

# The Pupil Safeguarding Review

Report 1: Do pupils in English schools feel safe, and do they know what to do if they do not?

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Key

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and do they know what to do if they do not?

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## Authors

Iona Jackson, Nicola West Jones, Sean Rapson

## Contributors

Dame Rachel De Souza (Children's Commissioner), Leora Cruddas CBE (Confederation of School Trusts),  
Patrick Knight (Diverse Academies Trust)

## Researchers

Beatrise Pelsa, Iona Jackson, Nicola West Jones, Sean Rapson, Dita Caunite-Bluma, Ben Willetts

## Design

Artis Taurins, Joel Southern

**edurio**

[edurio@edurio.com](mailto:edurio@edurio.com)

[home.edurio.com](https://home.edurio.com)

**The  
Key**

[enquiries@thekeysupport.com](mailto:enquiries@thekeysupport.com)

[thekeysupport.com](https://thekeysupport.com)

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## About The Safeguarding Review

Based on feedback from Trust leaders in early 2022, about the key priorities facing the sector at the moment, Edurio and The Key have partnered to conduct The Pupil Safeguarding Review.

The review was developed over the course of many months, with Edurio designing a survey based on input from sector leaders including trust safeguarding leads, safeguarding specialists, and representatives from The Key. There are two overarching goals of the review for schools and trusts who take part: quality assurance of safeguarding practices, and gathering evidence for action.

- **QUALITY ASSURANCE: to assess whether policies, practices and curriculum are having the required impact on pupil safety**
- **EVIDENCE FOR ACTION: to proactively identify issues (prior to Ofsted and risk to pupils), and target dedicated resource in the most impactful areas**

### The survey covers four main topics



It ends with a brief look at readiness to learn, giving an understanding of the impact of each of these four areas on a pupil's ability to participate fully in their education.

The survey launched in October 2022, and has had over 70,000 pupil responses since its launch. This report is the first in a series that will be released throughout the rest of the 2022-23 academic year, and is based on the 68,214 pupils who took part between 3rd October and 11th November 2022. It highlights key insights focused on safety, seeking to answer the questions of whether pupils feel safe, and whether they know what to do if they do not.

# Executive Summary & Key Findings



## Overall safety

Whilst the majority of pupils feel safe, around a quarter felt only fairly safe, not very safe, or not at all. One in ten pupils reported that they have missed school recently because they felt unsafe.

**75% of pupils feel safe  
IN SCHOOL**

Other pupils are the most likely to make pupils feel unsafe, though 13% of pupils felt unsafe because of a teacher. Corridors and playgrounds are the places most pupils feel unsafe at school.

**78% of pupils feel safe  
OUT OF SCHOOL**

Adults the pupils don't know are most likely to make pupils feel unsafe, followed by other children the pupils don't know. Public parks, and travelling to and from school are where most pupils feel unsafe out of school.

**88% of pupils feel safe  
ONLINE**

More pupils feel safe online than at school or out of school. Online, it's other children (that the pupils don't know) that are most likely to make them feel unsafe. Online, pupils most commonly feel unsafe whilst playing in Roblox, followed by Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and Fortnite.



## Safety and demography

Across all demographic groups analysed for this report, a higher proportion of pupils feel safe online than they do in school or out of school.

**Year group**

Feelings of safety in and out of school drop during years 8-11, rising again in sixth form. Online, feelings of safety increase as pupils get older. Safety-related absences are higher among year 3s and 4s than pupils in 8-11, despite higher safety overall.

**Sexual orientation  
and gender identity**

There are significant differences between pupils of different genders: pupils with a gender identity other than male or female have lower feelings of safety than boys or girls. Gay and bisexual pupils have lower feelings of safety than straight pupils.

**Ethnicity**

The difference between groups is smaller when looking at ethnicity than it is for year group, sexual orientation and gender identity, however there are still some differences.



## Access to help

Most pupils report knowing what to do if they feel unsafe. Whilst 61% of pupils who haven't felt unsafe say they would speak to an adult at school if they did, only 26% of pupils who actually felt unsafe did speak to someone at school.

## Foreword

**Dame Rachel De Souza**

*Children's Commissioner*

When I started as Children's Commissioner in March 2021 I launched *The Big Ask*, the largest ever survey of children in England ever, which received 550,000 responses. *The Big Ask* was the first time many children in England had ever been asked by a national body what mattered to them, what was going well in their lives and what challenges they faced.

It also confirmed what I think anyone who works with children already knows but that national bodies and government aren't always sure how to do: how important it is to give children the opportunity to speak for themselves. Too often decisions are made based on assumptions about children's experiences, instead of reaching out to them and empowering them to create their own narratives. That's why I am so pleased to see that this report is based on findings from almost 70,000 children across the country.

*The Big Ask* was launched as the country was emerging from the Coronavirus pandemic. It demonstrated how much children had missed school, they missed learning face to face with their teachers, they missed spending time with their friends, and they missed the extracurricular activities which enrich their lives. Since *The Big Ask* I have spoken directly with hundreds of children and created opportunities for thousands more to share their views and experiences with my office. These interactions have confirmed what I have always believed to be true: that education is absolutely central to children's lives and to their future. To get the best education possible, a great school should be available to every child, and they need to be attending every day, ready to learn, in an environment that supports them.

This research carried out by Edurio and The Key shines a light on an incredibly important issue: that for a school to provide a supportive environment, it needs to feel safe to the children attending. It is testament to the hard work of school staff who support their students and build caring school communities that 75% of children who took part in the research reported feeling safe in school. However, that leaves a quarter of children – that's eight in every class of 30 – who don't feel safe. 10%, or three children out of a class of 30, said they missed school because they didn't feel safe enough to attend. That harms their education and puts them at risk of disengaging completely.

My research into children missing from education found that when children feel listened to, they build relationships with teachers and school staff which they really value. Children need

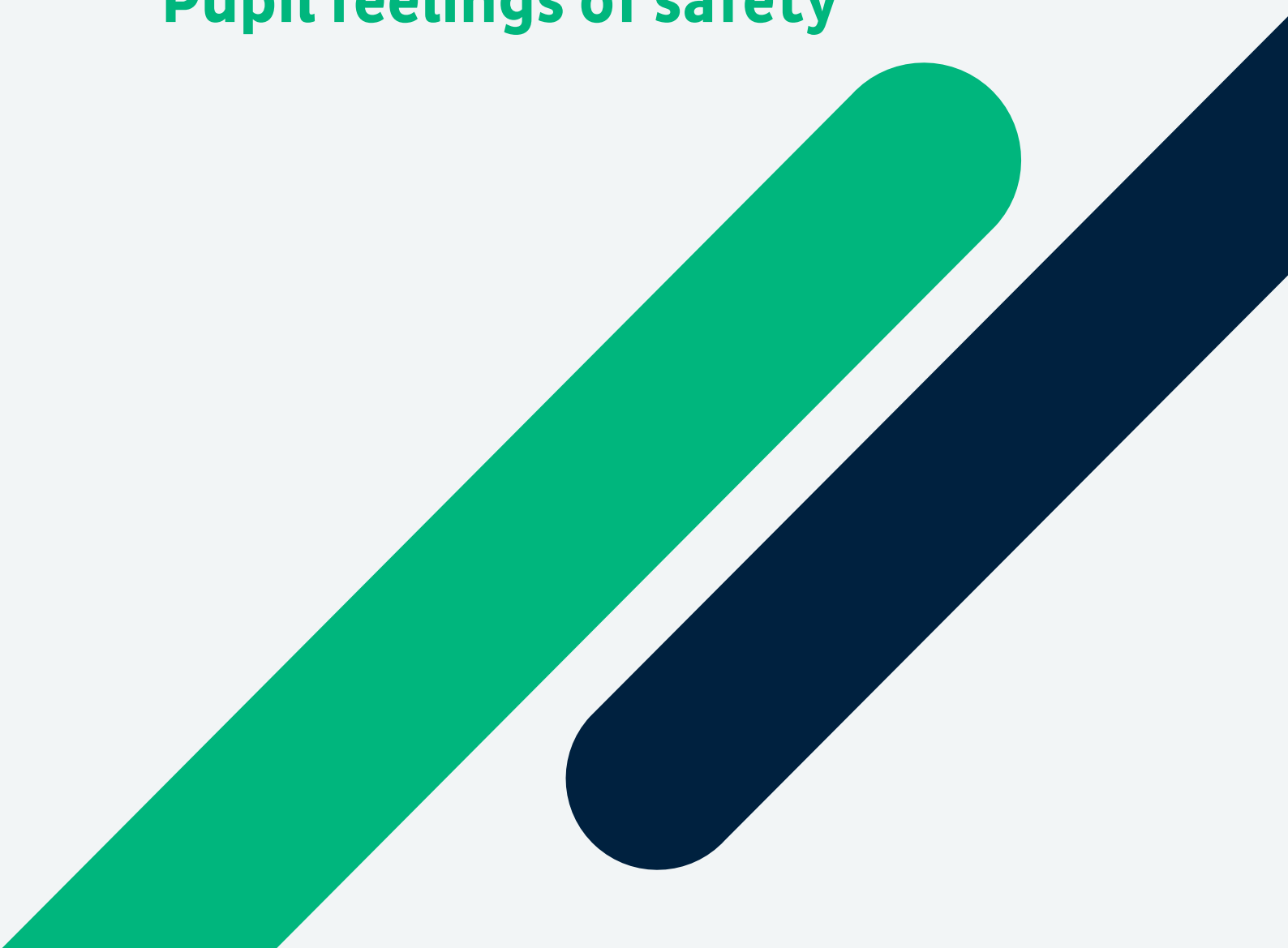
to be able to speak to a trusted adult when they feel unsafe at school - these relationships were often key to making sure that children stay engaged in their educations. This research demonstrates why this is so key, with only 25% of children who had felt unsafe having spoken to someone at school about it - but 45% spoke to another adult outside of school.

