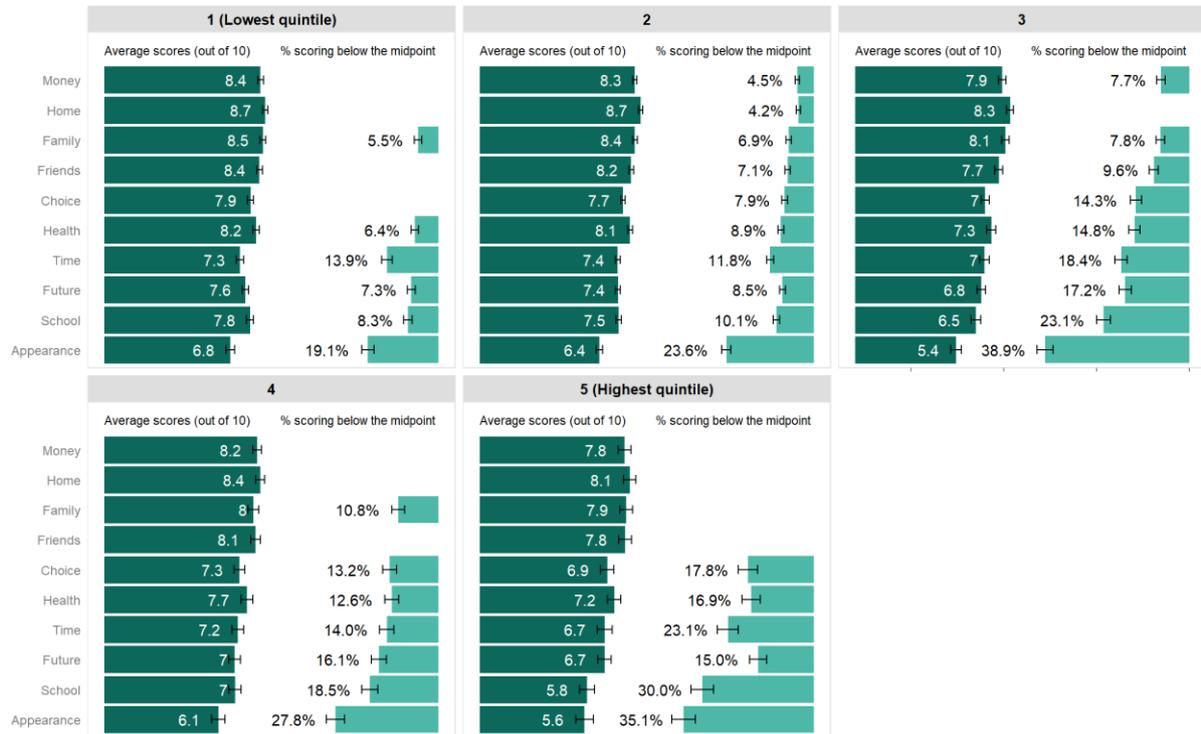
### Key findings

- In year 7, the data suggests a weak positive correlation between free school meals (FSM) quintiles and lower rates of wellbeing.
- However, this correlation becomes less clear between FSM quintiles 3 and 5.
- In the least deprived quintile, 10.4 per cent of pupils report low wellbeing, compared with 20.2 per cent in the third-most deprived quintile.
- For the three most deprived quintiles, roughly a third of all pupils report low wellbeing with regard to their appearance, compared with 19.1 per cent in the least deprived quintile.

**Figure 5.2. Proportion of year 7 students reporting low wellbeing by FSM quintile**



**Figure 5.3. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 7 pupils by FSM quintile**

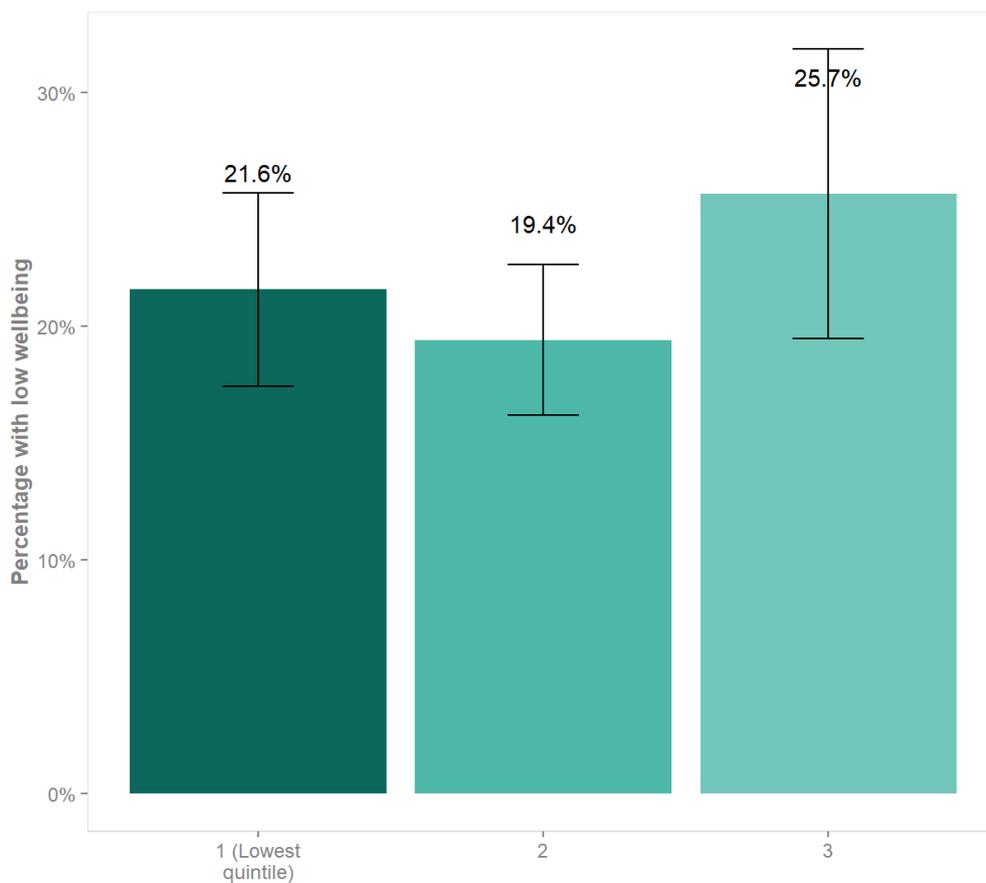


## Year 11

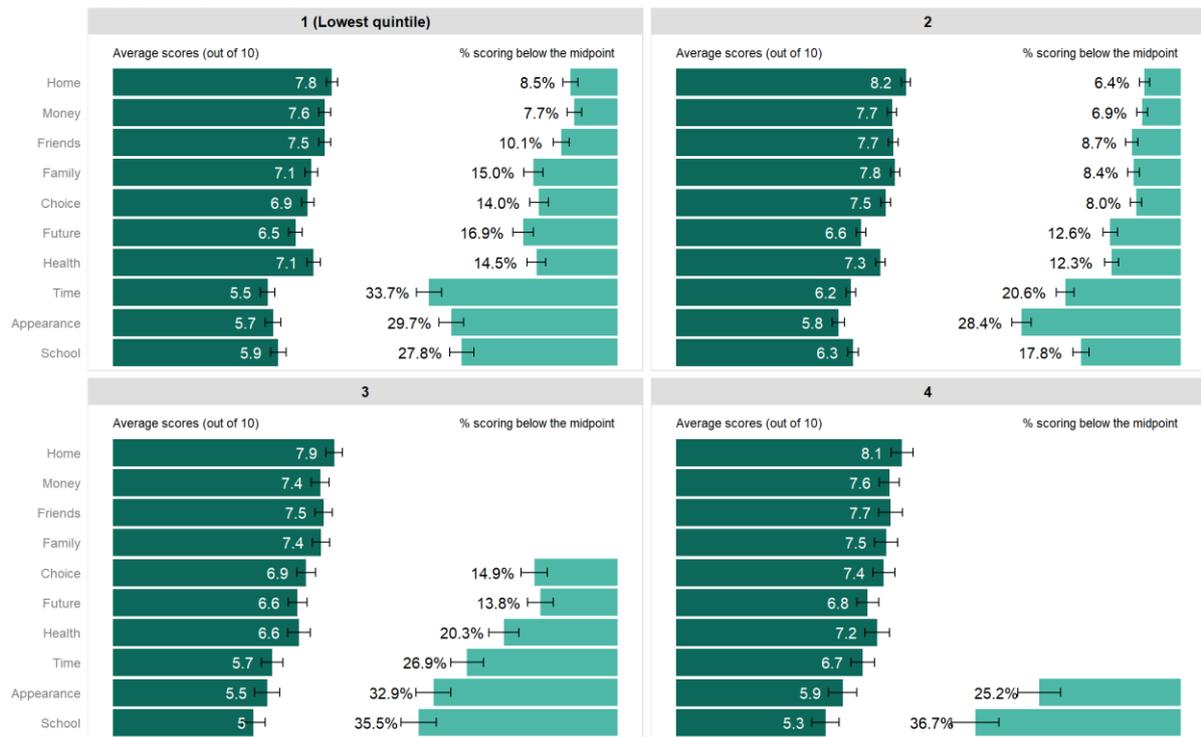
### Key findings

- A small minority of year 11 pupils surveyed are in the most deprived FSM quintiles
- With the data available, it appears the correlation between FSM quintiles and low wellbeing is much weaker than in years 6 and 7, with broadly similar results across quintiles, albeit that pupils in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quintiles reporting significantly lower scores in 'School' and 'Appearance'.

