



Department
for Education

SEND Futures: lives at age 12-13

**Exploring wellbeing, peer relationships,
experiences of bullying and
independence among young people with
SEN at age 12-13**

December 2023

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Social Research

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, the authors would like to thank all the families who have given up their time to take part in the study. Thanks also to colleagues at the National Centre for Social Research and at the National Children's Bureau, and at the Department for Education.

Responsibility for all interpretation of the data in this report lies solely with the authors.

Executive summary

This report explores the lives of young people in England with Special Educational Needs (SEN) who were aged 12-13 in 2022. It describes their wellbeing, the quality of their peer relationships and experiences of bullying, as well as current and expected future levels of independence (such as expectations around paid employment). In each of these areas the report investigates how the lives of young people with SEN varied across different subgroups, including different types of SEN, different educational settings (mainstream schools, special schools and Alternative Provision), and whether a young person had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC plan).

Data

The findings in this report are based on the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase. This is a large-scale survey which aims to test the feasibility of conducting quantitative longitudinal research among young people with SEN and at the same time provides rich data painting a detailed picture of the lives of the young people who take part in it. The first wave of fieldwork was completed between May and September 2022 and was conducted using a combination of online surveys and face-to-face in-home interviewing for groups who are often under-represented in survey research. Data collection was conducted with the young people themselves and with their parents or guardians, achieving about 3,500 completed responses from parents and guardians and 3,000 from young people. Measures were put in place to enable as many young people as possible to take part, and around half of the young people took part with assistance from others.

All findings presented in the report have been weighted to be nationally representative of the population of young people in English state education who were in Year 8 during the 2021-22 academic year and were registered as having SEN. The weighting was performed using characteristics included in pupils' administrative educational records, including whether they had an EHC plan and their primary type of SEN. This means that respondents taking part in the study have been given different 'weights' to ensure the overall figures presented in the report match those of the wider population of young people with SEN in the relevant year group.¹

¹ Respondents whose characteristics are under-represented (compared to the population from which they were sampled) have weights greater than 1 to boost their influence, whilst those that are over-represented are given weights less than 1. A respondent with a weight of 2 is counted twice in effect, thereby increasing their influence or 'weight' when the data are analysed.

Key findings

Wellbeing

- At age 12-13 72% of young people with SEN reported they were happy² with their life as whole, although 13% did not feel very happy with their life.
- Across the different areas of life asked about in the survey – family, friends, school, and how they look – young people with SEN were more happy with their family and less happy with their school or educational setting and how they looked: 90% reported being happy with their family compared with 55% who were happy with their school.
- Among the different types of primary SEN, young people with autism and with social, emotional and mental health difficulties were the most likely to report low wellbeing (measured as low happiness with their life overall). In these groups 16% and 18%, respectively, reported low levels of happiness with their life overall, compared with 13% among all young people with SEN.
- There were no differences in overall wellbeing between young people who had an EHC plan and those who did not, nor between those attending different types of educational setting (whether a mainstream or special school, or Alternative Provision).

Bullying and relationships with peers

- Parents reported that most young people with SEN (72%) got on well with their peers. Nevertheless, almost a quarter (24%) were reported to not get on with their peers.
- The parents of young people with certain types of primary SEN (Physical and sensory needs, Specific learning difficulties and Cognition and learning difficulties) were more likely than parents of young people with other types of primary SEN to report that their child got on well with their peers.
- Parents of young people with SEN who attended a special school or Alternative Provision were more likely to report their child got on well with peers than those in mainstream schools.
- At age 12-13 nearly two thirds (63%) of young people with SEN reported they had experienced at least one of the types of bullying behaviours asked about in the survey during the last year. These included being called hurtful names, being

² Young people were asked how happy they felt with their life overall and in four different 'domains' of their lives: their friends, their family, the way they look, and their school. For each of these they were asked to rank their happiness on a seven-point scale ranging from completely happy (1) to not at all happy (7). A score of 1-3 was considered to indicate someone was happy and 5-7 that they were unhappy.

excluded from a group or from joining in activities, having possessions or money stolen, being physically threatened or being the subject of actual physical violence.

- Young people who had autism or Social, emotional and mental health difficulties were more likely to report having experienced bullying in the last year than those with other types of primary SEN. Young people who had Physical and sensory needs as their primary SEN were more likely than young people with other types of primary SEN to say that any name-calling they experienced was related to their SEN.
- Mostly, parents seemed to be aware if their child experienced bullying. In households where both the parent and the young person took part in the survey, the parent's and the young person's answers on whether the young person had experienced bullying was the same in 85% of cases.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, having experienced bullying in the last year was associated with lower levels of wellbeing – young people who reported being bullied were more likely to report being unhappy with their life as a whole than those who had not experienced bullying.

Current and future independence

- At age 12-13 44% of young people with SEN spent time with friends unsupervised by an adult 'most weeks'. Just under one in four (23%) never spent any time with friends unsupervised.
- Some groups of young people were more likely than others to say that they never spent time with friends without adult supervision: young people with an EHC plan, young people who attended a special school or Alternative Provision, and young people who had autism as their primary SEN.
- The vast majority of young people (94%) and their parents (85%) expected that the young person would go on to have a job in the future.
- Just over half of young people with SEN (54%) reported they would like to go to college or university after leaving school.
- Just over half of parents (56%) reported that the support provided by their child's school to prepare them for adulthood was helpful, although a substantial minority (20%) reported that it was not helpful.
- Parents of young people who had Social, emotional and mental health difficulties or autism as their primary SEN were the groups least likely to say the support provided had been helpful (48% and 52% respectively), compared with the parents of young people with other types of needs. Conversely, the parents of young people with Physical and sensory needs were those most likely to have found the school's support helpful (69%).

Conclusion

The findings of this report demonstrate the potential value of a large-scale survey with young people with SEN and their parents or guardians. A study like this allows for a detailed exploration of these young people's lives in a way that would not be possible through drawing on existing studies of a general population of young people or on small-scale studies of particular sub-populations within the wider SEN population. The study over-sampled groups which are often less well represented in surveys of this nature and employed innovative methods to recruit and retain these sample members. Through this, the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase data offers the opportunity to explore the lives of several understudied groups, such as young people with SEN who receive free school meals.

This report draws only on selected data from the study, which covers a wealth of different topic areas. In addition to the data presented here, the study includes data on the extent to which young people's special educational needs are being met, their transition to secondary school, parents' views on special and mainstream education, and how the young person is getting on at school. It is also worth noting that the analysis in this report is based on descriptive and bivariate analysis only. It does not allow for conclusions about causality, nor to disentangle the respective impacts of characteristics on pupils' outcomes. There is thus considerable scope for future research to explore the data – looking at other topic areas and/or applying more advanced analytical methods. On completion of Wave 2 of the study, it will also become possible to explore changes over time in the lives of young people with SEN.

Introduction

This report explores findings from the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase – a study which aims to explore the experiences of young people in England with special educational needs (SEN). This large-scale feasibility study is funded by the Department for Education and includes the collection of two rounds of survey data with the same young people and families, beginning when young people were in Year 8. It provides a valuable new data source which gives an insight into the lives of a wide range of young people with SEN.

Existing research and policy relevance

Understanding the lives of young people with SEN is an important area for government policy. These young people make up a sizeable minority of the school population in England (17%) (DFE, 2023a). On average, their outcomes are also poorer than those of their peers who do not have SEN. Throughout primary and secondary education, at all key stages, there is a gap in academic attainment between young people who have SEN and those who do not (DFE, 2023e). Young people with SEN are also more likely to be excluded from school; and, after leaving school, are more likely than their peers who do not have SEN to not be in employment, education or training (NEET) (DFE, 2023a; DFE, 2023b; DfE, 2022a; DFE, 2020). What is not clear from existing research is what factors are driving this disparity in outcomes, how they relate to other areas of young people's lives and apply to different subgroups within the SEN population. It is therefore necessary to develop a robust evidence base to inform both interventions among young people with SEN and wider policies aimed at supporting young people with SEN and their families, such as the recent SEND improvement plan (DFE, 2023c).

A key aim of the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase is to explore how best to recruit and retain children and young people with SEN and their families in longitudinal quantitative research, with an emphasis on groups which are under-represented in survey research. The information about response and retention strategies obtained through this phase will inform the design and delivery of high-quality longitudinal survey research with the SEN population. In the eventual longitudinal study that DfE envisage, a robust methodology will help uncover what contributes to different outcomes among children and young people with SEN, and understand more about what experiences and circumstances, including education and support provision, can help mitigate against poorer outcomes.

Despite being a discovery phase, the study has successfully delivered a substantial survey, sampled from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Alternative Provision database, using a mixture of face-to-face and web surveys. In this report we draw on the first round of data collected from young people and their parents or carers (Wave 1),

conducted in the summer of 2022, which includes data collected from over 3,000 pupils in Year 8 (age 12-13) and 3,500 parents.