As Children's Commissioner, I am acutely aware that my responsibility for children's wellbeing and safety now extends beyond the physical world. Children live their lives seamlessly online and offline, and I am deeply concerned about the report's findings on the number of children who feel unsafe whilst playing and communicating on popular platforms such as Roblox, Snapchat and Instagram. For adults who didn't grow up with this technology, it is difficult to understand what it is to live a "Digital Childhood". Children's voices and experiences will be key to understanding how we can better protect and support them in online spaces. I commend Edurio and The Key for this important contribution to our understanding in this space.

Pupil safety is paramount, and the findings from this report should make essential reading for all school leaders. It is only through understanding what leads to children feeling unsafe that effective policies and procedures can be implemented. Every school is a unique community made up of a diverse mix of children and experiences and rarely looks exactly like the 'average' picture. Therefore, this research and the findings should serve as a roadmap for school leaders to have a conversation with their pupils and staff to identify any areas of concern specific to their school.

**Section 1**

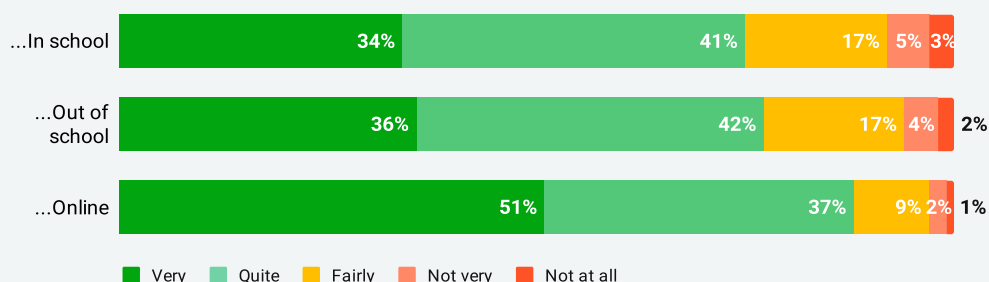
# **Pupil feelings of safety**





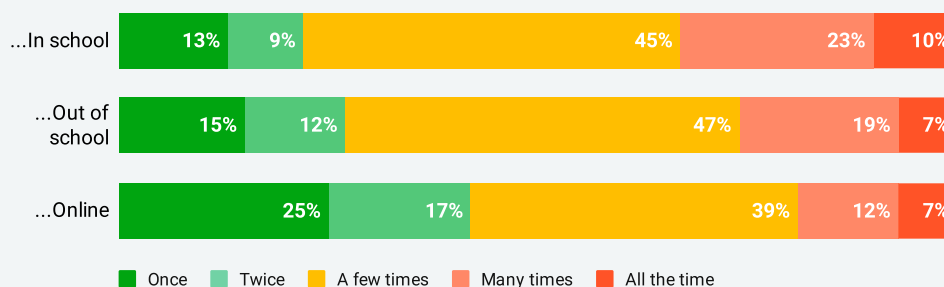
## Overall feelings of safety

FIGURE 1: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT...?**



A quarter of pupils report that they felt only fairly safe, or not safe, at school in the last six months. Safety scores for school are slightly worse than outside of school: 75% of pupils feel safe in school whilst 78% of pupils feel safe out of school. Pupils feel safest online: 88% of pupils reported feeling safe online. 8% of pupils reported feeling not very, or not at all safe in school, compared to 3% online.

FIGURE 2: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU FELT UNSAFE...?**



Among pupils who have felt unsafe at school in the past six months, a third reported that they felt unsafe many times or all the time during that period. This is compared to a quarter of those who felt unsafe out of school, and less than a fifth of pupils who felt unsafe online.

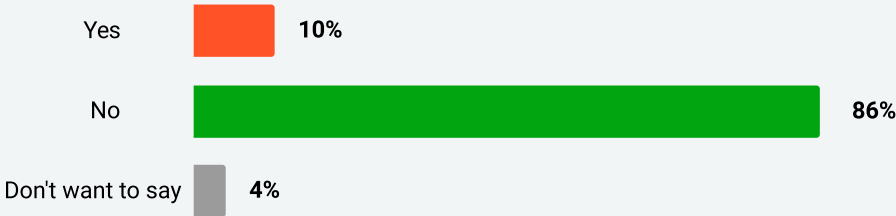
FIGURE 3: **HAS THE PROBLEM BEEN SORTED?**



Among all pupils who have felt unsafe in school in the past six months, 25% reported that the problem has not been sorted, and a further 27% don't know.

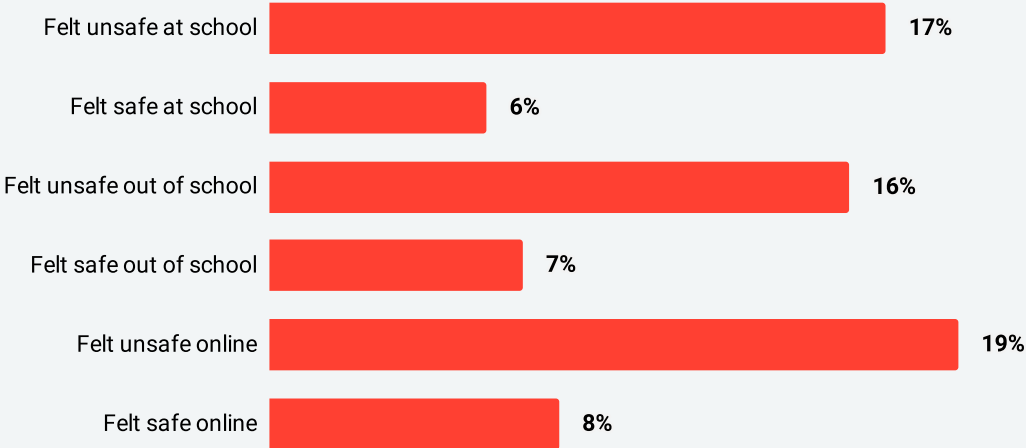
# Safety-related absence

FIGURE 4: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HAVE YOU MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU FELT UNSAFE?** (OVERALL)



10% of pupils have missed school in the past 6 months because they felt unsafe, and a further 4% did not want to answer the question. In a class of 30 pupils, this could mean 2-4 pupils missing school for safeguarding reasons.

FIGURE 5: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HAVE YOU MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU FELT UNSAFE?** (FEELINGS OF SAFETY)



Pupils who felt unsafe, whether that's at school, out of school or online, were more likely to report that they have missed school because they felt unsafe. Even among those who felt safe at school, 6% reported that they had missed school for safety reasons.

## Implications for school leaders: by The Key

Looking at real-world experiences, the data shows us that pupils are slightly less likely to feel safe in school than out of school. Given our findings later in this report that feelings of 'unsafety' in school relate mainly to "other pupils" (rather than, say, adults), this is perhaps not surprising - in school, pupils might have regular contact with those pupils who make them feel unsafe, with less opportunity to stay out of their way.

Interestingly, a significantly higher proportion of pupils report feeling safe online than in the 'real world' of school or outside school. If we take this at face value, we might assume that the work schools have been doing to teach pupils about online safety, from early primary school upwards, is paying off - that these 'digital natives' are confidently navigating the online world and feeling secure in how to manage any threat.

Sadly, given what we know about the realities of online risks for young people, and just how 'hidden' many of these risks are, we could also conclude that this data is presenting a false positive. Do pupils actually have a false sense of security about their own online safety? Perhaps those who feel safer online are less aware of actual incidents, like predatory adults impersonating children, hacking, or trends like the 'blue whale challenge'<sup>1</sup>. Or perhaps they don't quite grasp the sheer volume, variety and prevalence of online risks, so many of which are quite intangible compared to 'real-world' risks. We also know that some of the more negative aspects of being online can be fairly insidious, chipping away at an individual's perception or ability to cope over a period of time, so some pupils might not yet be aware of their exposure to danger or the extent of an escalating threat. And, as we know, there are always limitations to how a survey question is interpreted or understood - some very real and present online risks might not even bring about 'feelings' of being unsafe in the same way as unwanted contact or seeing something that's clearly distressing.

On the regularity of feeling unsafe, the data shows that pupils who have felt unsafe in school are more likely to experience this more frequently (over a 6-month period) than those who have felt unsafe online or out of school. It's possible that this is largely about pupils dealing with an ongoing, unresolved issue, rather than multiple unconnected incidents - as supported by the data on whether the problem has been sorted. If that's the case, is there more the sector can do to help schools tackle often longer-term issues such as bullying and harassment? Or is there more staff can do to identify such issues, or encourage pupils to report and talk about their experiences, so they don't stay hidden? And looking at the comparative data on regularity of incidents in the 'real world', it is arguably easier to resolve some issues outside school than in school, such as by choosing a different route or mixing with different children who don't attend the same school.

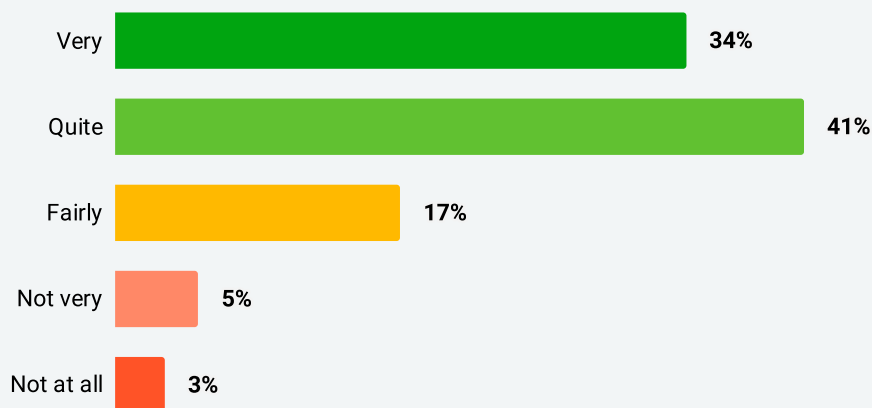
It's staggering and concerning that at least 10% of pupils (approximately 3 in every class of 30) have missed school in the last 6 months because they felt unsafe. What is even more of a wake-up call is how that data breaks down by gender, sexual orientation and year group, all of which we'll explore later in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-46505722>

## Feelings of safety: in school

FIGURE 6: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT AT SCHOOL?**



A quarter of pupils report that they felt only fairly safe, or not safe, at school in the last six months. In a class of 30 pupils, this means 7-8 pupils may be feeling unsafe in school.