**Figure 5.4. Proportion of Year 11 students reporting low wellbeing by FSM quintile**



**Figure 5.5. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 11 pupils by FSM quintile**



## Part 6: The impact of council-led school interventions in Essex

A number of intervention initiatives are already being piloted or implemented by the council in Essex schools. These include:

- **Disadvantaged strategy**<sup>7</sup>: a framework of evidence-based support methods supplied to schools aimed at identifying and understanding the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on children's learning to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
- **Trauma Perceptive Practice (TPP)**<sup>8</sup>: the Essex approach to understanding behaviour and supporting emotional wellbeing. It is carried out through a train the trainer delivery model, enabling the commencement of a whole school approach, considering firstly school values, policy and practice before commencing on the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills and habits across seven different complementary elements.
- **Supervision of designated safeguarding leads**: a pilot programme aiming to establish the impact of providing a designated senior social worker to supervise Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in schools. By providing supervision, this programme aims to improve the appropriateness and quality of contacts to children's social care. A further aim of the intervention is to increase confidence in decision-making and reduce anxiety among DSLs.

The Essex Education Task Force provided data on which schools surveyed are taking part in the above council-led interventions, allowing us to investigate the differences in pupil wellbeing in participating and non-participating schools.

It must be emphasised that the research design used in this survey is not suitable for identifying the impact of these interventions. The results reported here should be treated as inconclusive with regards to the effectiveness of the programmes for the following reasons.

Firstly, there is no baseline data which would enable analysis of improvement in wellbeing since the beginning of these interventions. Furthermore, there are a variety of selection mechanisms which lead a school to receive a particular intervention, and this selection bias is likely to affect the results in multiple contradictory ways. For example, these interventions are likely targeted at schools that are most in need of improvement, and therefore we would expect pupil wellbeing to be lower on average compared to schools which are not targeted. A contrasting selection mechanism is that intervention schools may have a particularly dynamic leader who is both engaged with programmes offered by the council *and also* effective at improving outcomes for pupils including their wellbeing. Meanwhile our comparison group of non-intervention schools may contain hard-to-reach schools which are in need of targeted intervention but are disengaged from the council's offer.

The analysis reported in this section show broadly similar wellbeing scores across participating and non-participating schools, with some evidence of lower wellbeing in participating schools. As set out above, without a suitable baseline or comparison group this analysis is not conclusive evidence of impact or lack of impact of these council-led interventions. The analysis essentially shows differences in wellbeing in schools where these interventions are being implemented and where

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<sup>7</sup> Essex County Council (2022) 'Tackling Educational Disadvantage: A Toolkit for Essex Schools'.  
<https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/pupil-premium/Documents/Toolkit.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Essex County Council (2022) 'SEMh – Trauma Preventive Practice'.  
<https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/SEND/Pages/SEMh---Trauma-Perceptive-Practice.aspx>

they are not being implemented at the time of the survey. Evidence of lower wellbeing in participating schools may indicate that interventions are being targeted at the correct schools.

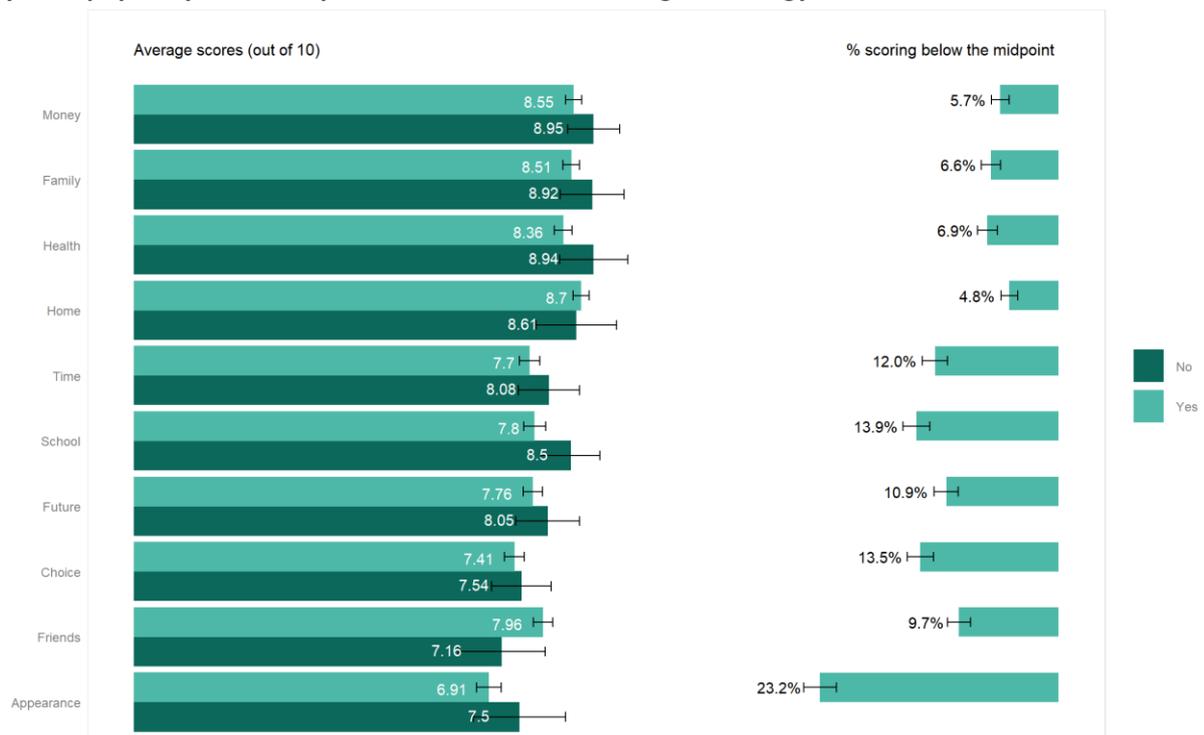
## Disadvantaged strategy

### Year 6

#### Key findings

- In year 6, pupils in schools implementing a disadvantaged strategy reported very similar results to pupils in schools that are not implementing such strategies.