This report provides a snapshot of how young people with SEN were getting on, in 2022, in key areas where young people with SEN have been found, on average, to have different outcomes compared with their peers without SEN (Bright, 2017; Parsons and Platt, 2013; NCB and CLS, 2013): life satisfaction; relationships with peers and experiences of bullying; and preparation for employment. Drawing on data collected from the young people's parents, the report also looks at the quality of the support young people were receiving from their school or educational setting to prepare them for adulthood. Previous qualitative research has suggested that children with SEND can feel excluded or victimised by their peers, and feel treated differently by their schools, which again can lead to feelings of stigmatisation (DFE, 2022b). Some young people with SEN have also reported a lack of accommodation and understanding of their needs by schools and teachers, potentially leading to their being labelled as 'naughty' or 'difficult' (DFE, 2022b). To ensure policy responses to these issues are appropriate and timely, it is important to understand more about how common such experiences are, and who seems to be affected the most.

Understanding how needs and experiences vary across this population is crucial for developing and implementing policies and support mechanisms that meet the needs of young people and their families. This matters because children and young people with SEN are a diverse group, with a range of different needs and circumstances. This study is particularly suited to exploring these needs because, by focussing exclusively on young people with SEN, it has a large enough sample of young people with SEN in this age group to allow for more detailed subgroup analysis than general population surveys typically allow for. The data collection for the SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase also focused on topics often not covered in detail in studies with a wider population group, such as specialist support needs and parents' and young people's views on this. As such, it provides unique opportunities for detailed analysis of this population, including how experiences differ between subgroups within the SEN population and how the level of support received may be associated with their outcomes.

Report aims

The report provides an overview of the experiences of young people with SEN on selected topics which are important to understanding young people's experiences and development, and where existing research has suggested that, on average, experiences of young people with SEN differ to those of young people without SEN. It provides timely estimates of just how young people with SEN were getting on following disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: including how they were feeling both at school and in their lives generally, how they were getting on with their peers, and to what extent they and

their parents felt they were able to lead independent lives, both now and in the future. Through this, the report seeks to demonstrate some of the questions that can be answered – or, indeed, raised – with the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study dataset. The analysis undertaken here is by no means exhaustive – the dataset provides rich and robust survey data on the lives of young people with SEN which could usefully be explored in further analysis. Some of the other topics asked about in Wave 1 included different types of support to manage SEN in school, how effective parents and young people found that support to be, perceptions of mainstream school provision compared with specialist settings, the transition into secondary school, how they travelled to school, and how well the young person was getting on at school.

Report overview

This report comprises three chapters that explore different themes in the lives of young people with SEN:

- their wellbeing,
- their relationships with peers and experiences of bullying, and
- their current and future independence.

For each of these three areas the report presents an overview for all young people with SEN before exploring how their experiences differed across three key characteristics:

- The young person's **primary special educational need**:
 - Cognition and learning,
 - Autism,
 - Physical and sensory needs,
 - Speech, language and communication needs,
 - Social, emotional and mental health difficulties,
 - Specific learning difficulties, and
 - Other SEN.

Throughout the report, when referring to people's primary special educational need we refer to SEN type. This avoids suggesting that the level of people's need will necessarily vary between these groups, because some SEN types may have similar support needs.

- Whether the young person had an **Education, Health and Care plan (EHC plan)** or not.
- What **type of school the young person attended**: a mainstream school, special school or Alternative Provision.

The report concludes with a summary of the main findings and suggestions for future research.

Interpretation of findings

All the findings in the report are weighted to be nationally representative of all young people with SEN in English state education who were in Year 8 in the 2021-22 academic year. This means that responses from families taking part in the study have been given different 'weights' to ensure the overall figures presented in the report match those of the wider population of young people with SEN in the relevant year group.³ The study name, 'SEND Futures', was intended to make sure that all young people with SEN and/or disabilities felt included in the study. Nevertheless, the database from which the sample was drawn (the National Pupil Database) only records whether pupils have a Special Educational Need - not whether they have a disability. Therefore, findings from the study described in this report refer predominantly to young people who had Special Educational Needs (SEN), rather than Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Where findings draw on survey questions asked of 'parents', these may also have been asked of someone who is not a parent but is the young person's main carer or guardian. In the report text we refer only to parents for simplicity (and in the vast majority of cases it was a parent who answered the survey).

Wherever comparisons were made between the subgroups described in the report overview above, these are only remarked upon where there was a difference between these subgroups which was statistically significant at the 95% level. That is to say that there is less than a 5% probability of the difference arising by chance if there was no difference in the population. The report looks at the relationship between individual characteristics and pupil outcomes. The analysis did not control for other characteristics that may affect or explain this relationship. For example, a relationship between the type of school a pupil attends and their wellbeing may be affected by the type of needs they have, and the type of needs they have may also separately affect the type of school they attend, and their wellbeing. These complexities are not controlled for here but could be looked at in future research. Further details on the methodology of the SEND Futures

³ Weighting is a commonly applied technique in survey research to ensure participants from groups which are less likely to respond to the survey are given greater 'weight' (i.e. the 'count' more) when producing figures (and likewise, people from groups more likely to respond are weighted down). This is done to make sure the figures match the overall population that the survey participants are sampled. The weighting undertaken for SEND Futures took into account a range of different pupil characteristics, including whether they had an EHC plan or not; what their primary type of SEN was (as recorded in administrative education records), the pupil's gender and where they lived (including region, whether the location was urban or rural, and the level of income deprivation affecting children). No direct measure of the 'severity' of the young person's needs was available in the administrative data and therefore the weights relied on proxy measures such as whether the young person had an EHC plan and their primary type of SEN. See the section on weighting and representativeness in the Methodological Appendix for further details.

Discovery Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase study and of the analysis methods employed can be found in the Methodology appendix. This also includes a more detailed description of the variables used for the analysis.

Wellbeing

Key findings

- More than two thirds (72%) of young people with SEN reported being relatively happy with their life as whole at age 12-13. Even so, 13% did not feel very happy with their life (scored 5 or more on a 1-7 scale where 7 indicated 'least happy' and 1 indicates 'completely happy').
- Out of the different areas of their life – family, friends, school, how they look - young people were most happy with their family, and least happy with their school or educational setting and how they looked: 90% gave a response on the 'happy' end of the scale (1 to 3) with their family, compared with 55% for school.
- Young people with autism and young people with Social, emotional and mental health difficulties were the most likely to report low wellbeing among the different types of primary SEN (16% and 18%, respectively, reported low levels of happiness with their life overall, compared with 13% among all young people with SEN).
- The analysis did not show any differences in levels of happiness with life overall between young people who had an EHC plan and those who did not. Nor did it show any differences in overall levels of wellbeing between young people attending a mainstream, special school, or Alternative Provision.

Introduction

Understanding how young people are feeling, their 'wellbeing', is an important outcome in its own right. In addition, we know that wellbeing is related to a range of other outcomes for young people, such as attainment and engagement in school, making it even more important to consider (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012). Some existing research has also found that young people with SEN may have lower wellbeing levels than those without SEN. For example, they have been reported to have poorer life satisfaction (NCB & CLS, 2013), and in the State of the nation 2022: children and young people's wellbeing report, to have lower levels of happiness than reported among young people who did not have SEN, although these the differences in happiness were not found in all timepoints of the State of the nation survey (DFE, 2023d).

In this report, we use a measure of wellbeing – or happiness – which is also used in other studies such as the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). Young people were asked how happy they felt with their life overall and in four different 'domains' of their lives: their friends, their family, the way they look, and their school. For each of these they were asked to rank their happiness on a seven-point scale ranging from completely happy (1)