FIGURE 7: **WHERE IN SCHOOL WERE YOU WHEN YOU FELT UNSAFE?** (RESPONSES FROM PUPILS WHO FELT FAIRLY, NOT VERY, OR NOT AT ALL SAFE AT SCHOOL)

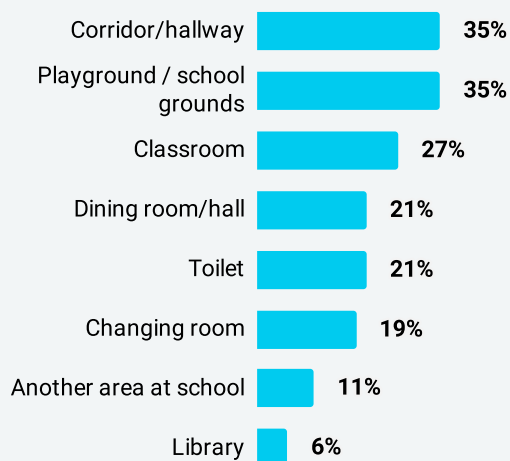
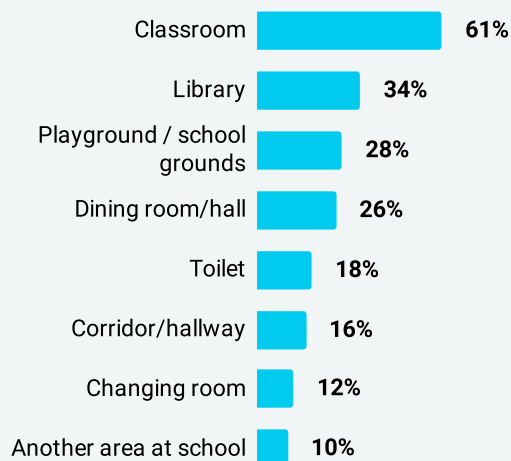
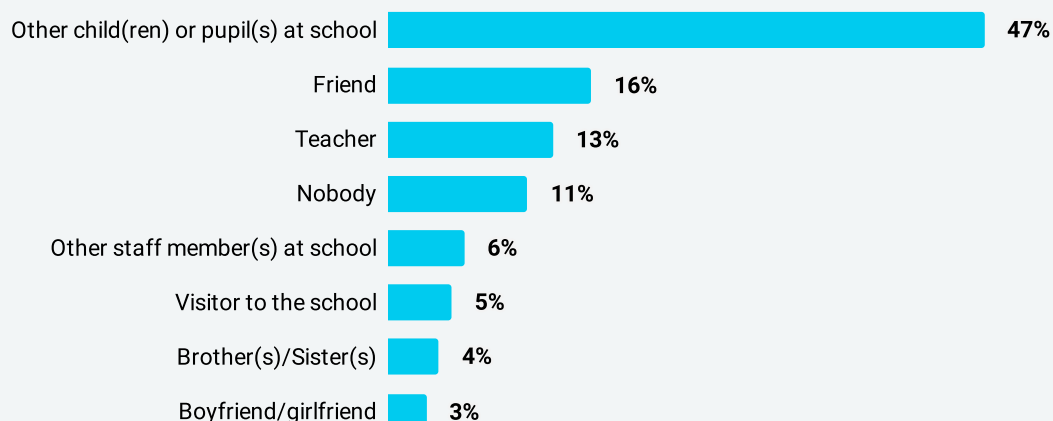


FIGURE 8: **IN WHICH PLACE DO YOU FEEL SAFEST AT SCHOOL?** (RESPONSES FROM PUPILS WHO FELT QUITE OR VERY SAFE AT SCHOOL)



The corridor and school grounds are the areas pupils are most likely to feel unsafe. Whilst 27% of pupils reported that they were in the classroom when they felt unsafe, it's also the area where to most pupils who did feel safe, reported feeling safest. The library is also a safe space.

FIGURE 9: **WHO HAS MADE YOU FEEL UNSAFE IN SCHOOL?** (RESPONSES FROM PUPILS WHO FELT FAIRLY, NOT VERY, OR NOT AT ALL SAFE AT SCHOOL)



In school, it's mostly other children who made them feel unsafe: 47% of pupils who had felt unsafe reported that it was another pupil at school who had made them feel unsafe, and 16% reported that it was a friend. 13% of these pupils reported that a teacher made them feel unsafe, and 6% reported that it was another staff member.

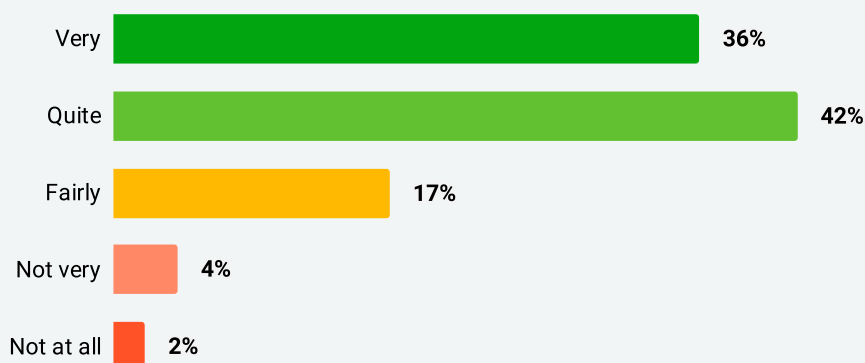
FIGURE 10: **DID YOU FEEL UNSAFE BECAUSE SOMETHING HAPPENED TO YOU OR BECAUSE OF ANOTHER REASON?** (RESPONSES FROM PUPILS WHO FELT FAIRLY, NOT VERY, OR NOT AT ALL SAFE AT SCHOOL)



In around a third of cases, pupils felt unsafe not because something happened to them, but for another reason, for example they heard or saw something happen to someone else. However, 27% of pupils reported that something happened to them specifically and a further 24% did not want to disclose.

## Feelings of safety: out of school

FIGURE 11: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT OUT OF SCHOOL?



Almost a quarter of pupils (23%) report that they felt only fairly safe, or not safe, out of school in the last six months. In a class of 30 pupils, this means 7-8 pupils may be feeling unsafe outside of school.

FIGURE 12: WHERE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL WERE YOU WHEN YOU FELT UNSAFE?

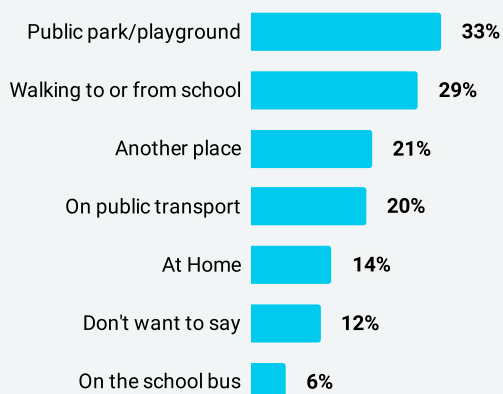
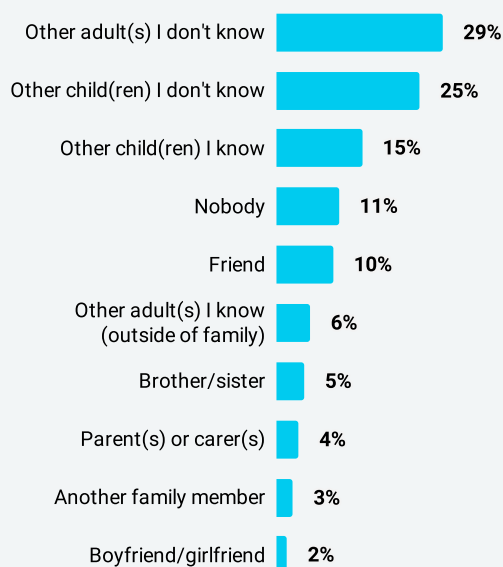


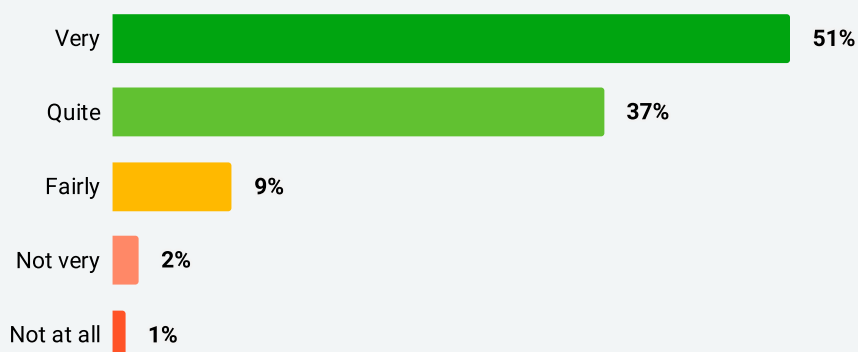
FIGURE 13: WHO MADE YOU FEEL UNSAFE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?



Pupils who felt unsafe outside of school were predominantly in a public place. Adults and children that the pupils don't know were the groups that pupils were most uncomfortable around. 4% reported that their parent/carer made them feel unsafe, and 2% reported that it was their boyfriend/girlfriend.

## Feelings of safety: online

FIGURE 14: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT ONLINE?



88% of pupils reported feeling safe online, which is higher than the proportion who feel safe in school or out of school.

FIGURE 15: WHAT DEVICE WERE YOU USING WHEN YOU FELT UNSAFE ONLINE?