**Figure 6.1. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by school implementation of disadvantaged strategy**

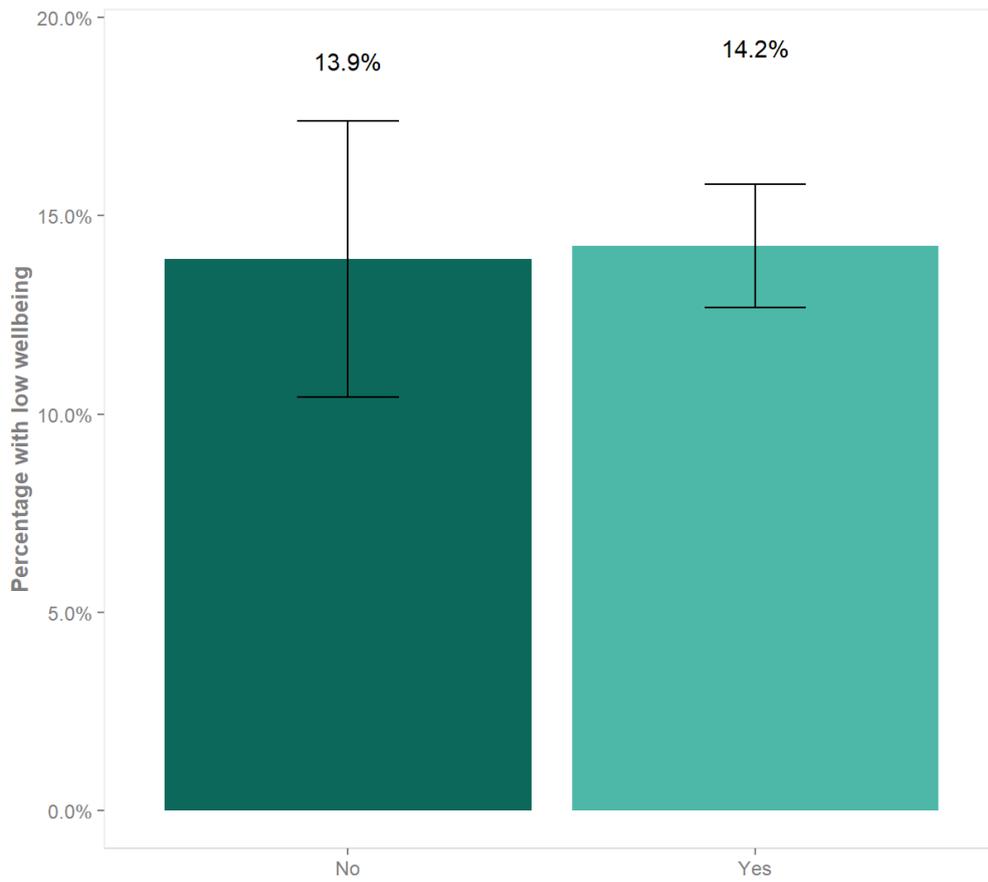


## Year 7

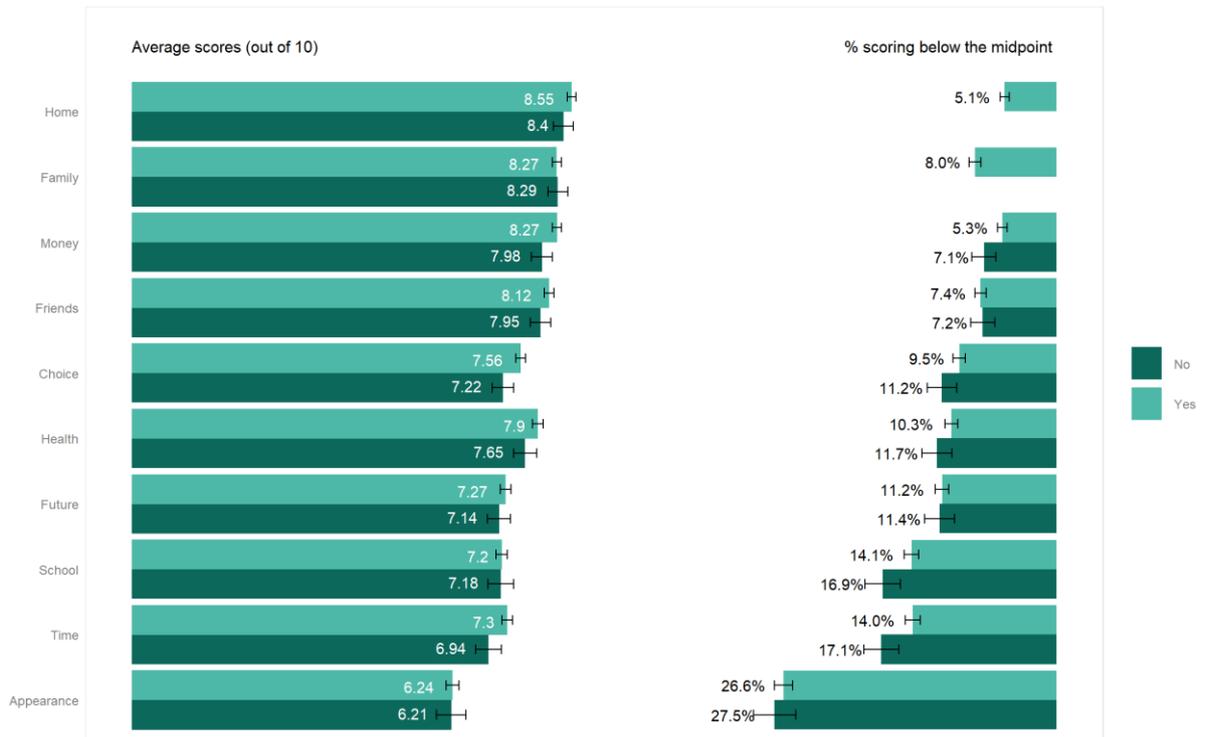
### Key findings

- In year 7, pupils in schools implementing a disadvantaged strategy reported very similar results to pupils in schools that are not implementing such strategies.

**Figure 6.2. Proportion of year 7 students reporting low wellbeing by school implementation of disadvantaged strategy**



**Figure 6.3. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 7 pupils by school implementation of disadvantaged strategy**

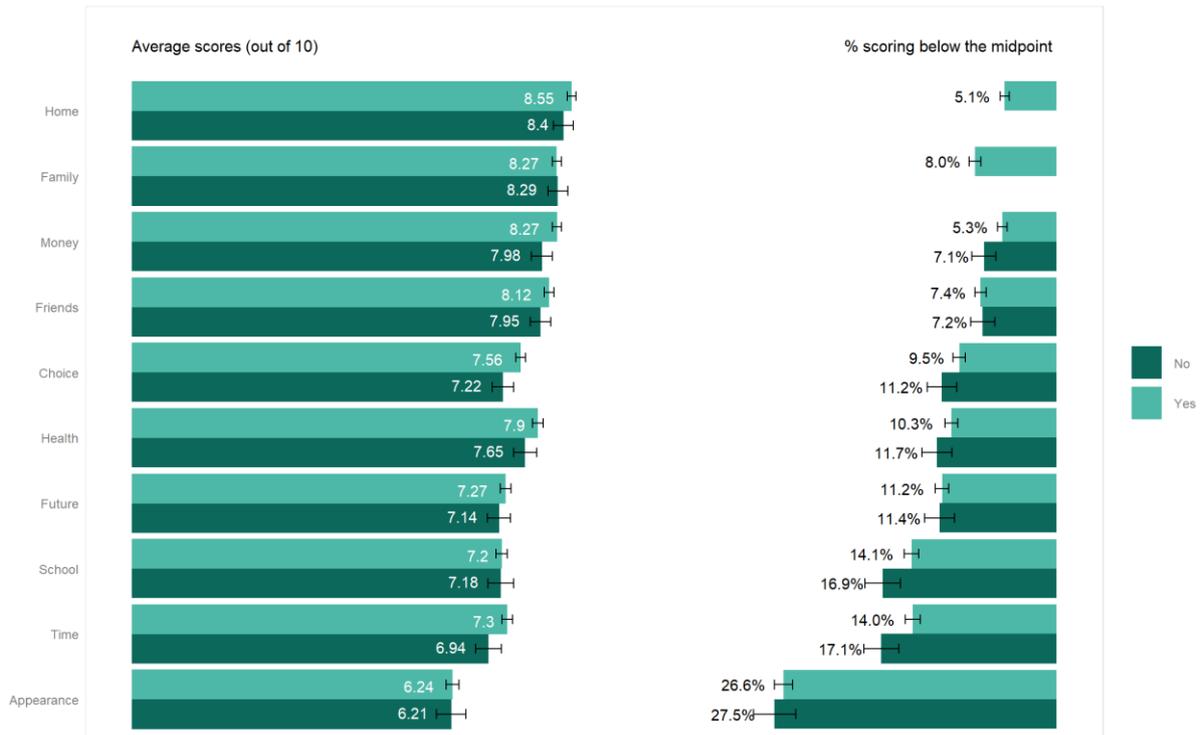


## Year 11

### Key findings

- In year 11, pupils in schools implementing a disadvantaged strategy reported broadly similar results to pupils in schools that are not implementing such strategies.

**Figure 6.4. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 11 pupils by school implementation of disadvantaged strategy**



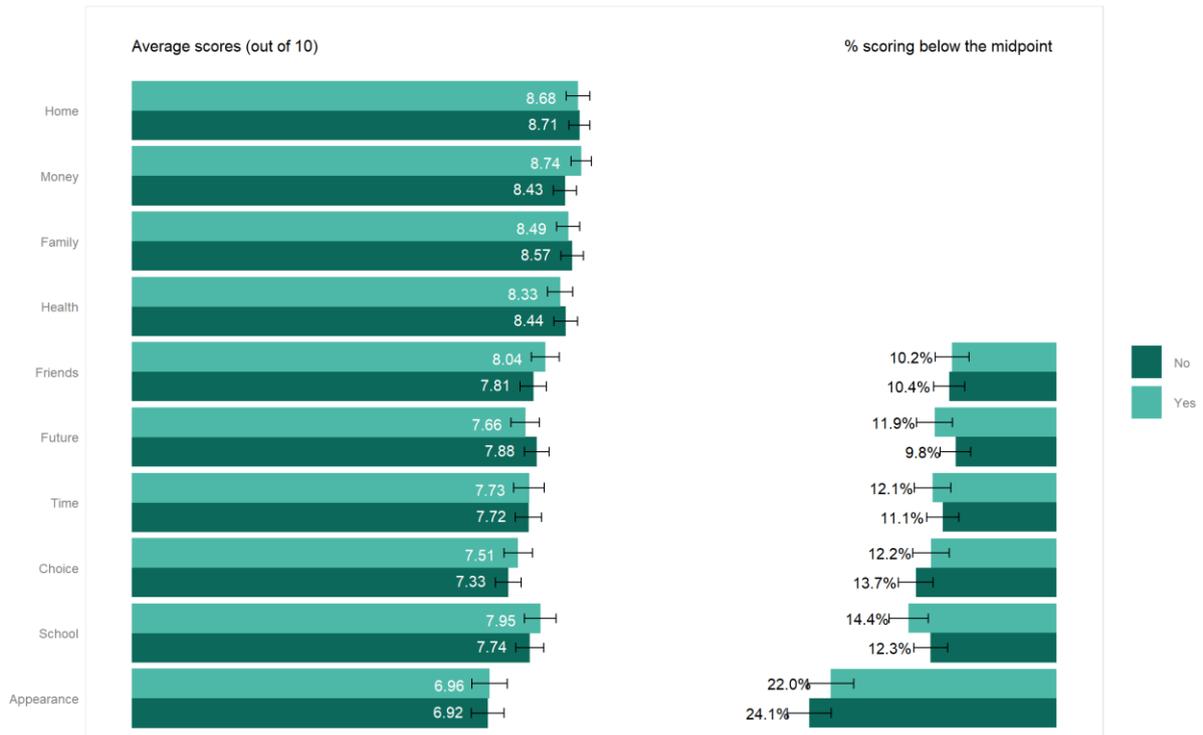
## Implementing TPP

### Year 6

#### Key findings

- In year 6, pupils in schools implementing TPP reported broadly similar results to pupils in schools that are not implementing TPP.