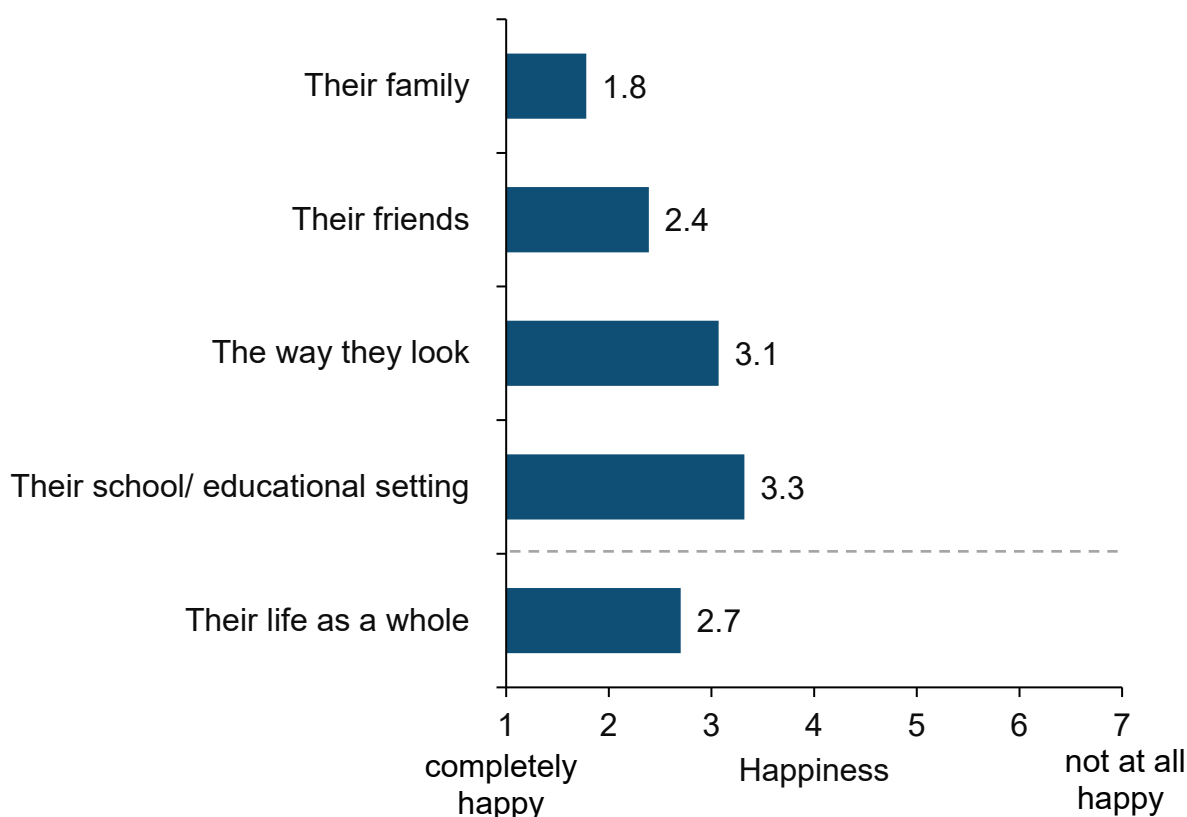
to not at all happy (7). When asked in the MCS (2013) with cohort members aged 11, a year younger than our respondents, 52% reported themselves to be 'completely happy' with their lives (Rees and Bradshaw, 2016). To explore the wellbeing of young people with SEN, this chapter first gives an overview of their average scores in each of the four 'life domains' and for the young person's life overall, as well as the distribution of responses across the scale in the school domain and for life overall. Previous research using these items has argued against combining them into a single measure of happiness (Rees and Bradshaw, 2018). We have therefore reported each separately and used 'happiness with life overall' for analysis by subgroups as this was recommended by Rees and Bradshaw to be the single item that best represented happiness.

Secondly, the chapter explores how young people's average levels of reported happiness in the school domain and for their life overall varied across different subgroups, including young people with and without an EHC plan, young people attending different types of school, and young people with different types of need. It also looks at variation in overall levels of happiness by whether the young person reported having experienced any form of bullying in the last 12 months and by how well parents felt the young person was supported by their school or educational setting.

Overall wellbeing

Figure 1 shows the average wellbeing score reported by young people with SEN across four 'life domains' and their happiness with their life overall. The scores ranged between 1 for 'completely happy' and 7 for 'not at all happy'. The figure shows that most young people are clustered towards the happier end of the scale, with mean scores under 4 across all areas. The domain where average scores were least happy was for their school and educational setting and for the way they look. Conversely, average scores were most happy in the 'family' domain.

Figure 1. Mean happiness score in four 'life domains' and with life as a whole (1 = completely happy; 7 = not at all happy)

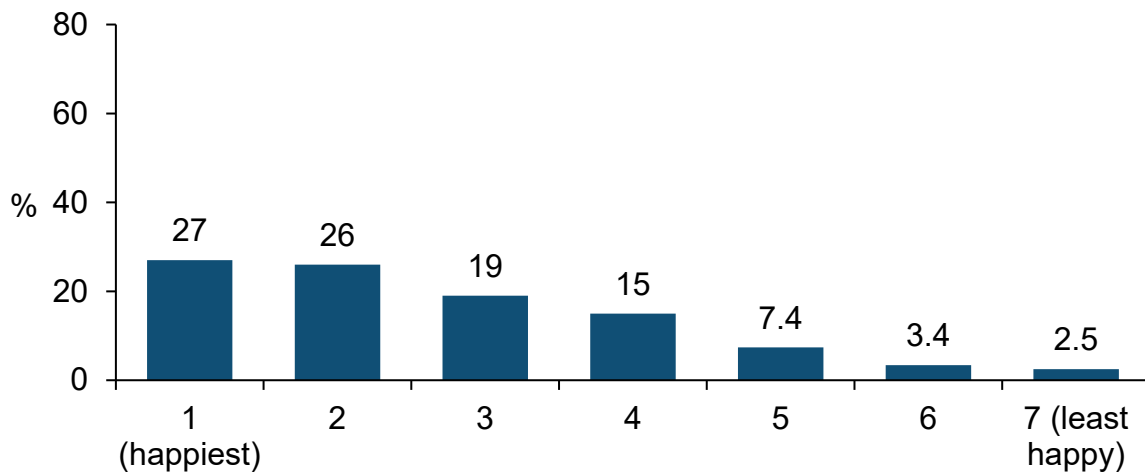


Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each domain:
Family = 2,809; Friends = 2,790; Way they look = 2,696; School = 2,738; Life as a whole = 2,723.

Reviewing the distribution of responses to how happy young people felt about their life as a whole and about their school (Figure 2 and Figure 3). shows that the low mean scores (indicating high levels of happiness) seen in Figure 1 are not 'hiding' a split distribution, with large numbers of responses at the extreme ends of the scale. For their life as a whole (Figure 2) answers clustered towards the happier end of the scale, with nearly three quarters (72%) giving a response of either 1, 2 or 3 and a fairly small proportion

selecting answers at the unhappy end of the scale –13% reported a score of 5 or above. Though not a clinically established measure of low wellbeing or depression, nevertheless, this does indicate that a minority of young people with SEN are not happy with their lives.⁴

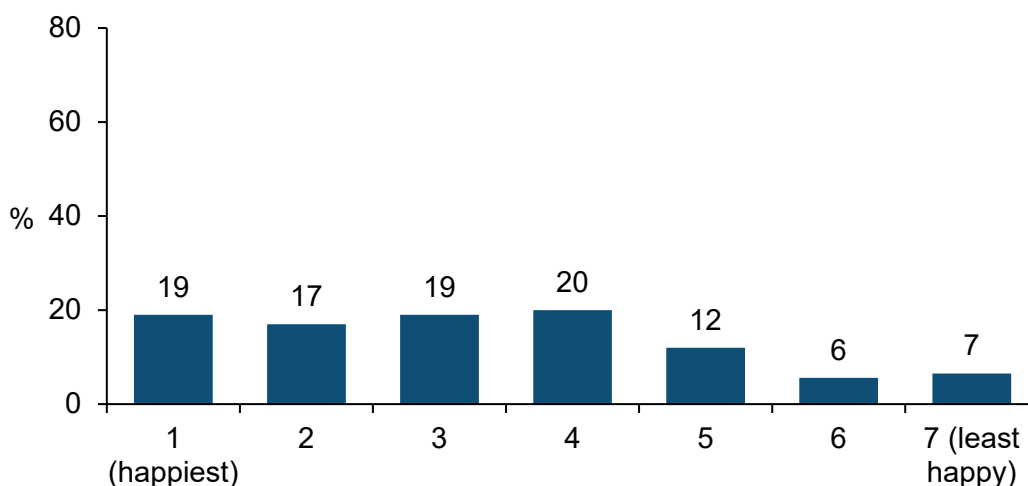
Figure 2. Percentage of young people with SEN who reported each level of happiness with life as a whole



Base: All young people with SEN (unweighted = 2,723).

Responses for the school domain were more evenly distributed (Figure 3), with greater numbers of young people choosing options at the less happy end of the scale. Nearly a quarter (24%) reported a score of 5 or higher, and the numbers selecting the more positive options (1-3) were lower than for their life as a whole – 55% compared with 72%.