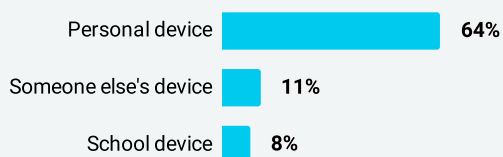
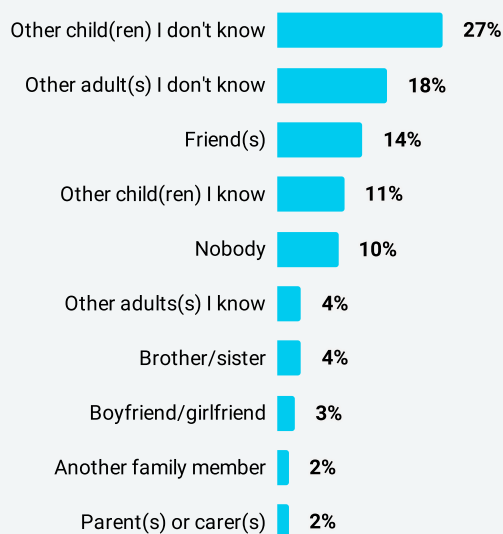


FIGURE 16: WHO MADE YOU FEEL UNSAFE ONLINE?



The majority of pupils (64%) were using their personal device when they felt unsafe, and 8% were using a school device. 27% of pupils who felt unsafe online, felt unsafe because of a child they didn't know. 18% felt unsafe because of an adult they didn't know.

FIGURE 17: WHAT WEBSITE WERE YOU USING WHEN YOU FELT UNSAFE ONLINE?



Top 5 Websites	% of comments that mentioned
Roblox	15%
Snapchat	12%
TikTok	7%
Instagram	6%
Fortnite	4%

Pupils who felt unsafe online were given the option of disclosing the website they were on when they felt unsafe. Among the 3215 pupils who left a comment, 15% of comments mentioned that they were using Roblox when they felt unsafe. Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram and Fortnite were the next most-mentioned apps, each with over 100 mentions.



## Implications for school leaders: by The Key

One key finding here is where on the school grounds pupils are more likely to feel unsafe: generally, these are more 'open' spaces where there is likely to be limited or no supervision – the corridor or hallway, and the playground or school grounds. Some schools operate “silent corridors” in an effort to control such spaces, which may be in response to an acknowledgement that pupils have not historically felt safe here. Either way, it is clear that for pupils themselves, these environments can feel intimidating.


The toilets and changing rooms are often recognised as places where safeguarding issues might thrive, with many schools regulating when they are accessible to pupils or adopting other measures to minimise risks. As only around 1 in 5 of those pupils who have felt unsafe in school said they felt unsafe in the toilets and/or a changing room, perhaps the measures schools have been taking are proving effective.

Interestingly, the classroom is generally where pupils feel safest while in school, with 61% of those who have felt “quite” or “very” safe at school telling us this. But on the flip side, 27% of those who have felt unsafe at school identified the classroom as a place where they felt unsafe. So, while the classroom might be a good place for the majority, there is a noteworthy proportion of pupils who are feeling vulnerable as they learn – perhaps because they are in close proximity to pupils who make them feel unsafe, or because, in a busy environment, comments or 'low-level' behaviour can go under the radar. The library – typically a space with supervision, rules, a physical boundary and sometimes a self-selected group of pupils – is seen by pupils as one of the safest places in school.

For the 25% of pupils who have felt unsafe in school, it's mainly other children who have made them feel that way. However, a combined 19% of these pupils said that it was a teacher or other member of staff who had made them feel unsafe. That amounts to around 4.5% of all children across a school, or at least 1 pupil in every class of 30, who has felt unsafe because of an adult staff member. We don't know from the data whether this fear is grounded in direct experience or perception, but it is certainly something for schools to explore.

Of the same 25% of pupils who have felt unsafe in school, just over a quarter (27%) say that feeling was because “something happened to me”. That is 6.7% of the total sample – or around 2 pupils in every class of 30. Robust safeguarding procedures in many schools might mean that these pupils are known and being supported already. Nevertheless, it would be a positive step for schools to reflect on whether this percentage feels consistent with knowledge of incidents in their own context – especially when we also factor in those pupils who did not want to disclose their reason for feeling unsafe.

Among the pupils who have felt unsafe out of school, 29% said this had happened when walking to or from school. Schools may have little influence over the other places where pupils said they don't feel safe, but the walk to/from school is something that schools might just be able to influence through parental engagement, liaison with the local police and discussion with the local authority over things like street lighting.



When it comes to online safety, schools are in a difficult situation. They may be meeting national expectations around staff training and pupil education, but most online incidents happen outside school, on pupils' own devices, or their friends', rather than on the premises on a school computer or tablet. An area of opportunity here - and one that's often not easy - might be to engage with parents, with more informational or practical sessions, factsheets, assemblies and other forms of education and support.

Finally, the data shows that of the 12% of pupils who haven't felt safe online, nearly half (44%) said that someone they didn't know had made them feel unsafe - an adult (18%) or child (27%). It's notable, then, that Roblox - the platform that the highest proportion of pupils said they were using when they felt unsafe - relies on user-generated content and draws in multiple players, who may or may not be known to the user. Finding ways to support more pupils and parents to understand the risks of such activity is something that schools might consider.

## Section 2

# Safety and demography



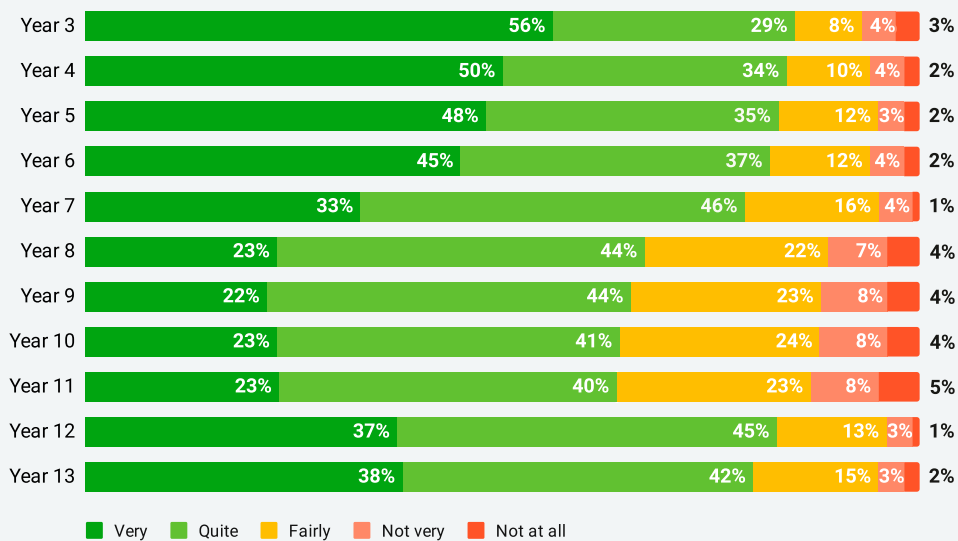
## Safety and demography

In the survey, pupils were given the opportunity to disclose demographic information. Each pupil was asked their year group and gender, years 7 and above were asked their ethnicity and religion, and years 9 and above were asked their sexual orientation. In this section, we explore levels of safety felt by pupils with different protected characteristics.

### Year group

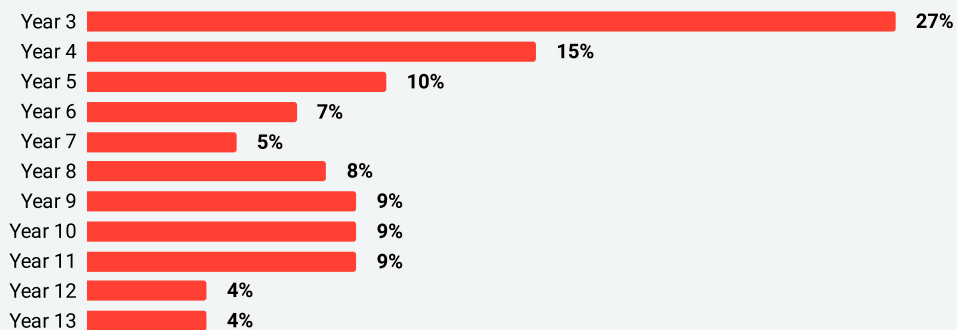
Feelings of safety in school and out of school drop during years 8-11, rising again in sixth form. Online, feelings of safety increase as pupils get older. Safety-related absences are higher among year 3s and 4s than pupils in 8-11, despite overall feelings of safety being higher.

FIGURE 18: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT AT SCHOOL?**



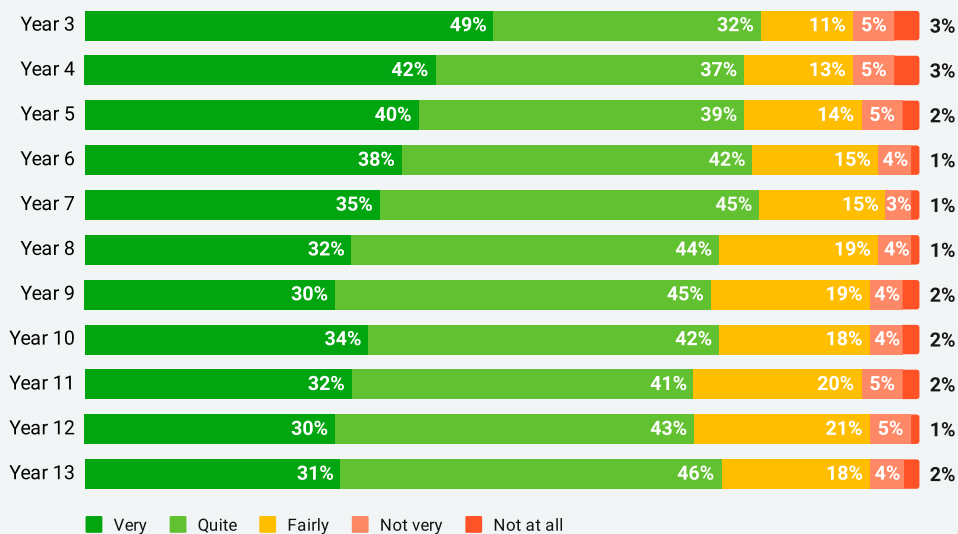
Primary pupils report consistent levels of safety, with around 85% of pupils in each of years 3-6 reporting that they feel quite or very safe. This drops to 79% in year seven, and then significantly more in years 8-11, where around 65% of pupils report feeling safe in school.