**Figure 6.5. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by school implementation of TPP**

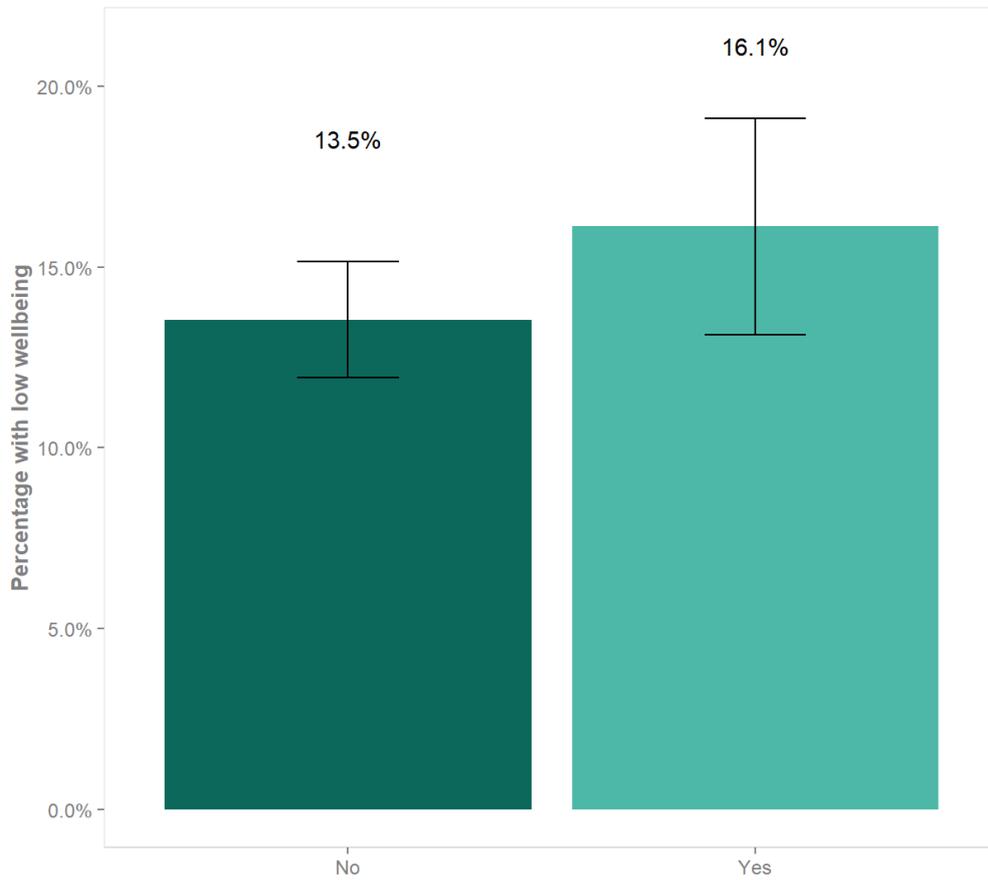


## Year 7

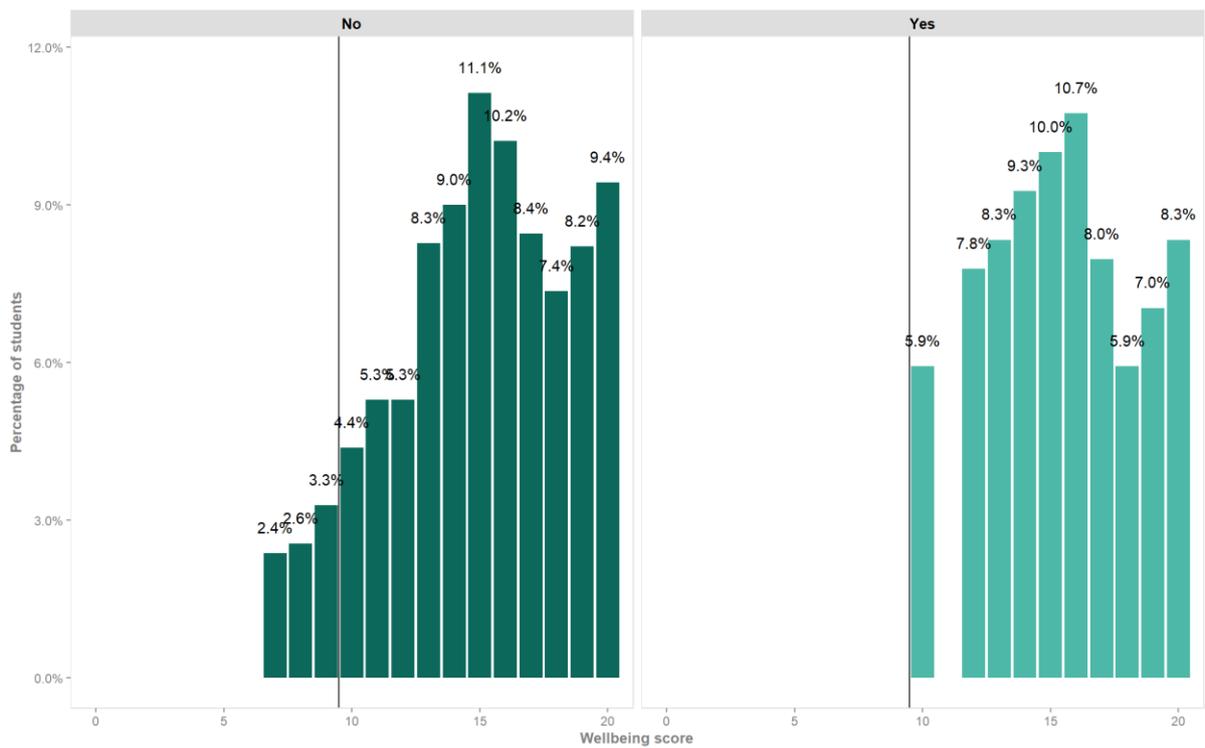
### Key findings

- In year 7, pupils in schools implementing TPP reported broadly similar results to pupils in schools that are not implementing TPP.

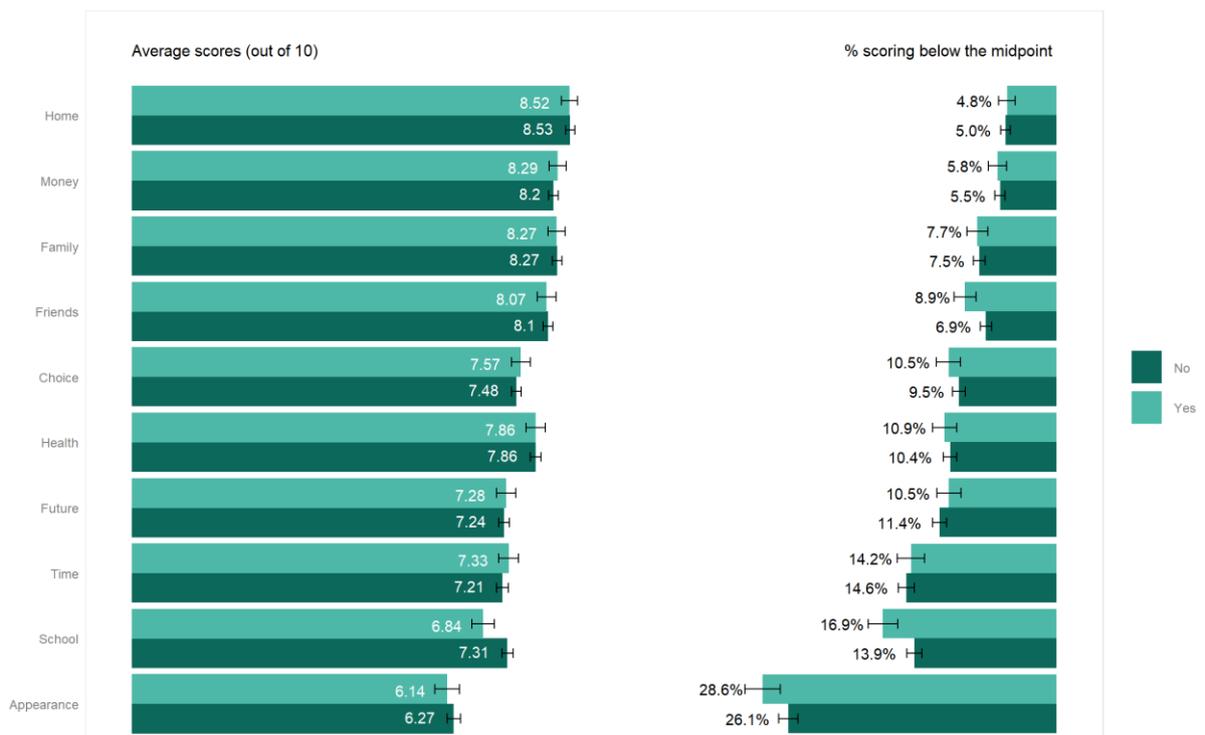
**Figure 6.6. Proportion of year 7 pupils reporting low wellbeing by school implementation of TPP**