Figure 3. Percentage of young people with SEN who reported each level of happiness with their school (or educational setting)

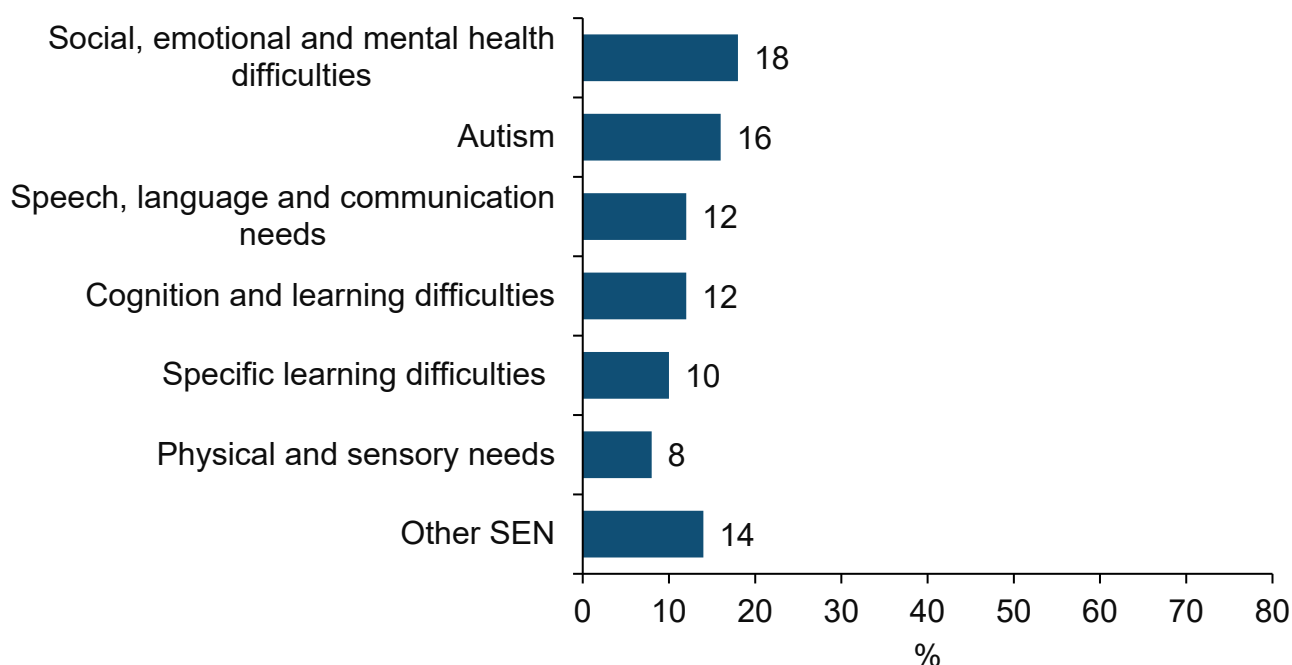


⁴ This is not a clinically established cut-off for low wellbeing or depression. The categories were selected due to the natural split of the scale around its midpoint response of four. For some people, selecting a '5' on this score may mean they are 'unhappy' with that area of their lives, but for others it may reflect an answer more similar to 'neither happy nor unhappy'.

Wellbeing by subgroup

To explore differences in the wellbeing of young people with SEN across different subgroups we focus on those with a score of 5, 6 or 7 – that is, those who selected response options on the unhappy end of the scale – and look at how this varies between different groups. The analysis did not show any significant differences by either EHC plan status or school type, however, it did show a statistically significant relationship between the young person’s primary type of SEN and their wellbeing. As Figure 4 shows, autistic young people and those with Social, emotional and mental health difficulties were the two groups more likely to report low wellbeing.

Figure 4. Percentage of young people with SEN who were unhappy, by primary SEN type

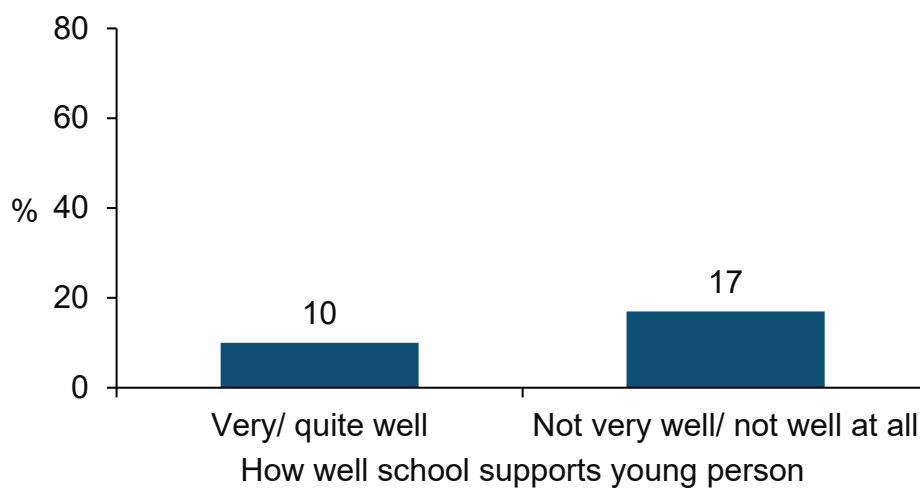


Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: SEMHD = 558; Autism = 381; CLD = 590; SLCN= 286; PSN = 176; SLD = 471; Other SEN =190.

The analysis also explored young people’s wellbeing in relation to the quality of the support provided by their school. The quality of a school’s support for the young person was measured through a question asked of their parent – ‘in the areas where your child needs extra help or support, how well do you think their school supports them?’. The analysis compared wellbeing (the proportion of young people who were unhappy with life overall) among young people whose parents felt they were either ‘very’ or ‘quite well’ supported by their school with the wellbeing among those whose parents felt they were

'not very well' or 'not well at all' supported. As shown in Figure 5, there was a small difference in the levels of happiness reported by young people by how well their parents felt they were supported by their school; 17% of those young people whose parents said they were not well supported reported being unhappy compared with 10% of those reported to be well supported. There was a corresponding difference in the proportion of young people who reported being happy: 76% of those whose parents reported that the school supported them well reported high levels of happiness with their life as a whole compared with 67% among those whose parents were not satisfied with the school's support.

Figure 5. Percentage of young people with SEN who were unhappy with their life overall, by how well the parent thinks their school supports them



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: parents think school supports them very/quite well (unweighted = 1,416) and not well (unweighted = 834).

Relationships with peers and experience of bullying

Key findings

- Based on parent report, most young people with SEN (72%) got on well with their peers at age 12-13. Even so, a quarter (24%) were reported to not get on with their peers.
- The parents of young people with certain types of primary SEN (Physical and sensory needs, Specific learning difficulties and Cognition and learning difficulties) were more likely than parents of young people with other types of primary SEN to report that their children got on well with their peers.
- Young people with SEN who attended a special school or Alternative Provision were more likely than those in mainstream schools to be reported by their parents as getting on well with their peers.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of young people with SEN said they had experienced bullying in the last year at age 12-13.
- Reports of bullying in the last year were more common among young people who had autism or Social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Young people with Physical and sensory needs as their primary SEN were more likely than young people with other types of primary SEN to say that any name-calling they had experienced was related to their SEN.
- There was a good level of correspondence between parent and young person reports of the young person's experiences of bullying – among households where both the parent and the young person took part, the parent's and the young person's assessment of this corresponded in 85% of cases.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, having experienced bullying in the last year was related to lower wellbeing – young people who reported being bullied were more likely to report low wellbeing than those who had not been bullied.

Introduction

This chapter first reports how well the young person got on with their peers and how this varied depending on school type, EHC plan status and primary special educational need. It then explores the prevalence of several different types of bullying, the overall prevalence of experiencing at least one of these types of bullying, differences in the experiences of bullying between selected subgroups, and, finally, to what extent parents' perception of whether their child is being bullied matched the perception of the people

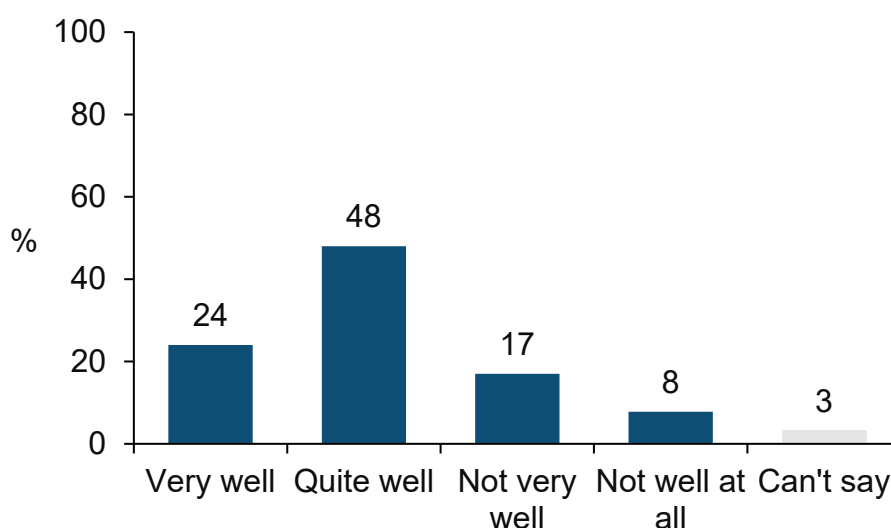
themselves. In addition, we also look at whether experiences of bullying varied by how much time a young person spent with other young people without an adult present.

Wave 1 of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England 2 (LSYPE2) can provide some context to our findings, because the questions used here were also asked in that study. It was conducted in 2013 with a sample of young people aged 13/14 (in school Year 9, a year older than our cohort), and found that 40% had experienced any bullying in the last 12 months (Baker et al, 2014, p. 62). A similar level of bullying (affecting 43% of young people based on the young person's report) was found in a more recent survey conducted in 2019, although this survey was of all young people of secondary school age, rather than only those in Year 8 with SEN, and was based on a different survey question (Ipsos MORI, 2019). The findings from LSYPE2 in 2013 also showed that young people with SEN were at greater risk of bullying across all the areas asked about. For example, for experiences of violence 11% of young people who did not have SEN had been a victim of violence compared with 24% of young people with SEN (Baker et al, 2014, p. 65).