FIGURE 19: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HAVE YOU MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU FELT UNSAFE?**



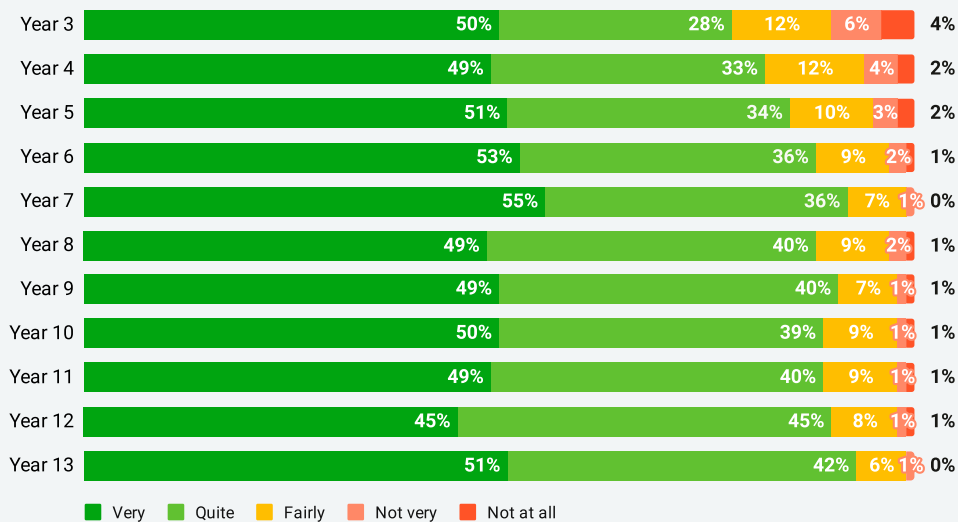
Year 3s reported the highest tendency to miss school because they felt unsafe, despite reporting among the highest level of safety within school. This drops throughout primary school before increasing for the majority of secondary school - whilst year 7s are among the least likely to miss school because they feel unsafe, years 8-11 are much more likely.

FIGURE 20: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT OUT OF SCHOOL?



Differences between year groups in feelings of safety outside of school are less pronounced: Year 3s report the highest feelings of safety, with 81% feeling safe and 8% feeling not very safe, or not at all safe. Years 9, 11 and 12 are lower, with only 73-76% feeling unsafe and 5-7% feeling not very safe, or not at all safe. Whilst this difference is significant, the range is smaller than feelings of safety in school.

FIGURE 21: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT ONLINE?



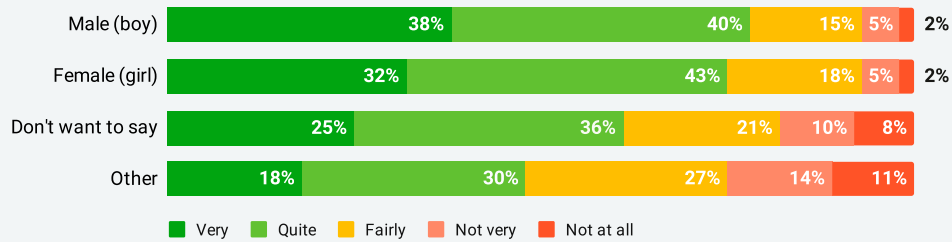
Online, feelings of safety increasing somewhat with age. 8 in 10 year 3s feel safe online, increasing to around 9 in 10 by year 6 and remaining relatively constant until year 13, where the highest proportion (93%) of pupils report feeling safe online.

## Sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)

There are significant differences between pupils depending on their gender identity and sexual orientation: pupils with a gender identity other than male or female have lower feelings of safety than boys or girls. Gay and bisexual pupils have lower feelings of safety than straight pupils.

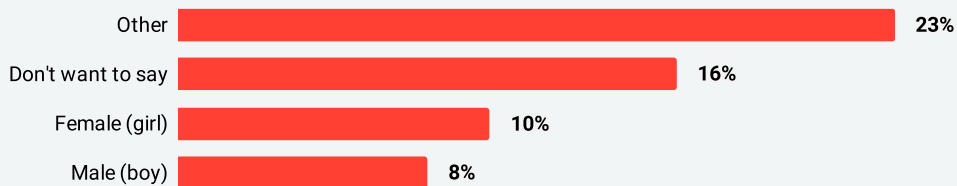
### Gender identity

FIGURE 22: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT AT SCHOOL?



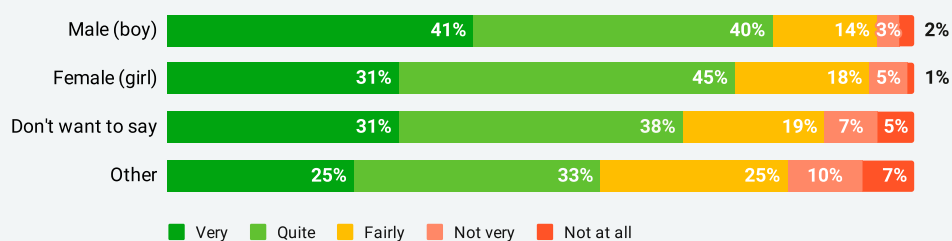
Among pupils with a gender identity other than male or female, only four in ten pupils feel safe at school, compared with three quarters of boys and seven in ten girls.

FIGURE 23: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HAVE YOU MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU FELT UNSAFE?



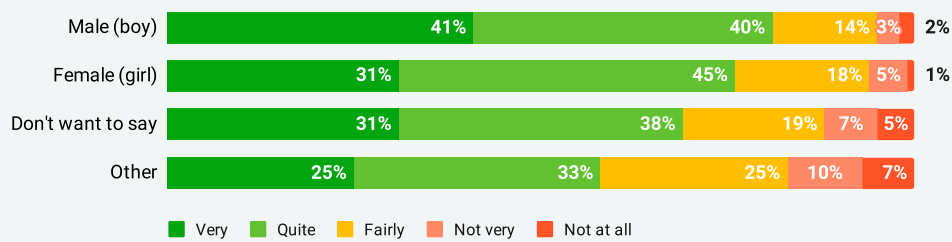
Whilst 10% of pupils overall have missed school because they felt unsafe, this proportion is far higher for pupils with a gender identity other than male or female, of whom 23% have missed school.

FIGURE 24: RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT OUT OF SCHOOL?



Pupils with a gender identity other than male or female report higher feelings of safety outside of school than in school (58% feel safe outside of school compared to 48% in school), however they are still the group with the lowest feelings of safety overall.

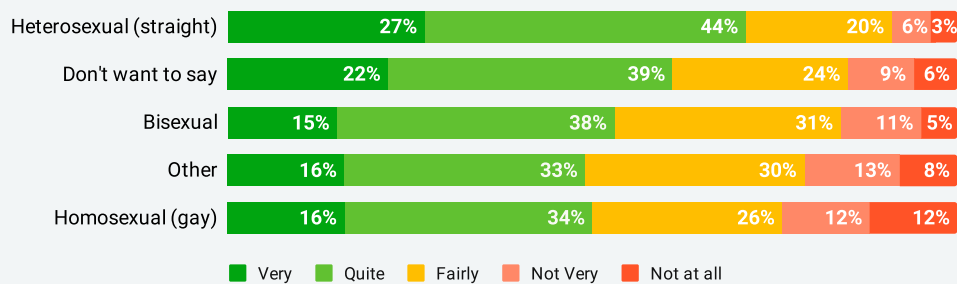
FIGURE 25: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT ONLINE?**



Online, there is less difference between genders than in school or out of school, though boys are still the group with the highest proportion who feel safe (81%), and those with a gender identity other than male or female are the group with the lowest proportion (58%). Of the three spaces, online is where pupils of all genders feel safest.

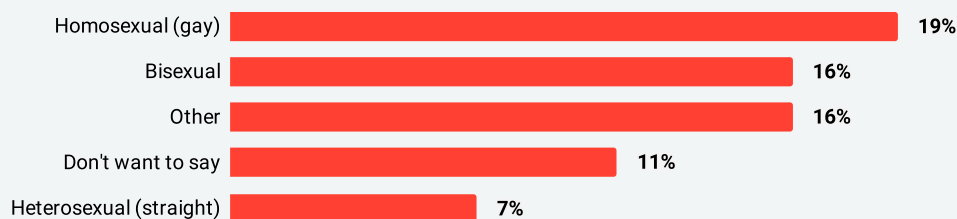
## Sexual orientation (Pupils in Year 9 and above)

FIGURE 26: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT AT SCHOOL?**



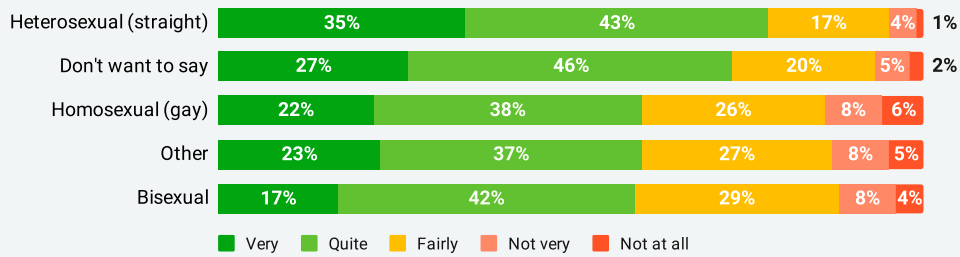
Less than half of pupils who identify as gay or bisexual feel safe at school: 40% of gay pupils, and 43% of bisexual pupils. Comparatively, three quarters of heterosexual pupils feel safe at school.