**Figure 6.7. Distribution of wellbeing scores of year 7 pupils by school implementation of TPP**



**Figure 6.8. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 7 pupils by school implementation of TPP**

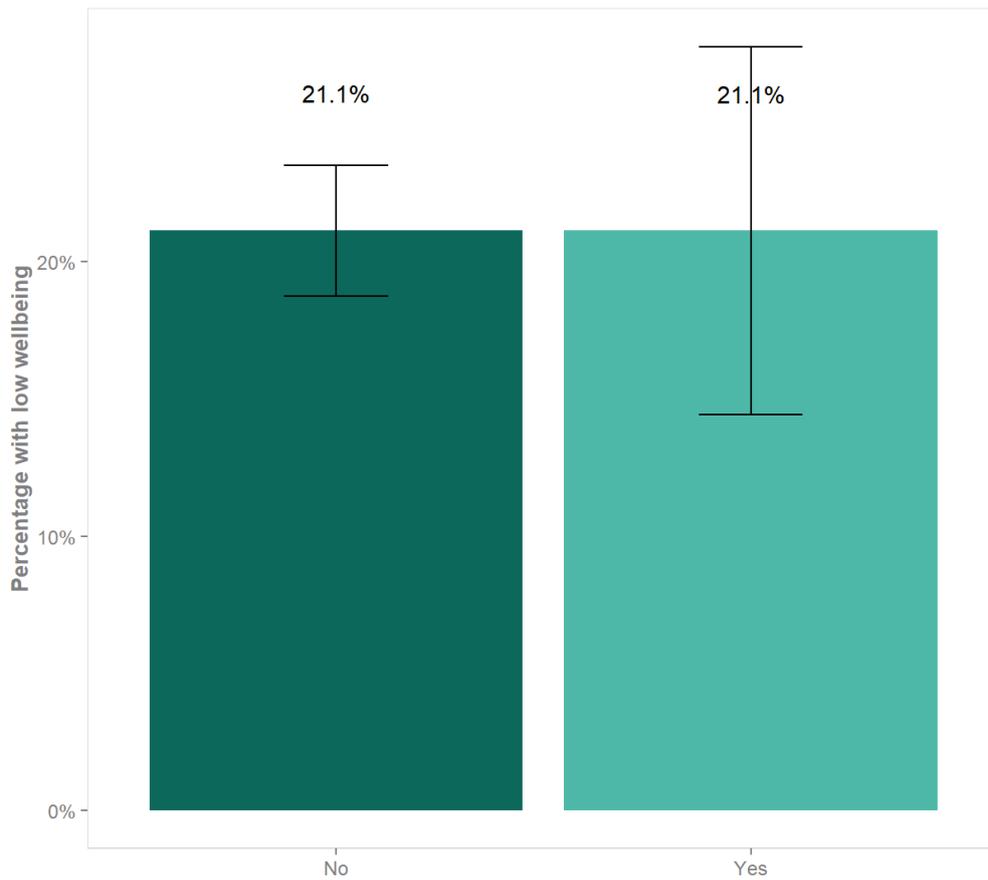


## Year 11

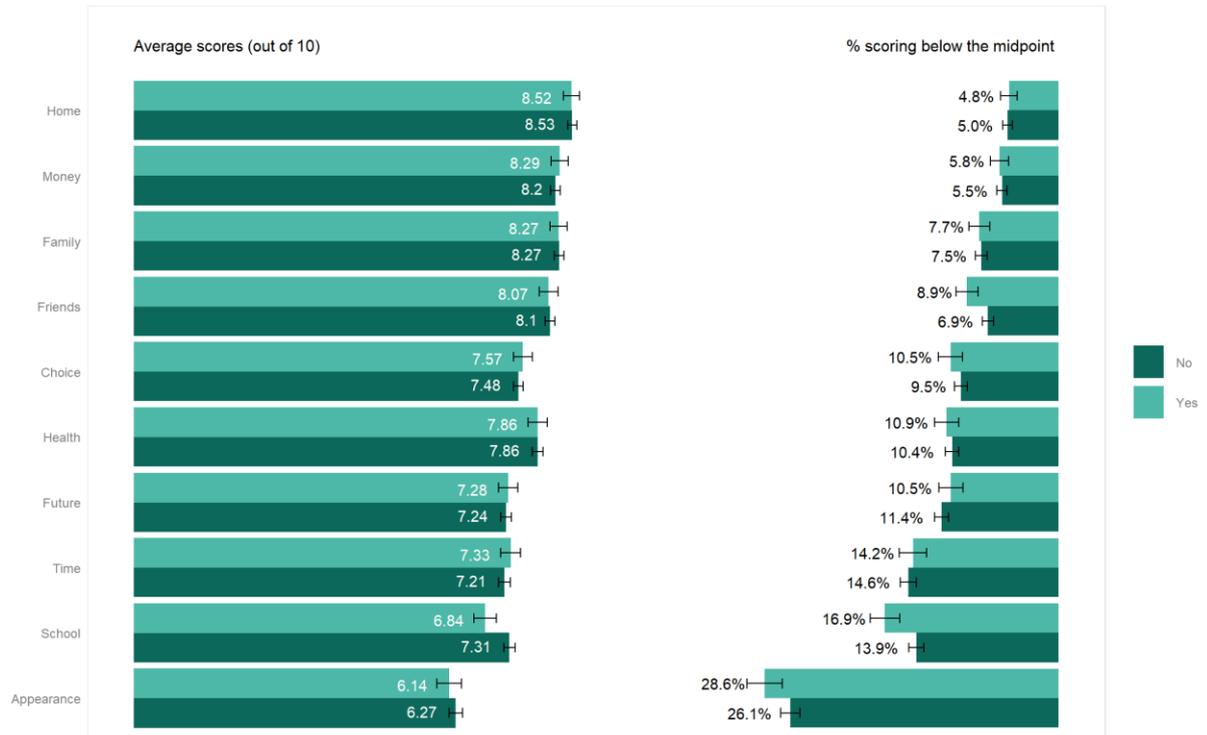
### Key findings

- In year 11, pupils in schools implementing TPP reported broadly similar results to pupils in schools that are not implementing TPP.

**Figure 6.9. Proportion of year 11 students reporting low wellbeing by school implementation of TPP**



**Figure 7. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by school implementation of TPP**



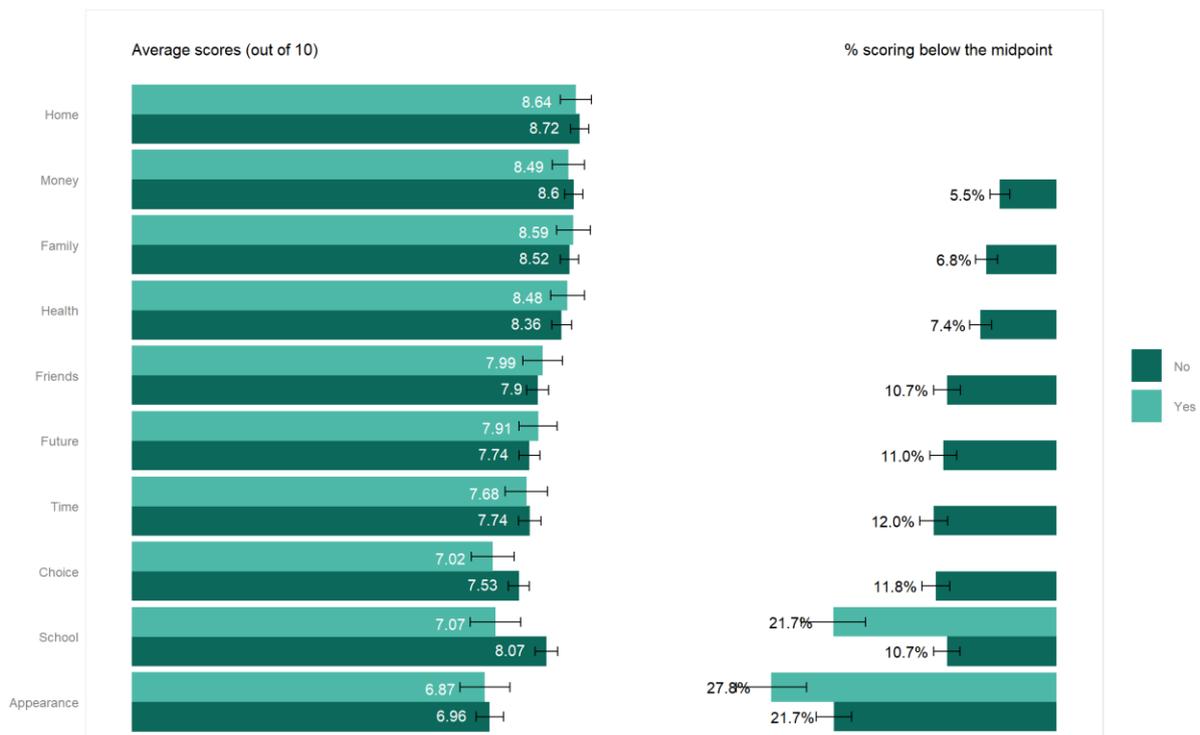
## Piloting supervision of safeguarding leads

### Year 6

#### Key findings

- In year 6, pupils in schools piloting a designated social worker to supervise Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) reported broadly similar average wellbeing scores to pupils in schools that are not piloting the scheme.
- However, a significant difference appears in the proportion of pupils reporting lower wellbeing in 'School', and 'Appearance', where a greater proportion of pupils in participating schools reported low wellbeing than those in non-participating schools.