Relationships with other young people

The quality of the young person's relationship with other young people their own age was measured by asking the parent how well the young person got on with their peers. Overall, most parents thought their child got on well with their peers, with 72% saying that the young person got on with peers either 'very well' or 'quite well'.

Figure 6. How well young people with SEN got on with their peers

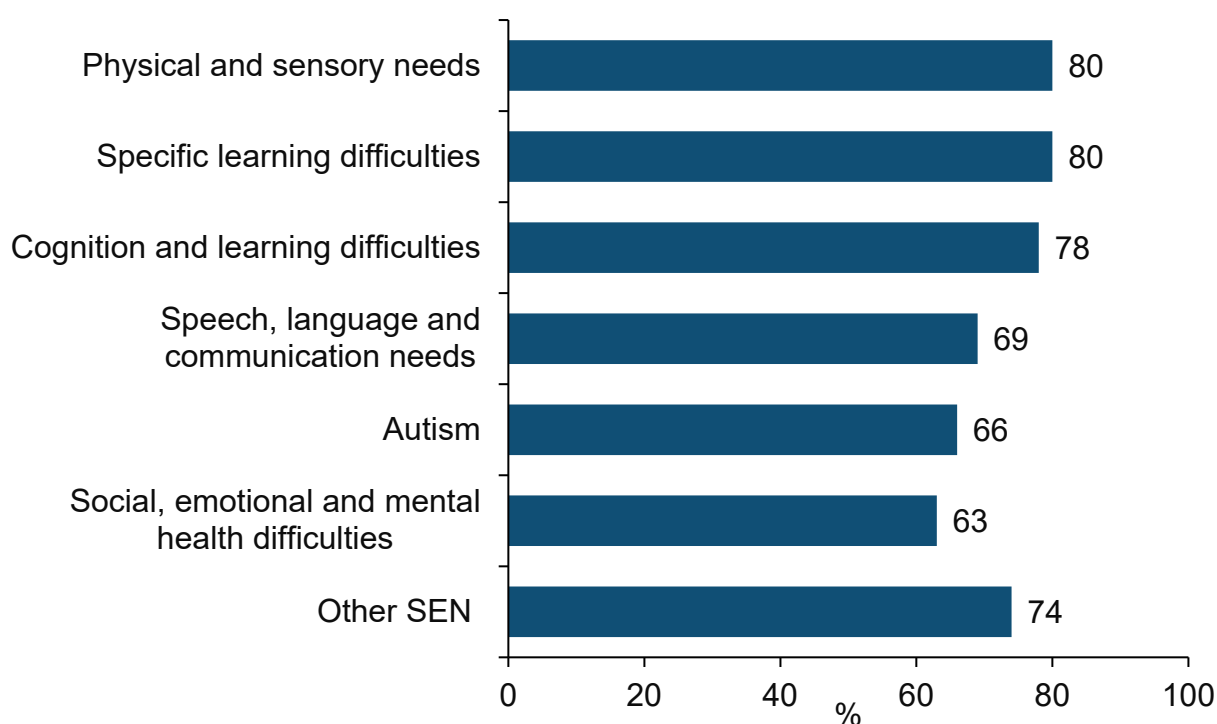


Base: All parents (unweighted =3,437).

Relationships with peers by subgroup

Figure 7 shows the percentage of young people with different types of SEN who were reported by their parent to get on either very or quite well with other young people. It shows that across all types of primary need the majority did get on well with their peers, but that there are also some differences in their experiences. In particular, young people with Physical and sensory needs, Specific learning difficulties and Cognition and learning difficulties were all more likely than young people with other types of needs to have positive relationships to their peers.

Figure 7. Percentage of young people with SEN who get on 'very' or 'quite well' with their peers, by primary SEN type (parental report)



Base: All parents, unweighted base for each category: PSN= 167; SLD= 465; CLD= 570; SLCN=254; Autism= 346; SEMHD=447; Other SEN= 169.

The analysis also showed differences by school type, with young people attending a special school or Alternative Provision getting on slightly better with their peers than those attending a mainstream school. For instance, 81% of parents whose child attended a special school and 78% of parents whose child were in Alternative Provision said their child got on quite well or very well with their peers, compared with 72% of parents whose children were in mainstream schools.

Prevalence of bullying among young people with SEN

To measure the prevalence of bullying this chapter draws on a series of questions asked of the young person about different types of experiences they may have had over the last 12 months, shown in the box below.

In the last 12 months have...

... you ever been upset by being called hurtful names by other students/ young people? This could be in person or through social media?

... you ever been excluded from a group of friends or from joining in activities?

... other students from school/ other young people ever made you give them money or personal possessions?

... other students from school/ other young people ever THREATENED to hit you, kick you or use any other form of violence against you?

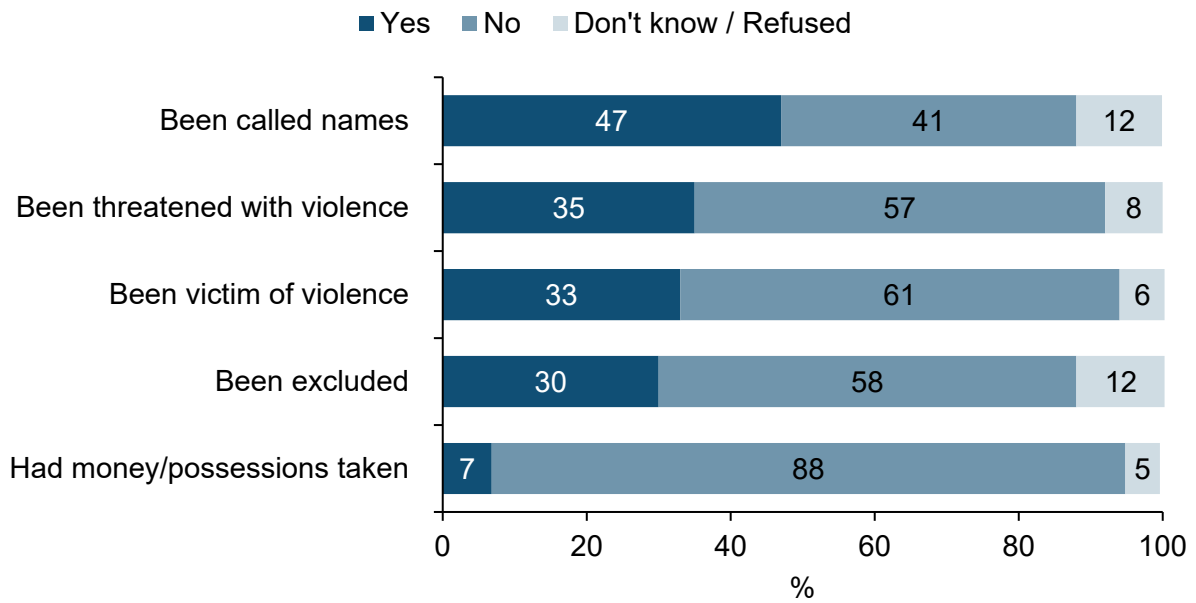
... other students / young people ever ACTUALLY hit you, kicked you or used any other form of violence against you?

The survey also explored whether experiencing any bullying (defined here as answering 'yes' to at least one of the questions shown in the box) was likely to be linked to their SEN by asking those who were called names whether this related to their special educational needs or disability.

As can be seen in Figure 8, some experiences of bullying were reported much more often than others. Name-calling was reported by nearly half (47%) while, the least common, having money or possessions taken, was reported by fewer than one in ten (7%). The other types of bullying were reported by around one third, between 30% and 35%. There is also a substantial minority of young people who chose not to answer the questions about bullying, answering with either 'Don't know' or 'Prefer not to say', which means that the level of bullying reported here may be an underestimate.