FIGURE 27: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HAVE YOU MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU FELT UNSAFE?**



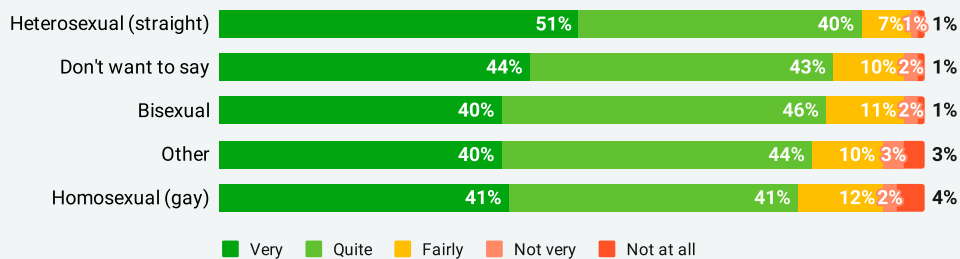
For pupils who identify as gay, the proportion who have missed school because they felt unsafe is 19%, and for bisexual pupils, 16%. This is significantly higher than the overall average for pupils in England (10%).

FIGURE 28: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT OUT OF SCHOOL?**



Pupils who identify as heterosexual have the highest feelings of safety outside of school, as they do in school. 78% of straight pupils feel safe out of school, compared to 60% of gay pupils, and 59% of bisexual pupils. A higher proportion of pupils identifying as gay or bisexual feel safe out of school than in school.

FIGURE 29: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT ONLINE?**

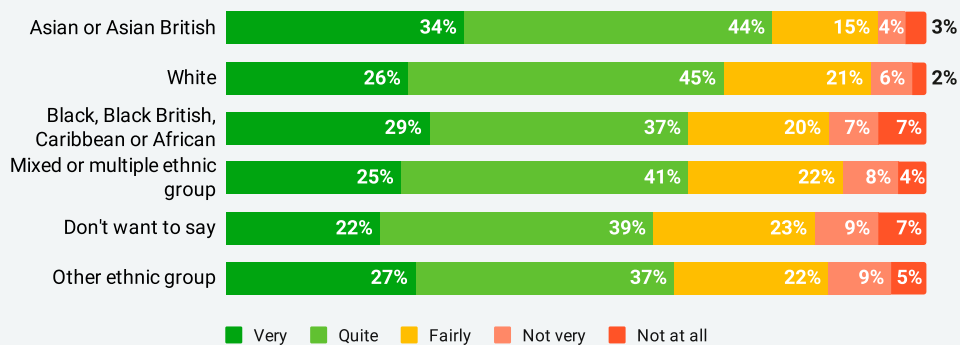


There is also less of a difference between pupils with different sexual orientations: 91% of heterosexual pupils feel safe online compared to 82% of gay pupils and 86% of bisexual pupils.

## Ethnicity (Pupils in Year 7 and above)

The difference between groups is smaller when looking at ethnicity than it is for year group, sexual orientation and gender identity, however there are still some differences.

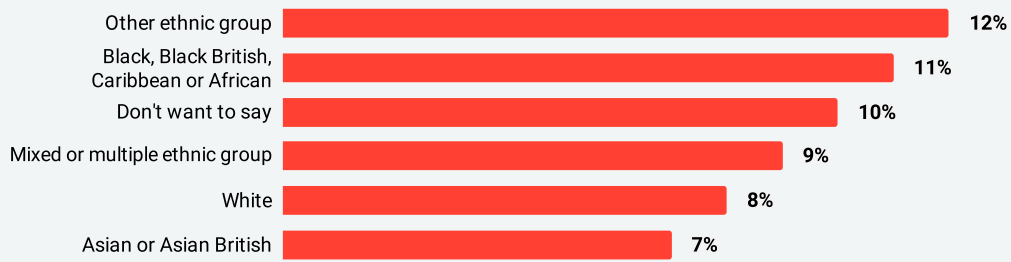
FIGURE 30: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT AT SCHOOL?**



78% of Asian or Asian British pupils feel quite or very safe, compared to 66% of pupils with mixed heritage and 64% of pupils from the smaller minority groups (those not outlined as distinct groups above).

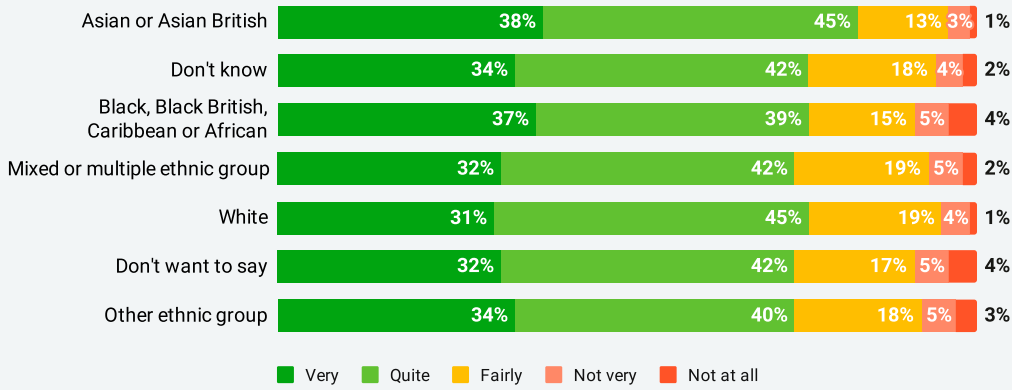


FIGURE 31: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HAVE YOU MISSED SCHOOL BECAUSE YOU FELT UNSAFE?**



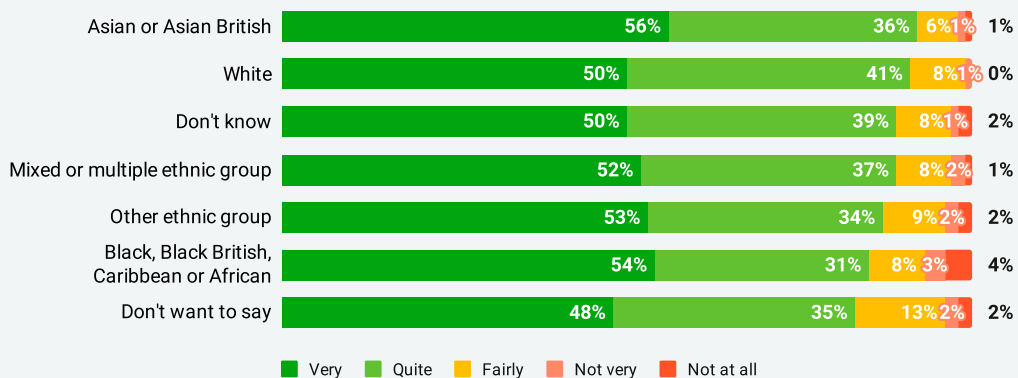
Compared to the overall proportion of pupils who have missed school because they felt unsafe (10%), Asian and Asian British, and White pupils, are less likely to have missed school. 12% of pupils from the smaller minority groups have missed school because they felt unsafe.

FIGURE 32: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT OUT OF SCHOOL?**



Out of school, the range is smaller for pupils of different ethnicities than it is for pupils of different year groups, genders and sexual orientations, though Asian or Asian British pupils have the highest proportion of pupils who feel safe (83%), which is in line with the trend in school. Pupils from the smaller minority groups and Mixed or Multiple Ethnic groups are least likely to feel safe out of school (74%), as they are in school too.

FIGURE 33: **RECENTLY (IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS) HOW SAFE HAVE YOU FELT ONLINE?**



Online, a higher proportion of pupils feel safe than they do in school or out of school, across all ethnicities. 92% of Asian or Asian British pupils feel safe online, compared to 85% of Black, Black British, Caribbean or African pupils.

## Comments from Diverse Academies

As a multi academy trust operating across a variety of settings and phases, it is clear that the data in this section presents us with some significant challenges and much food for thought. Ensuring that we get transition right, especially from primary to secondary, has always been a priority; however the sharp decline in feelings of 'relative safety' whilst at school in years 8 to 11 is a concern. Leaders across all MATs and local authorities will need to assess structures and procedures around managing behaviours, be explicit about what *is* and what *is not* acceptable in terms of respectful relationships, anti-bullying, online conduct in the context of child-on-child abuse, sexual violence and harassment, and crucially, bullying. Leaders must educate children (and parents) to understand what unsafe behaviours and / or bullying actually are, as opposed to 'fallings out' and 'isolated incidents of aggression'. They will also need to unpick *where* in school, and at *what times* of the day, pupils feel most unsafe.

The results regarding online safety, are on the face of it, encouraging. However, caution should be exercised when interpreting the response. The questions we should ask in response are; is this a result of increased student confidence in navigating the online world? Or is it due to complacency, and a naivety around online security? The quality of the 'online curriculum' in delivering meaningful, relevant and current advice and guidance is going to remain as important as ever.

Demographic differences in responses are of particular interest to school leaders. The results raise important questions about inclusivity, crucially in terms of pupils who are particularly of black origin, those who identify as other than male or female or those whose sexual orientation is other than heterosexual. Pupils with gender identity other than male or female or who are gay are more than twice as likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe. Indeed, they feel safer out of school than in. This alerts the education sector to a potentially difficult, and certainly surprising conclusion; that in spite of extensive PD, BV and PSHCE programmes, bullying and social exclusion is perhaps more prevalent in our schools than out in the community. The results indicate that an urgent and sustainable focus is given to areas of the curriculum, that for years have been seen by some as 'Cinderella' subjects. Merely covering 'respectful relationships', 'LGBTQ+', 'Protected Characteristics', 'online safety' and 'race' is not enough; the *quality of delivery* and the *expertise of the delivery team* is going to be critical in ensuring that schools move forward in creating a truly inclusive, respectful culture.