**Figure 7.1. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 6 pupils by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**

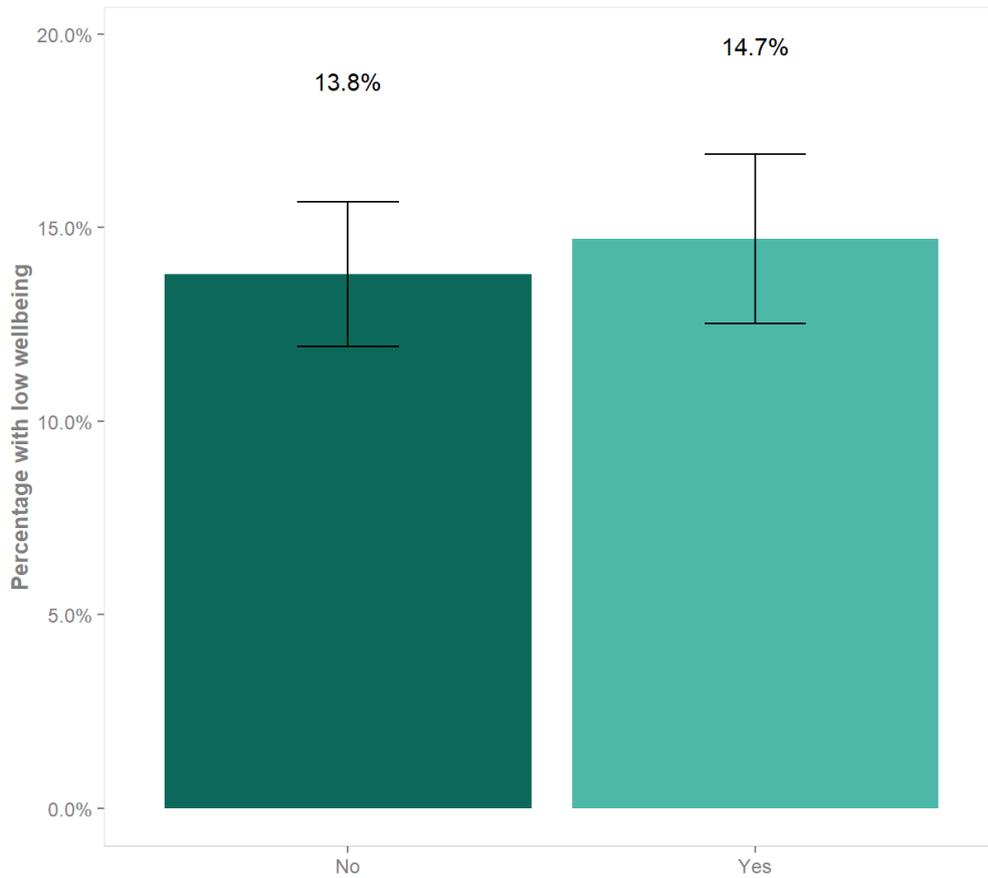


## Year 7

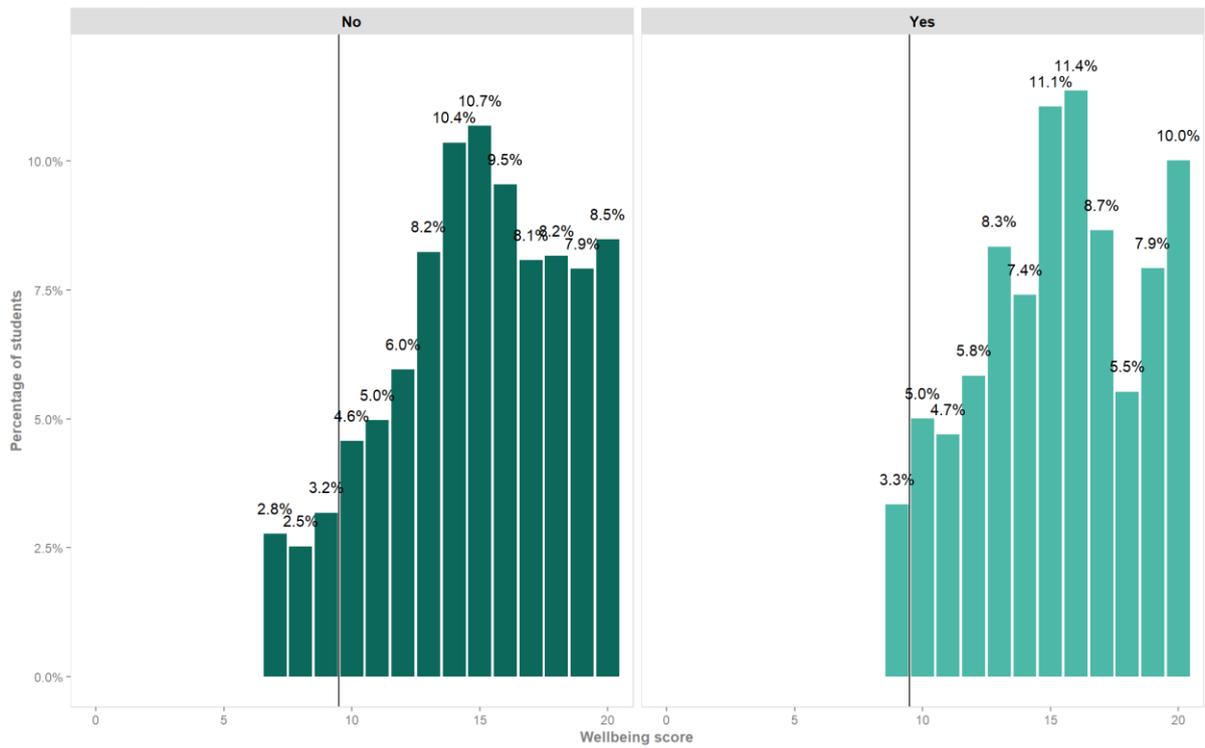
### Key findings

- In year 7, pupils in schools piloting a designated social worker to supervise Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) reported broadly similar results to pupils in schools that are not piloting the scheme.

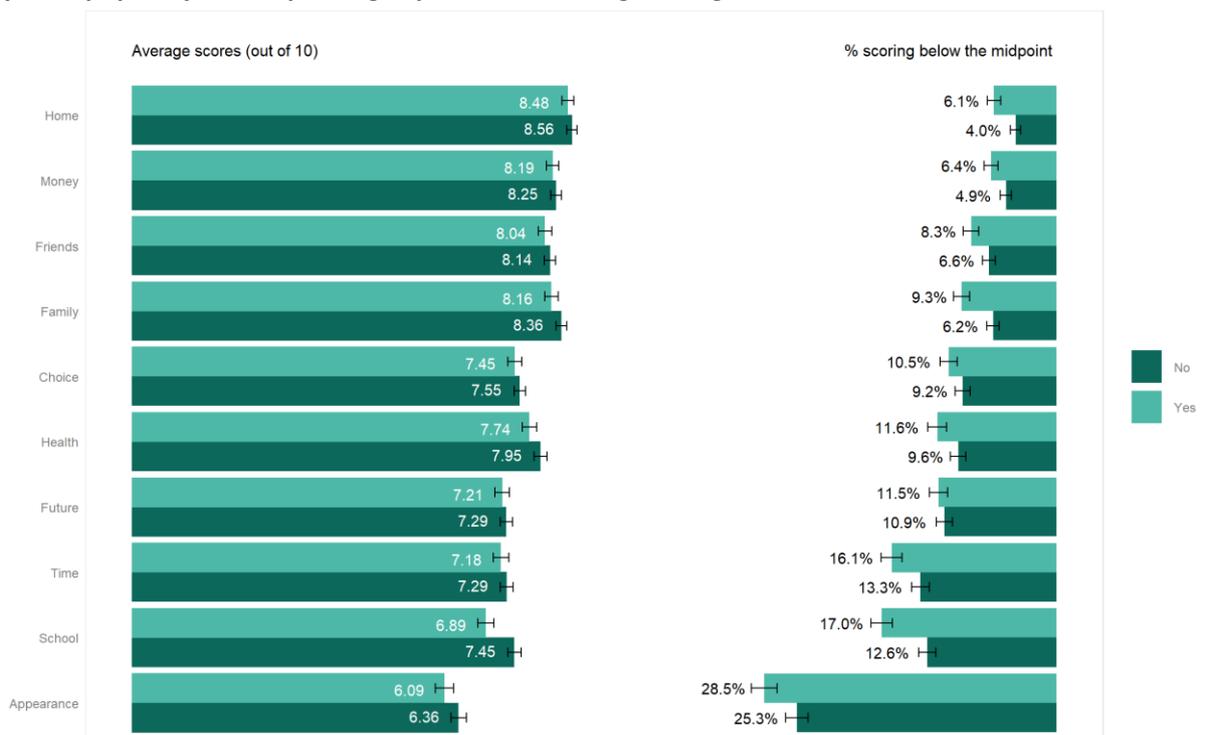
**Figure 7.2. Proportion of year 7 pupils reporting low wellbeing by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**