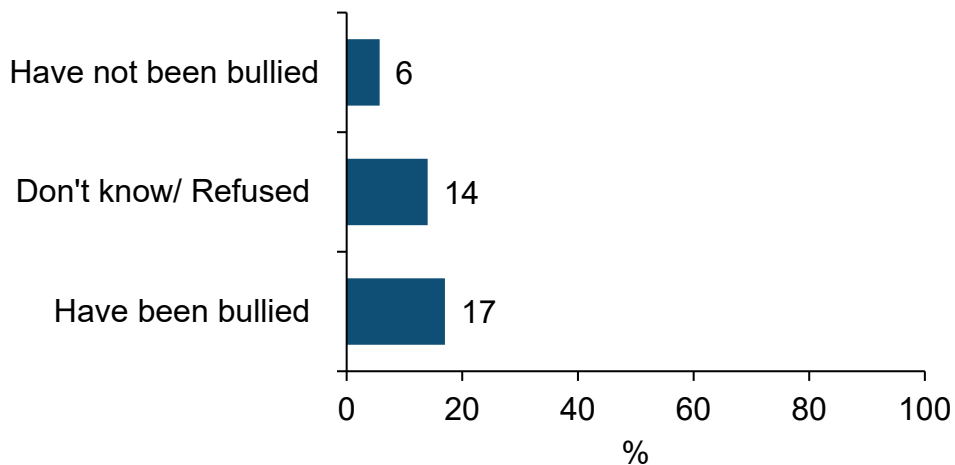
Bullying was also related to young people with SEN's wellbeing, with those who reported experiencing at least one of the forms of bullying above more likely to report lower level of happiness with life overall (Figure 9)

Figure 8. Prevalence of types of bullying



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category:
 Name-calling = 2,909; Violence threats = 2,906; Violence victim = 2,905; Exclusion= 2,907; Having money/
 possessions taken = 2,906.

Figure 9. Percentage of young people with lower wellbeing among those who reported and did not report being bullied



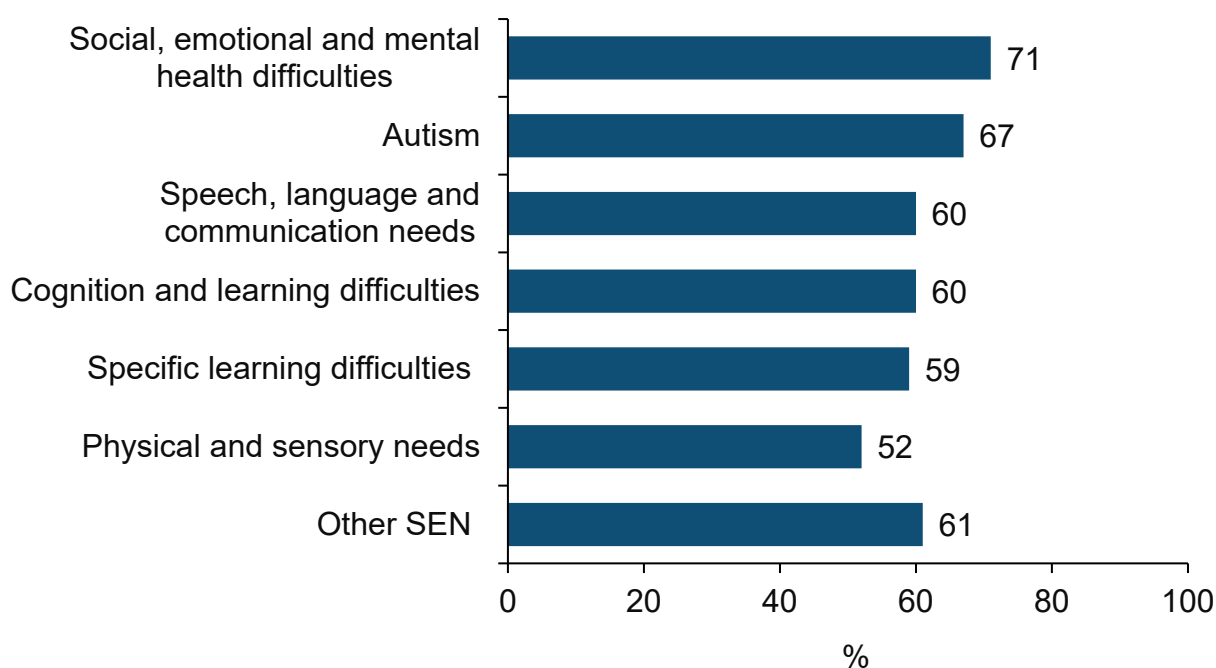
Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: have not been bullied (unweighted = 741), have been bullied (unweighted = 1,741), selected DK/REF (unweighted = 265).

Experiences of bullying by subgroup

To measure the overall prevalence of bullying a summary variable was created that measured the presence of any of the forms of bullying asked about in the survey.⁵ In the following, unless otherwise stated, 'bullying' refers to this measure. On this measure, having experienced bullying was fairly common, with nearly two thirds of young people with SEN (63%) reporting they had experienced at least one of these types of bullying in the last 12 months.

The analysis showed no differences in the prevalence of bullying by either EHC plan status or school type. However, as shown in Figure 10, young people who had Social, emotional and mental health difficulties and autistic young people were more likely to report having experienced at least one of these types of bullying behaviour (71% and 67% respectively). Among young people with other types of primary SEN, no more than 61% reported experiencing bullying in the last 12 months.

Figure 10. Percentage who experienced any bullying, by primary SEN type



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: SEMHD = 603; Autism = 410; SLCN = 311; CLD= 628; SLD= 494; PSN = 189; Other SEN = 201.

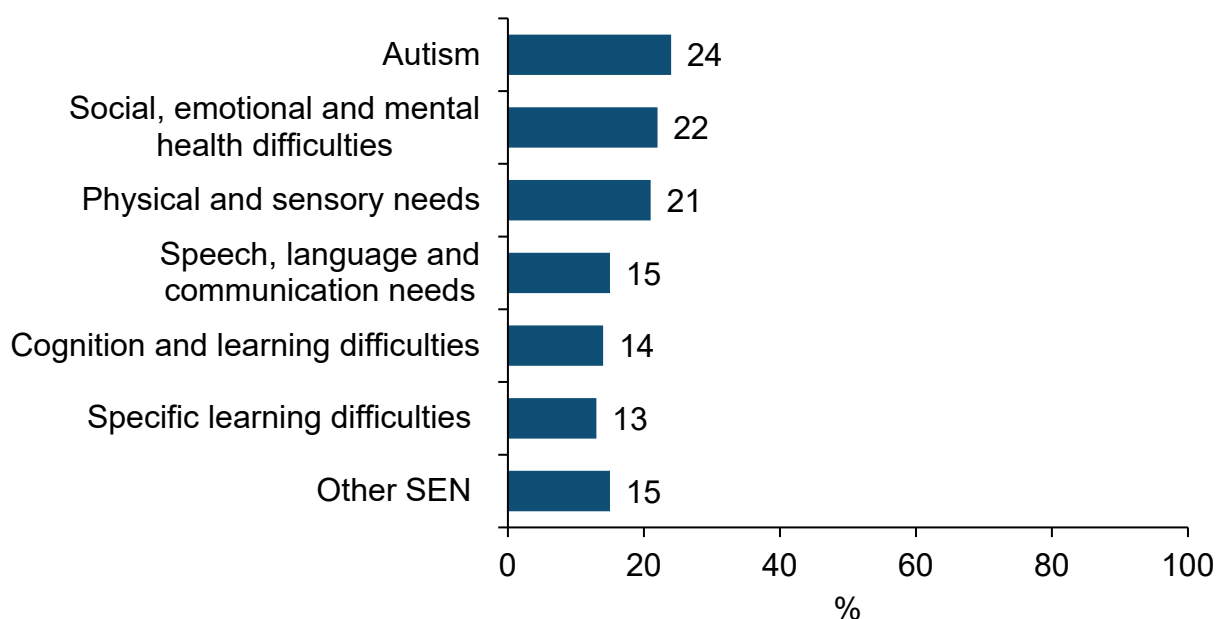
In addition, it was explored whether the prevalence of bullying differed by how much time young people spent with friends without supervision by an adult, however, there was not found to be statistically significant association between this and bullying.

⁵ This summary variable indicated that a young person was bullied when the young person said they experienced at least one form of bullying out of the five forms the survey asked about.

Bullying related to SEN

Among all young people with SEN just under one in five (18%) reported that they had been called names which were related to their SEN. As seen in Figure 11, those with autism, Social, emotional and mental health issues, and those with Physical and sensory needs were more likely than young people with other primary SEN types to say that the name-calling was related to their SEN.

Figure 11. Percentage who said that name-calling is related to their SEN, by primary SEN type (young person report)



Base: All young people with SEN, who reported name-calling, unweighted base for each category: Autism=358; SEMHD=533; PSN=171; SLCN=262; CLD = 560; SLD=439; Other SEN = 174.

Parental awareness of bullying

Parents were asked a comparable set of questions on bullying, allowing for the comparison of their responses to those of the young people themselves. The degree to which parents' responses correspond to those of their children can provide useful guidance on how to interpret data collected from parents about their children – particularly in situations where the parent is not present, such as at school, and areas that the young person may be less likely to discuss with their parents.

To compare the specific experience of bullying reported by each parent to bullying reported by their own child, a new variable was created. Based on whether either the child or the parent reported at least one of the types of bullying this new measure allocated people into three categories:

- the young person reported being bullied but their parent said they had not been,
- the young person said they had not been bullied, but their parent reported they had been,
- or the parent and their child's answers corresponded (both reported bullying, or both reported no bullying).⁶

Overall, this showed a high level of correspondence between the answers of parents and young people, indicating a high level of parental awareness of whether their child was experiencing bullying. When looking at any experience of the different types of bullying in the last 12 months the parent's responses matched the answers given by their child in the vast majority of cases (85%).⁷ The 15% of cases where the young person and parent answers did not match were fairly evenly divided between cases where the young person reported being bullied while their parent did not, and vice versa.