Unpicking these results at school, MAT and national level will have implications for the way in which we, as leaders, plan and deliver our future personal development and PSHCE programmes. The implications for *not* doing so, are likely to not only lead to an increase in adverse inspection judgments, (from safeguarding through to quality of education and therefore leadership and overall effectiveness), but also feed into wider, more problematic contextual issues lived by our students in the community.

## Implications for school leaders: by The Key

There's so much to unpick here. One interesting finding relates to what's happening with pupils just entering secondary school. The data shows us that pupils in year 7 (traditionally a time associated with high anxiety triggered by so much change) are more likely to feel safe at school, than those in year 8. It might be that primary and secondary schools have given more attention in recent years to the transition process, and this is working well to prepare pupils for their new experience. Some secondaries keep their year 7s quite separate from older pupils - with year 7 pupils having their own playgrounds or 'spaces', and staggered start times or meal times - which could contribute to their relative feelings of safety. It's possible that if we asked these same year 7 pupils towards the end of the summer term (instead of half a term into secondary school), their experiences may then put them more in line with their year 8 peers.

The data shows that a smaller proportion of the pupils in years 8 to 11 (up to GCSEs) feel safe at school, compared with their younger counterparts (and their sixth form peers).


There are many possible reasons for this. With newfound independence, onset or further development of pubertal changes (which might for some bring a tendency for 'riskier' pursuits, as well as more obvious physical changes), these pupils are likely to be bringing through the school gates the repercussions of what's happening outside. Whether that's relationships, friendship issues or more complex activities, it's clear that this only starts to improve once they reach their sixth form years.

It's likely that this research includes one of the largest samples of data among English school-aged pupils who identify as something other than "male (boy)" or "female (girl)", and/or other than "heterosexual (straight)". In total, 3,850 pupils identified as neither "male (boy)" nor "female (girl)" (including those selecting "I don't know"), and 4,590 of pupils in year 9 and above identified as something other than "heterosexual" (including those selecting "I don't know"). Other studies, such as Stonewall's 'School Report 2017', which collected the data from over 3,700 pupils identifying as LGBTQ+ in Britain, tend to be focused specifically on the experiences of this demographic (or survey older age groups, e.g. 16 to 24 year-olds). While such research is important, it's when we compare against the experiences of pupils identifying as heterosexual, or with a binary gender, that we can start to look at real differences in experiences.

There's a significant difference in how safe pupils feel, by gender identity and sexual orientation, across all of the survey questions (with the exception of how safe pupils feel online, where the difference is less pronounced). Looking just at experiences of being at school, we see that 71% of pupils identifying as heterosexual feel "very" or "quite" safe, compared to 53% of pupils identifying as bisexual and 50% of pupils identifying as homosexual. For staff and leaders working in schools, this is a wake-up call to how an increasingly-visible segment of our pupils feel, going into the school building.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017>



We know, from the previously-mentioned Stonewall research and other studies, that there's a general shift down in incidences of bullying towards pupils identifying as LGBTQ+. However, it's worth noting that this is from a high base (measured in 2007), and correlates with higher levels of visibility and acceptance of this demographic among the general population. Schools have the great privilege and challenge of often being at the forefront of these changes required by society. Leaders have the opportunity to support pupils in their need for wider acceptance of the progress they want to see, while they sit within the rules of a formal institution.

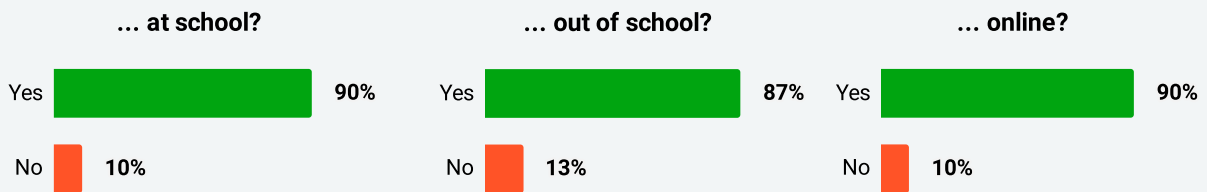
## **Section 3**

# **School support**



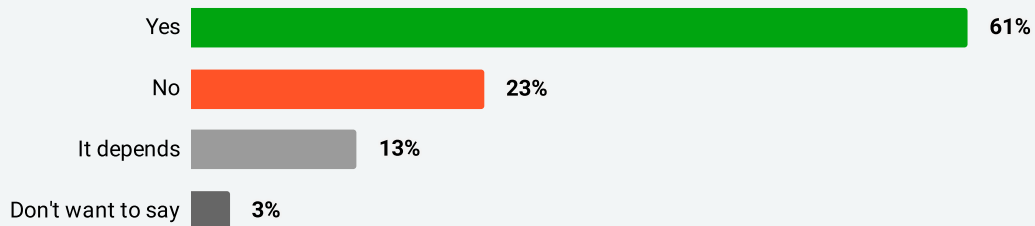
## School support

FIGURE 34: DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE MAKES YOU FEEL UNSAFE...?



Most pupils feel confident they know what to do if someone makes them feel unsafe at school, out of school, or online. However, with around 1 in 10 pupils not knowing, this means around 3 pupils out of a class of 30 do not know what to do if they feel unsafe.

FIGURE 35: IF YOU EVER FELT UNSAFE, WOULD YOU ASK AN ADULT AT SCHOOL FOR HELP?



Among pupils who did not report feeling unsafe, over half said that, if they were to feel unsafe, they would tell an adult at school about it, whilst a further 13% said it would depend.

FIGURE 36: WHEN YOU FELT UNSAFE, DID YOU TELL ANY ADULTS AT SCHOOL ABOUT IT?

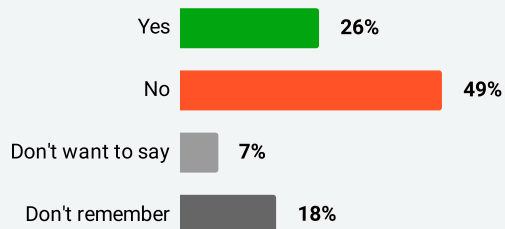
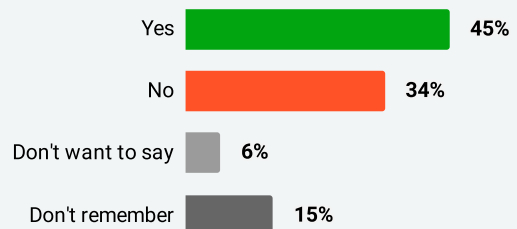


FIGURE 37: WHEN YOU FELT UNSAFE, DID YOU TELL ANY ADULTS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL ABOUT IT?



However, only a quarter of those who have felt unsafe reported it to an adult at school. 45% told an adult outside of school.

Comments suggest a few different reasons why pupils might not wish to talk to teachers: their own feelings of discomfort about having an issue, wanting to sort the issue themselves, having someone they trust more to speak to, or feeling concerned that school staff don't care / won't help came up as frequent reasons.

#### FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE

*"Because I struggle to speak to people especially about my own personal problems"*

*"I get too anxious and my brain tells me not to so I just try to forget about it."*

*"I'm quite shy and I don't like opening up to people I don't know very well"*

#### WANTING TO SORT IT THEMSELVES

*"Because I can sort things out by my self"*

*"Because most of the time it's not a big deal and I will get over it"*

*"Sometimes it feels like I should be able to deal with my problems myself, and they're insignificant"*

#### SOMEONE THEY TRUST MORE

*"I would just feel comfortable to tell my mum and dad"*

*"I dont know i would just find it awkward and sharing your life with someone you dont know fully and only know them as a teacher they could be anyone when not a teacher"*

*"I would rather talk to my parents or close friends"*

#### CONCERN THAT SCHOOL STAFF DON'T CARE / WON'T HELP

*"I asked for help once in the past and nothing happened. I also know many friends who have asked for help and not received any."*

*"There was once when I was being bullied and I was told, "Tell us if things get worse." Things were already terrible and I was really struggling, but I didn't feel like I was taken seriously enough."*

*"Because they don't care all they care about is homework"*

## Implications for school leaders: by The Key

It's testament to schools across the country that the majority of pupils know what to do if someone makes them feel unsafe either at school, out of school or online. Schools are doing everything from hosting "anonymous drop boxes" where pupils can post messages for leaders, to making key staff visible and available for pupils to contact at convenient times, to employing learning and behaviour mentors to work specifically with identified pupils. Some are bringing in agencies such as the local police to talk about safety-related topics, such as what constitutes sexual harassment as a criminal offence.

And yet, with around 3 pupils in every class of 30 not knowing what to do if someone makes them feel unsafe, whether in school, out of school or online, there is always more to do. Clearly some of this responsibility falls on parents and carers, but schools are in a unique position to educate those parents and carers - for example, through factsheets or informational events - to make sure the messaging is consistent and localised.

Unsurprisingly, in general, pupils are more comfortable telling their parents or adults they know outside of school - than an adult at school - if they feel unsafe. It's understandable that many pupils are more likely to have a close, trusted relationship with adults such as parents, as well as the opportunity to talk openly. For those pupils whose responses suggest that previous experience has taught them that school staff won't be understanding, we need to equip schools to provide a better outcome. For example, certain bullying behaviours could seem, to an unequipped member of staff, closer to "friendship issues" depending on how they come across. And the elevation of pupil voice here is really key, as is creating the conditions for conversations. We know, too, that the risk of being on the receiving end of 'victim blaming' can deter a child from telling an adult about abuse, especially abuse that happens online. This might be another area of focus for staff training to increase awareness, as in so many cases this victim blaming will be inadvertent.