**Figure 7.3. Distribution of wellbeing scores of year 7 pupils by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**



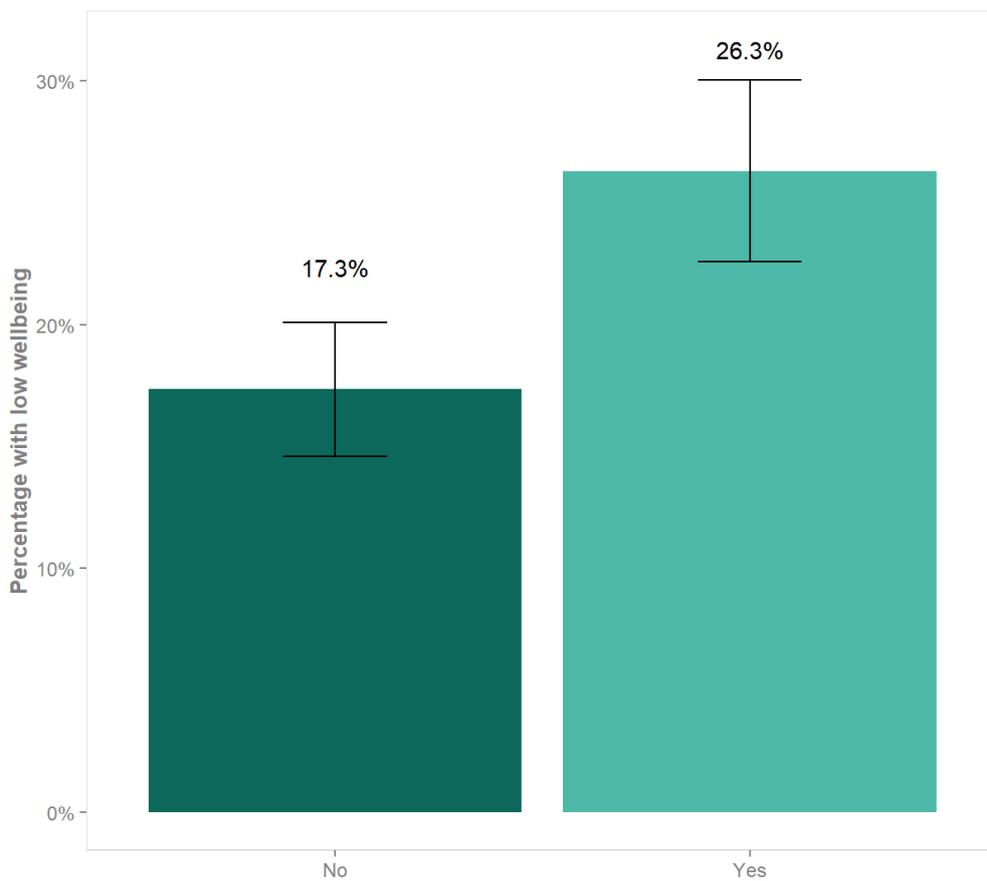
**Figure 7.4. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 7 pupils by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**



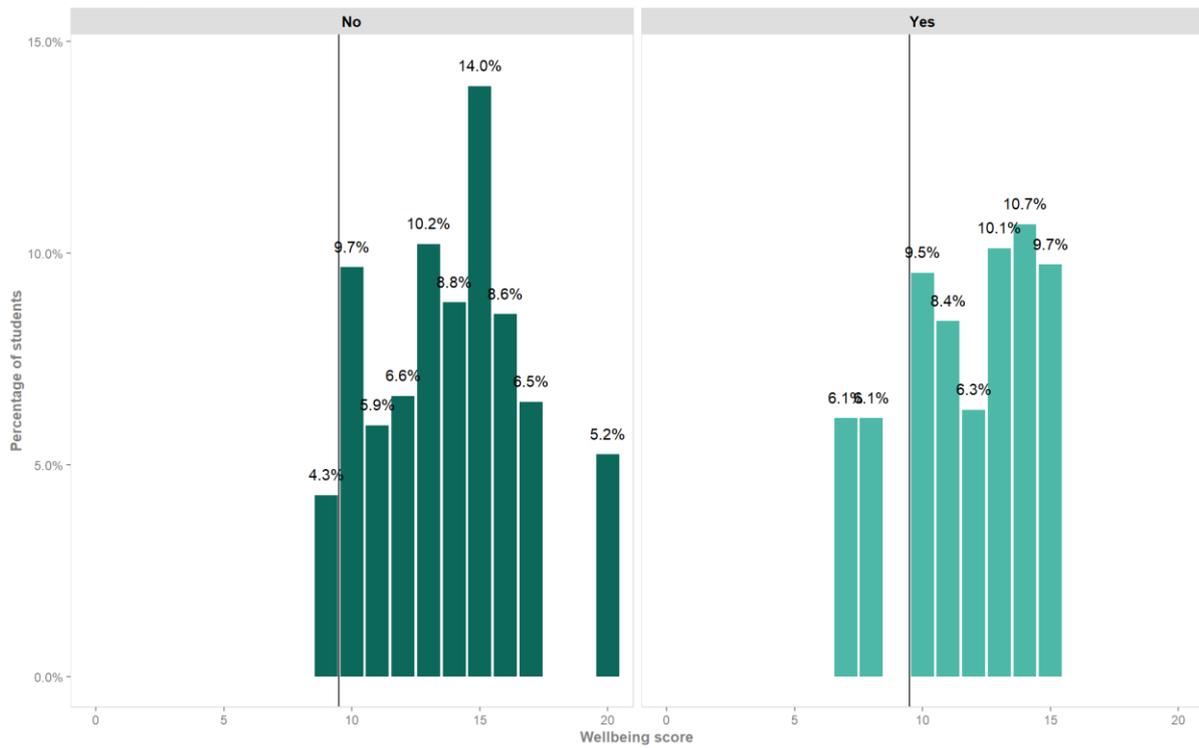
## Year 11

- In year 11, a greater proportion of pupils in schools piloting a designated social worker to supervise DSLs reported low overall wellbeing to pupils in schools that are not piloting the scheme (26 per cent and 17 per cent).
- A greater proportion of pupils in schools piloting the scheme reported low wellbeing in 'Time', 'School', and 'Appearance'.

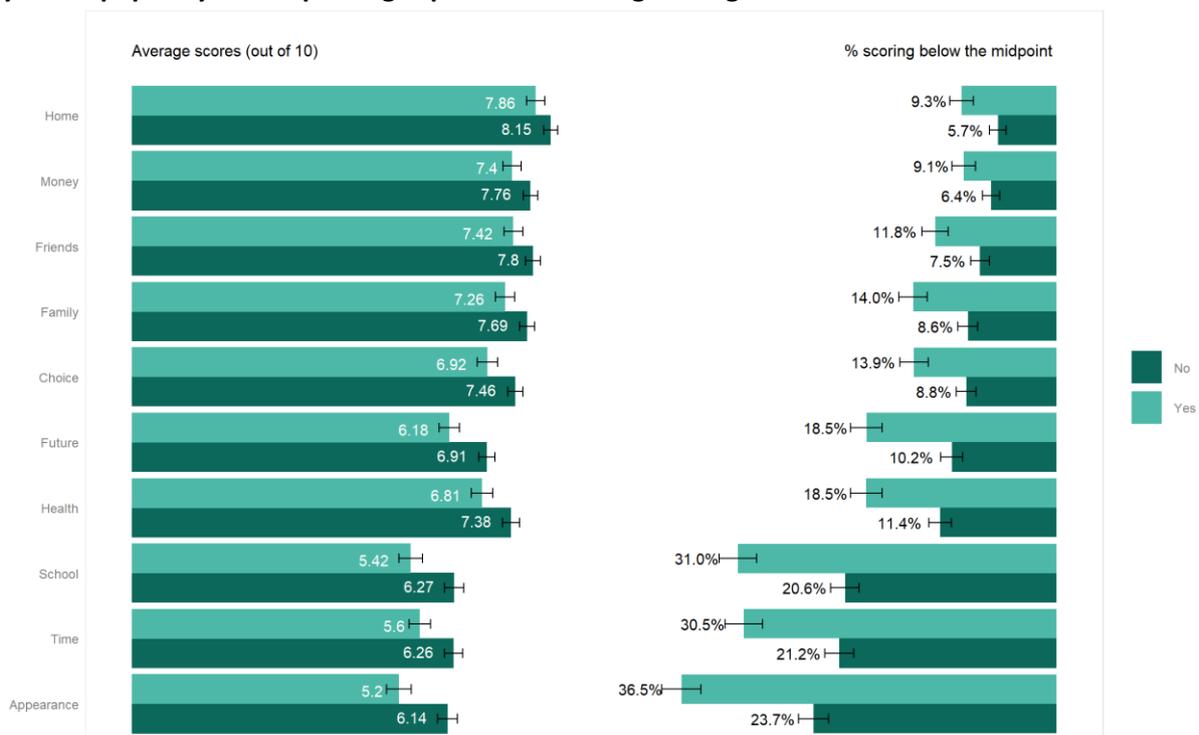
**Figure 7.5. Proportion of year 11 students reporting low wellbeing by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**