There was a very similar level of agreement between parents and their children on whether name-calling, where the child had experienced it, related to their SEN, with 85% of cases matching. On this measure, of the 15% of cases where there was discordance between parent and young person's answers, it was more common for the parent to report that the name-calling was related to the young person's SEN – in 10% of cases the parent reported that the name-calling was related to their child's SEN but the young person said it was not related to their SEN; in 5% of cases the young person reported that the name-calling was related to their SEN, but their parent said it was not.

⁶ When comparing paired parental and children's responses, respondents who gave answers of 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' are excluded from the analysis. These findings are also unweighted and so are not representative of the population of young people with SEN in the NPD.

⁷ It should also be noted that these differences may also be partly explained by the lower levels of 'don't know' and 'prefer not to answer' answers in the parent survey. This is likely as a result of how answer options were presented: in the questionnaires for young people 'don't know' and 'prefer not to answer' options were displayed on screen straight away, while these answer options were not shown to parents unless they tried to move to the next question without answering the question.

Current and future independence

Key findings

- Just under half (44%) of young people with SEN spent time with friends unsupervised by an adult most weeks at age 12-13. Just under one in four (23%) never spent any time with friends unsupervised.
- Some groups of young people were more likely than others to say that they 'never' spent time with friends without adult supervision: young people with an EHC plan, young people who attended a special school or Alternative Provision, and young people who had autism.
- Looking to the future, the vast majority of young people (94%) and their parents (85%) expected the young person to have a job. There was also a high degree of agreement between parents and young people, with 88% of children giving the same answer (where both answered the question).
- Just over half (54%) reported they would like to go to college or university after leaving school.
- A majority of parents (56%) were positive in their assessments of the support provided by their child's school to prepare them for adulthood. Nevertheless, a substantial minority (20%) reported that this support was not helpful.
- Parents of young people who had Social, emotional and mental health difficulties or autism as their primary SEN were less likely to have a favourable view of the support provided (48% and 52% respectively) than parents of young people with other types of needs. Conversely, parents of young people with Physical and sensory needs were the ones most likely to assess the school's support as helpful, with 69% finding the support helpful.

Introduction

Becoming ever more independent is a key part of growing up for most children and young people. While this experience differs for young people irrespective of whether they have SEN or not, young people with SEN may experience additional barriers to developing independence due to their additional needs or disabilities. This is reflected in the SEND Code of Practice, which highlights the importance of helping young people with SEND achieve independence as part of the process of preparing for adulthood (DfE, 2015, p.112). To understand where young people with SEN have reached in this process in Year 8, this chapter assesses levels of independence among young people through two key indicators. These aim to provide a proxy measure of the levels of independence young people currently have in their day-to-day lives, with an emphasis on being able to

engage in peer relationships face-to-face, and with a view to their future levels of independence, exemplified by their prospects of having a job. These two indicators do not provide a complete measure of 'independence' and there are other aspects of the lives of young people that are important to whether they may feel or be thought to be 'independent' – for example, independent living is a key aspect of living an independent adult life. Nevertheless, the measures explored here provide indications of how the lives of young people with SEN can be different in areas of life that would, to many young people, seem entirely commonplace and important parts of their lives and expectations.

The chapter explores three main areas:

- the young person's current level of independence at the age of 12-13, measured by the time they spent with friends without adult supervision (young person report)
- their expected level of independence in the future, indicated by how likely they and their parent thought they were to get a job (young person and parent report),
- and finally, how well supported young people with SEN were in preparing for adulthood, measured by how helpful parents found the support provided by their child's school in preparing them for adulthood.

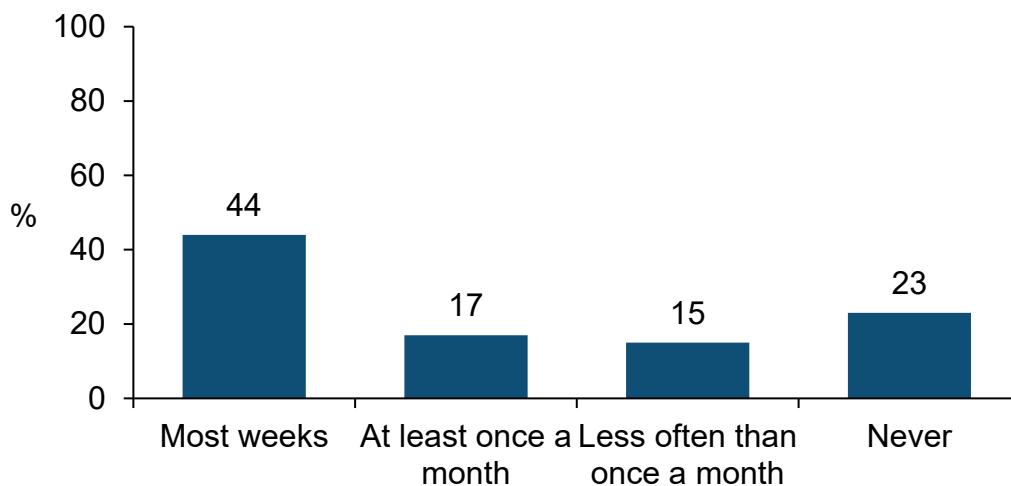
In addition to these, although not a direct indicator of independence, we report on preferred routes into adulthood after leaving school – whether the young person wanted to move directly into work, to continue in education, or to move into work-related training.

Time spent with friends

To indicate how independent young people with SEN were at the age of 12-13 we used a question about how often they 'spend time with friends, without adults being there'. While this question is also likely to vary according to parenting approaches, young people's preferences and geography, it gives a sense of how much the young people were acting independently in a social context with no direct adult support.

As shown in Figure 12, spending time with friends unsupervised was common among young people with SEN, with just under half saying they did so most weeks (44%). Even so, a substantial minority of almost one in four (23%) never spent any time with friends unsupervised. When asked a similar question about time spent unsupervised at the weekends, young people aged 11 in the general population reported a fairly similar amount of time spent with friends: 45% seeing them 'most weekends' and 26% reporting they 'never' see them unsupervised at weekends (Baker et al., 2014).

Figure 12. Time spent with friends unsupervised by an adult



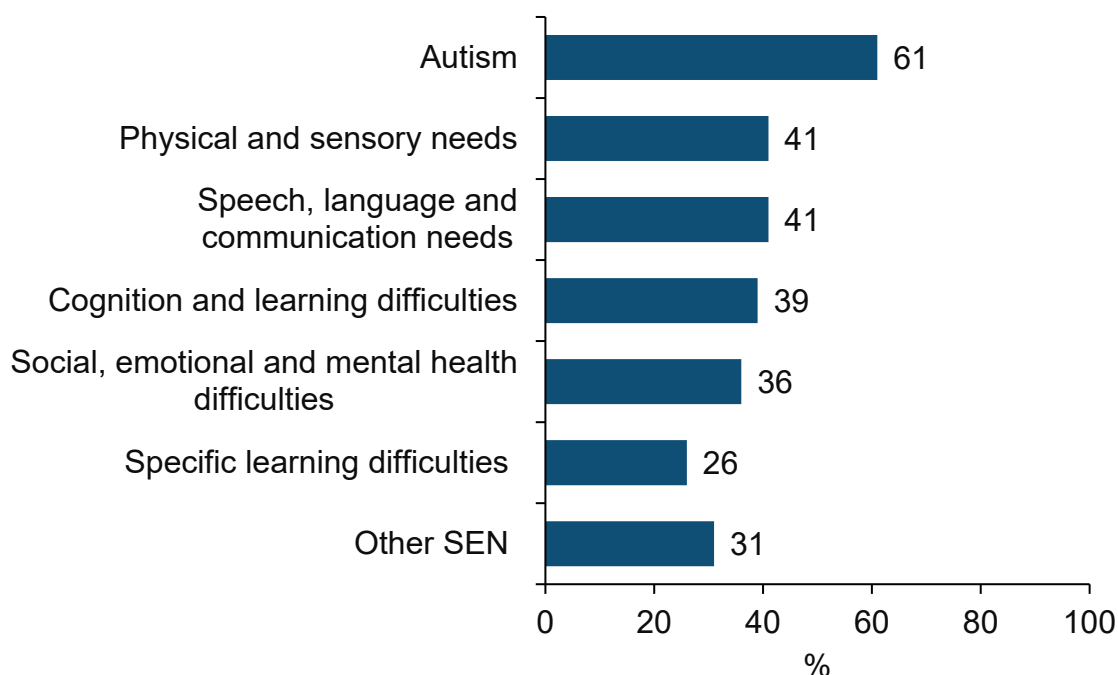
Base: All young people with SEN, only asked in the long version of the questionnaire (unweighted =1,605).