Fostering an environment where pupils feel they can talk to an adult is likely easier in primary schools, where pupils have one core teacher that they could "hang back" with during at least 3 points in the day (e.g. the start of break time, lunchtime and after school). By contrast, secondary school pupils experience many more teachers, usually at least one per subject, meaning it can take longer to build up trusted relationships. They also have limited opportunities to "hang back" with someone they do trust - moving from one part of the school to the next as lessons transition, in most cases. This is borne out in the data, which shows that up to 54% of primary pupils would tell an adult in school, whereas only up to 24% of secondary pupils would. (This is not presented above in this report, but is likely to be explored in a future publication within the series).

So what can secondary schools do to create the conditions where pupils feel able to tell an adult if they feel unsafe? Perhaps this is where technology can step up to support, with secure messaging opportunities between pupils and teachers they trust allowing ease of access during a busy school day. Pastoral care is often delivered through tutor times in secondary schools,

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/challenging-victim-blaming-language-and-behaviours-when-dealing-with-the-online-experiences-of-children-and-young-people>





but this comes with challenges in terms of individual needs around privacy. A joined-up approach with well-trained staff and strong parental engagement, enabled by good technology and a sound foundation of mutual respect and openness, is likely to be key.

Ultimately though, 34% of pupils who disclosed that they've felt unsafe, have told no adults at all, in or out of school, and this is concerning. Some of this may come down to "wanting to sort it out themselves" or telling friends above adults, but all pupils, and especially more vulnerable pupils or those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), would stand to benefit greatly from an adult's intervention. Schools have to find ways to remove barriers to talking and reach these pupils with compelling messaging and support options, whether that involves their own staff or outside agencies.

## Conclusion

### **Leora Cruddas CBE**

*Chief executive, Confederation of School Trusts*

As educators, the greatest responsibility we have is the trust we hold on behalf of children.

That means helping them learn and flourish, but more fundamentally it means keeping them safe – and teachers and school leaders across the country take that responsibility very seriously. My experience is that of all their duties, monitoring safeguarding is the one that trustees and governors undertake most diligently and solemnly.

It can be very difficult, however, to know what is really going on in our schools. The risk is that we only discover safeguarding issues when they boil over, rather than detecting and preventing them early on. The Confederation of School Trust's work in this area, developed most recently by Browne Jacobson's Dai Durbridge, puts emphasis on the importance of prevention when forming a strategic approach to safeguarding at scale across our schools. It also encourages a broad view, sharing experience and expertise across our schools.

So this research by Edurio and The Key, informed by the views of 70,000 pupils, is a vital and instructive indication of what is going on beneath the surface. The findings are at once both reassuring and concerning. The majority of pupils do feel safe at school, but around a quarter have felt unsafe in the last six months. Pupils by and large know they should report concerns to an adult, but in practice a significant minority don't do so through shyness or because they don't believe help will be forthcoming. There are some significant differences between the experiences of pupils of different ages, genders, and sexuality.

These findings should be reflected on by all school leaders to help them devise strategies to close the gaps between different pupil demographics to create safe, inclusive environments in which all pupils can learn and flourish.

They also provide a valuable model for schools and trusts who wish to listen more systematically to pupil voice in their own settings, sitting alongside existing pastoral and parental engagement.

The findings go beyond the school gates, reporting on pupils' perceptions outside of school and online. As educators we have less influence in these settings, but we do have a role in equipping children – and, to some degree, their parents and carers – to understand the risks and manage their safety as they grow into independent adults. At a time when there is so much public, professional, and political anxiety about online safety it is perhaps surprising that the report finds children feel safest online; we need to understand more about whose perception is closer to reality.

Most of all, these results show the importance of listening and learning. To properly discharge the trust we hold we need to understand the daily experiences of children, and use that understanding to provide the scaffolding and support that helps them flourish safely.

## About Edurio

Edurio is England's leading provider of staff, pupil, and parent feedback surveys for schools and multi-academy trusts, working with over 100 trusts and 2000 schools across England and internationally.

Edurio's platform and nationwide dataset allow trust and school leaders to benchmark their performance against national averages on topics like staff wellbeing, parental engagement, pupil wellbeing and others.

By measuring the often difficult to track elements of education quality, Edurio can help school leaders make informed decisions, develop engaging relationships with staff and communicate their values to their community.

Featuring surveys designed in partnership with academic experts, Edurio has developed an advanced survey management and data visualisation platform for schools and school trusts to easily access these important insights.

By using Edurio to centrally manage your stakeholder feedback across the trust, you can:

- Provide an understanding of where your resources and support are needed
- Find areas of good practice and celebrate strengths
- Identify areas for professional learning and growth opportunities
- Strengthen relationships between school leadership and the staff and parent community
- Improve staff wellbeing and student achievement
- Reduce effort to analyse data and ensure high response rates due to the use of a trusted external partner

If you're interested in learning how Edurio can help your school or trust achieve its goals, email [contact@edurio.com](mailto:contact@edurio.com).

**edurio**

## About The Key

Running an effective school or trust is rarely one dimensional. It's hectic and complex, but there's nothing more important than getting it right when you're accountable for every decision that's made. Working through any challenge is never as straightforward as needing one piece of advice, or one training course alone. It requires a team of great leaders, all making the right decisions at the right time. That's where we come in.

**The Key is the leading support service providing schools and trusts with high-quality guidance that goes further to tackle issues at a deeper level and from all angles.**

Our whole-school approach gives leaders one trusted source to turn to for any challenge, equipping them with highly-accurate, expertly-synthesised and context-rich resources, guidance and CPD. Because driving lasting change always requires a considered approach.

## Our mission to support schools and trusts to get safeguarding right

We know that safeguarding children is a primary concern for school staff, and something we all need to get right. It's a collective responsibility that's complex, sensitive and takes so much more than an outstanding designated safeguarding lead. It takes the whole team - and for this, you need comprehensive knowledge and wrap-around support that everyone can lean in to.

That's why we're pleased to have partnered with Edurio to get pupils' perspectives on their feelings of safety - for the first time - which we believe can transform how all of us in the sector look at safeguarding. And as we share the findings of this review, we're committed to using the insights from pupils themselves to help shape the guidance, support and training schools and trusts need to get safeguarding right for every pupil.

Contact us to learn more about how we can support your school or trust to build a culture of safeguarding. Email us at [enquiries@thekeysupport.com](mailto:enquiries@thekeysupport.com).



## Acknowledgments

The Pupil Safeguarding Review project has taken over 6 months of focused work and participation of multi-academy trusts, schools and pupils far beyond the team's expectations.

The survey was designed under the leadership of Iona Jackson and Beatrise Pelsa of Edurio, in partnership with Nicola Westjones and Sean Rapson of The Key, who balanced academic rigour with the practical needs of multi-academy trust teams. Beyond the survey design, there was significant work from multiple colleagues across both organisations, leading to impressive size of the dataset and the smooth running of the survey as it launched.

We are enormously grateful to the trust leaders and sector experts who took part in our survey development panel and provided frequent feedback throughout the survey development and analysis, in particular:

**Patrick Knight** of Diverse Academies Trust

**Jon Needham** of Oasis Community Learning

**Dionne Jude** of Education for the 21st Century

**James Down** of Brooke Weston Trust

**Nikki Cameron** of Ormiston Academies Trust

**Ken Palmer** of Proactive Safeguarding

Finally, we thank Ben Willets and Dita Bluma for their contribution to the report analysis, Leora Cruddas of the Confederation of School Trusts and Rachel De Souza, Children's commissioner, for contributing reflections on this important research, and Artis Taurins and Joel Southern for the design of the report.

# Appendix



## About The Pupil Safeguarding Survey

The survey was developed by Edurio, in partnership with The Key, throughout the summer of 2022 with input from Trust safeguarding leads from Oasis, Brook-Weston and Diverse Academies Trust, as well as safeguarding expert Ken Palmer from Proactive Safeguarding. The survey reviews the effectiveness of school safeguarding policy with the main aim of understanding whether pupils feel safe in various settings, and whether their school has prepared them for what to do if they do not.

### Main areas of the Edurio Safeguarding Review survey



#### Curriculum

Understanding pupil perceptions of RSE/PSHE curriculum based on DfE guidance, including expectations around appropriate behaviour in relationships, where they are learning about different topics and whether they know what to do if they feel unsafe



#### Treatment of others

Assessing pupil perceptions of the importance of different qualities, and how well they feel they treat others



#### Feelings of safety

Understanding how safe pupils feel in different settings, and whether anything has happened to them that makes them feel unsafe



#### Access to help

Understanding what happened when pupils have sought help, how quickly issues are resolved, and identifying what may be stopping a pupil raising an issue at school



#### Readiness to learn

Assessing the impact of feelings of safety on pupil's ability to learn.



More details on the survey can be found at [go.edurio.com/safeguard](https://go.edurio.com/safeguard).

## About the dataset

This report highlights the responses of pupils who took part in the survey between 3rd October 2022 and 11th November 2022.

<b>Overall dataset</b>	<b>68214</b>
Pupils who felt safe in school	44358
Pupils who felt unsafe in school	15145
Pupils who felt safe out of school	45527
Pupils who felt unsafe out of school	13299
Pupils who felt safe online	50840
Pupils who felt unsafe online	6968
Pupils who felt safe at school, out of school, or online	56637
Pupils who felt unsafe at school, out of school, or online	14318
<b>Year group</b>	
Year 3	4901
Year 4	4869
Year 5	5974
Year 6	6591
Year 7	11309
Year 8	8396
Year 9	8727
Year 10	7171
Year 11	5749
Year 12	2192
Year 13	1841
<b>Sexual Orientation (asked of pupils in year 9 and above)</b>	
Bisexual	1608
Heterosexual (straight)	15952
Homosexual (gay)	840
Other	969
Don't know	1173
Don't want to say	1075
<b>Ethnicity (year 7 and above)</b>	
Asian or Asian British	4536
Black, Black British, Carribean or African	1318
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	1694
White	27115
Other ethnic group	769
Don't know	2081
Don't want to say	1018