**Figure 7.6. Distribution of wellbeing scores of year 11 pupils by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**



**Figure 7.7. Average wellbeing item scores and percentage reporting low wellbeing item scores of year 11 pupils by school piloting supervision of safeguarding leads**



## Part 7: Conclusion and recommendations

We have identified that overall, pupil wellbeing in Essex is similar to pupil wellbeing nationally. Nevertheless, we have identified areas of concern which should be addressed as priorities; young people in Essex are less happy about their appearance than other young people nationally. This is particularly the case for girls in secondary schools. Additionally, gender-diverse pupils have significantly lower wellbeing than their cisgender peers. This is particularly concerning given the isolated but frequent cases of transphobic attitudes expressed through the free-text responses of the survey.

This first round of the Essex wellbeing survey is not designed to identify the direct causes of low-wellbeing or to recommend precise courses of action for improving young people's wellbeing. In this brief section we refer to other relevant reports which may be useful in this regard.

The findings of the survey taken by Essex pupils appear to reflect a number of findings from our previous research undertaken with The Prince's Trust and Tesco in 2019, '*Young people's mental and emotional health*'<sup>9</sup>, into the trajectories and drivers of young people's wellbeing, namely:

- As children get older, the drop in wellbeing scores is greater for girls than for boys, particularly in the areas of appearance and self-esteem.
- Young people highlighted the transition to secondary school as particularly hard on their self-esteem due to increased concerns about being judged and not fitting in.
- As young people get older, how they see and value themselves becomes more closely tied with how they feel about their lives generally.

Due to the commonalities between the findings, our recommendations for improving pupil wellbeing in Essex will follow the recommendations made in the 2019 report. It is worth noting that there are already existing council-led interventions in Essex aimed at addressing major issues of pupil wellbeing, but findings on the effectiveness of these interventions cannot be made conclusively in this report due to the possibility of selection bias and lack of historic data.

Based on our findings, our recommendations for actions schools can take are:

- **Developing a 'whole school approach' to mental health.** Whole school approaches, such as the '5 Steps' framework developed by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families<sup>10</sup>, aim to develop a positive culture that promotes good mental health across the school, through the curriculum, support for pupils, and engagement between leadership, staff, pupils, parents, and communities. Whole school approaches facilitate both day-to-day processes and targeted curriculum activity that help to build strong protective relationships between pupils and staff while strengthening protective factors which promote children's resilience and reduce risk factors.
- **Adopt an evidence-based approach to addressing the causes and impacts of bullying, particularly in relation to gender and sexual identity-based abuse.** Recent research has revealed the prevalence of sexual harassment in schools, with an Ofsted review finding that

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<sup>9</sup> Education Policy Institute (2021) 'Young people's mental and emotional health: Trajectories and drivers in childhood and adolescence'. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/young-peoples-mental-and-emotional-health/>

<sup>10</sup> Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (2020) '5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing'. <https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/5-steps-to-mental-health-and-wellbeing/>

92 per cent of girls report that sexist name-calling happens a lot or sometimes to them or their peers<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, a report published by the Women and Equalities Committee found that 59 per cent of 13- to 21-year-old girls said they had experienced unwanted sexual touching in school<sup>12</sup>. Nine out of ten secondary school teachers report that their pupils experience homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic bullying (HBT)<sup>13</sup>. Given this report's findings that girls and gender-diverse pupils in Essex secondary schools report significantly lower rates of wellbeing than the national average, particularly in how they feel about their appearance, this issue should be a priority for Essex schools. Our previous work in this area<sup>14</sup> identified strategies such as **anti-bias, anti-bullying, and bystander intervention training**, as well as **peer support and restorative justice programs** as more effective evidence-based measures than 'zero-tolerance' policies, particularly to address HBT bullying.

The Essex survey of pupil wellbeing is planned to run for a further two years, during which we will continue to survey wellbeing of pupils in our headline year groups – years 6, 7 and 11 – as well as tracking how wellbeing changes as cohorts of pupils move through the school system. We intend to extend the scope of the survey to capture data on the drivers of wellbeing in addition to exploring how we can better engage with special schools.

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<sup>11</sup> Ofsted (2021) 'Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges'.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-colleges/review-of-sexual-abuse-in-schools-and-college>

<sup>12</sup> Long, R., Hubble, S. (2018). 'Sexual harassment in education' Retrieved from <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/34945/1/CBP-8117.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, M., Gray, M., & Beninger, K. (2014). Tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying among school-age children and young people. Evidence review and typology of initiatives. London: NatCen.

<sup>14</sup> Education Policy Institute (2018) 'Bullying: A review of the evidence'. <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/bullying-a-review-of-the-evidence/>

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Underlying counts (rounded to the nearest five)

### Pupil counts by local administrative district, year group

Year group	Basildon	Brentwood	Braintree	Castle Point	Chelmsford	Colchester
Year 4	80		155		110	85
Year 6	150		210	80	70	40
Year 7	725		130	120	550	315
Year 9	200		120	110	385	335
Year 11	165	165		60	475	165

Year group	Epping Forest	Harlow	Maldon	Rochford	Tendring	Uttlesford
Year 4		60	60	30	35	
Year 6		110		30	85	
Year 7	270	205		475		205
Year 9	120	90		425		145
Year 11	75	60		160		140

### Pupil counts by gender, year group

Year group	Boys	Girls	Gender-diverse
Year 4	335	310	
Year 6	380	400	
Year 7	1465	1400	55
Year 9	985	865	35
Year 11	695	720	

### Pupil counts by ethnicity, year group

Year group	Asian or Asian British	Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	Mixed Or Multiple Ethnic Groups	White
Year 4	15	15	20	485
Year 6	25	25	30	635
Year 7	235	140	145	2280
Year 9	145	90	90	1535
Year 11	100	100	55	1180

**Pupil counts by FSM quintile, year group**

Year group	First quintile	Second quintile	Third quintile	Fourth quintile	Fifth quintile
Year 4		275	285	55	
Year 6	45	390	215	85	
Year 7	585	1320	540	340	240
Year 9	570	795	450		
Year 11	440	680	225	130	

**Pupil counts by council-led interventions, year group**

Year group	Implementing disadvantaged strategy	Not implementing disadvantaged strategy
Year 4	580	80
Year 6	765	40
Year 7	2525	495
Year 9	1650	290
Year 11	1270	195

Year group	Implementing TPP	Not implementing TPP
Year 4	345	310
Year 6	355	450
Year 7	755	2265
Year 9	345	1595
Year 11	160	1305

Year group	Piloting supervision of designated safeguarding leads	Not piloting supervision of designated safeguarding leads
Year 4	105	550
Year 6	195	610
Year 7	1350	1675
Year 9	925	1020
Year 11	640	830

## Appendix B: Wellbeing survey questionnaire

Pupils' names were held for a maximum of 31 days to provide a window for parents or pupils to request their withdrawal from the study. Dates of birth were held to validate pupils' year groups before deletion. The full questionnaire can be read below.

### About you

This page asks some details about you.

We collect your name and date of birth to ensure you can exercise your rights over your data: for example if you wish to access or delete your data later, we need to be able to identify it as yours.

We ask you to tell us your gender and your ethnicity, because our research will look at whether wellbeing is different for any of these groups.

We will never use these details to identify you with the answers you give in the rest of the survey.

No one at school or at home will be able to see your answers.

#### 1. Please tell us your year group

- Year 4
- Year 6
- Year 7
- Year 8
- Year 11

#### 2. Please tell us your first name.

Please give your full name. For example, 'Rebecca' instead of 'Becky'.

#### 3. Please tell us your last name.

#### 4. Please tell us your date of birth.

If your birthday is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010, the answer would be 01/01/2010.

If you don't know you can skip to the next question.

#### 5. Please tell us your gender.

- Boy
- Girl
- Any other gender (please specify)

#### 6. Please tell us your ethnicity.

- Not sure
- White
- Asian or Asian British
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

- Any other ethnic group (please specify)

**7. Please say how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know).**

- My life is going well
- My life is just right
- I wish I had a different kind of life
- I have a good life
- I have what I want in life

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

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

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

**8. How happy are you with...?**

- ...your life as a whole?
- ...your relationships with your family?
- ...the home that you live in?
- ...how much choice you have in life?
- ...your relationships with your friends?
- ...the things that you have (like money and the things that you own)?
- ...your health?
- ...your appearance (the way that you look)?
- ...what may happen to you later in your life (the future)?
- ...the school you go to?
- ...the way that you use your time?

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