Differences in time spent with friends by subgroup

The amount of time young people with SEN spent socialising with friends unsupervised by an adult varied by EHC plan status, their primary SEN type and the educational setting they attended. Those with an EHC plan were much less likely to spend time with friends unsupervised. Among young people with an EHC plan 38% never spent unsupervised time with friends, compared with 16% of those who did not have an EHC plan.

Figure 13 shows the percentage of young people with SEN who rarely spent time with other young people without a supervising adult. The 'rarely' group includes those who either 'never' did this or did so 'less than once a month'. The figure shows that spending time with friends without adult supervision was less common among pupils with certain types of SEN. A substantially higher percentage (61%) of those with autism said that they did this infrequently, compared with at most 41% among the other primary SEN types. In contrast, young people with a specific learning difficulty were more likely to socialise in this way, with 26% reporting they rarely spent time alone with peers. Further research is needed to understand the reasons for these differences - in particular, whether young people with SEN who do not spend much time with friends unsupervised would like to do this more but are not able to, or if this simply reflects a preference not to spend much time socialising.

Figure 13. Percentage who rarely spent time with friends without adult supervision, by primary SEN type



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: Autism = 209; PSN = 97; SLCN = 173; CLD = 337; SEMH = 365; SLD = 259; Other SEN= 123.

Young people with SEN attending a mainstream school spent more time socialising with friends unsupervised than those attending a special school or alternative provision. For example, only 19% of young people in mainstream schools reported never spending time with friends unsupervised, compared with 50% of those attending a special school and 43% of those in Alternative Provision.

Future job prospects

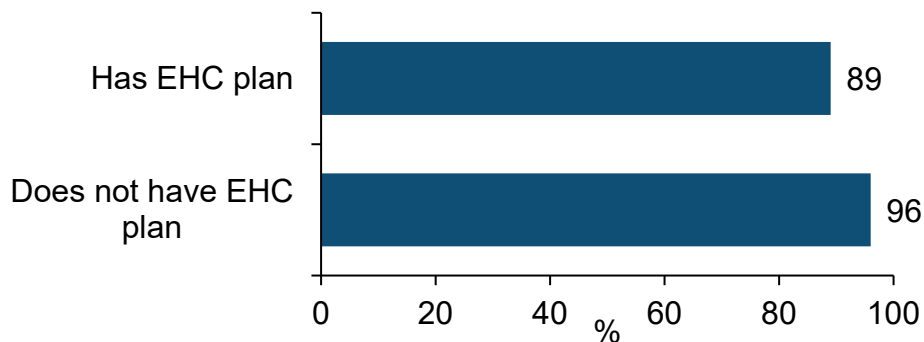
Young people with SEN have been found to have poorer labour market outcomes than their peers with similar levels of education (DfE, 2021). As such, it is important to understand the expectations of young people with SEN around work, and to what extent this varies for different subgroups. The key measure used here is whether they themselves expect or are expected by others to get a job as adults. This section first analyses the view of young people and then compares their and their parents' perspectives.

The survey included a question asked of the young people - 'do you think you will have a job in the future?'. The majority of young people (94%) expected to have a job in the future, indicating high expectations and aspirations among young people in this respect.

Differences in work expectations by subgroups

There were differences in the expectations of young people as to whether they were likely to have a job in the future depending on their EHC plan status, the type of school they attended, and their primary SEN. Young people who had an EHC plan were less likely than those who did not have an EHC plan to expect to get a job in the future. This is shown in Figure 14, where 96% of young people without an EHC plan expected to get a job compared with 89% of those with an EHC plan.

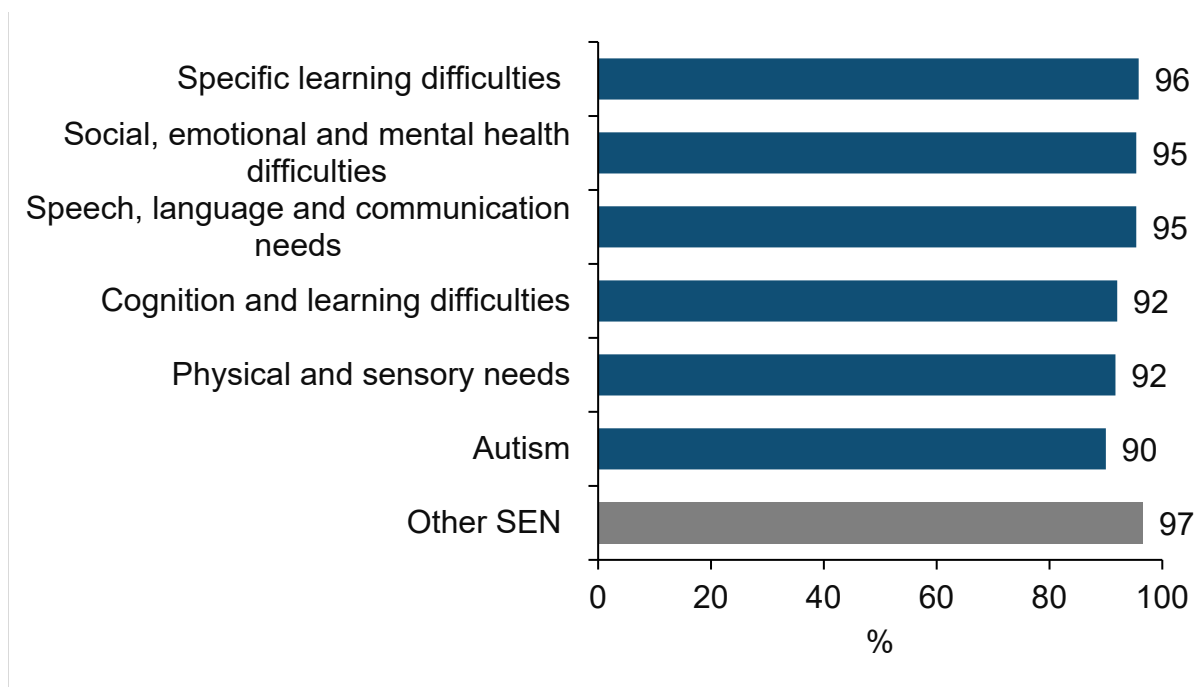
Figure 14. Percentage of young people who think they will have a job in the future, by EHC plan status



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: 811 young people with EHC plan; 1,996 young people without EHC plan.

The extent to which young people expected to have a job in the future also differed by their primary type of SEN. As shown in Figure 15, those with autism were most likely to say they did not expect to have a job in the future, followed by those with Physical or sensory needs and those with Cognition and learning difficulties.

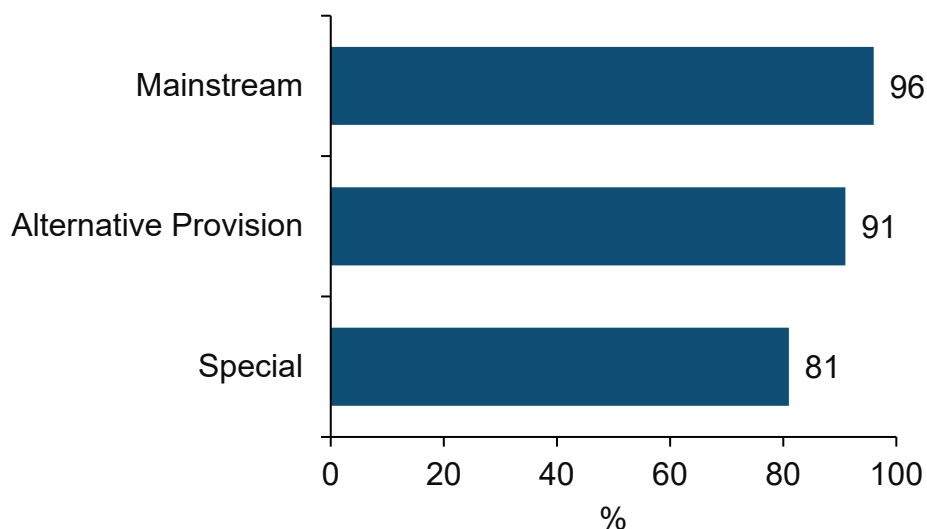
Figure 15. Percentage of young people who thought they would have a job in the future, by primary SEN type



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: Autism= 404; PSN = 185; CLD = 626; SEMHD= 598; SLCN = 302; SLD = 492; Other SEN = 196.

The analysis also showed variation in how young people assessed their future job prospects according to the education setting attended. As can be seen in Figure 16 young people with SEN who attended a mainstream school were more likely to think that they would get a job than young people who were in Alternative Provision or attended a special school. In particular – and in line with the findings in relation to young people who had an EHC plan (most of those who attend a special school hold an EHC plan) – expectations of having a job in the future were lower among those who attended special school. Of those who attended a special school 81% thought this was likely compared with 96% of those who attended a mainstream school.

Figure 16. Percentage of young people who thought it was likely they will have a job in the future, by school type

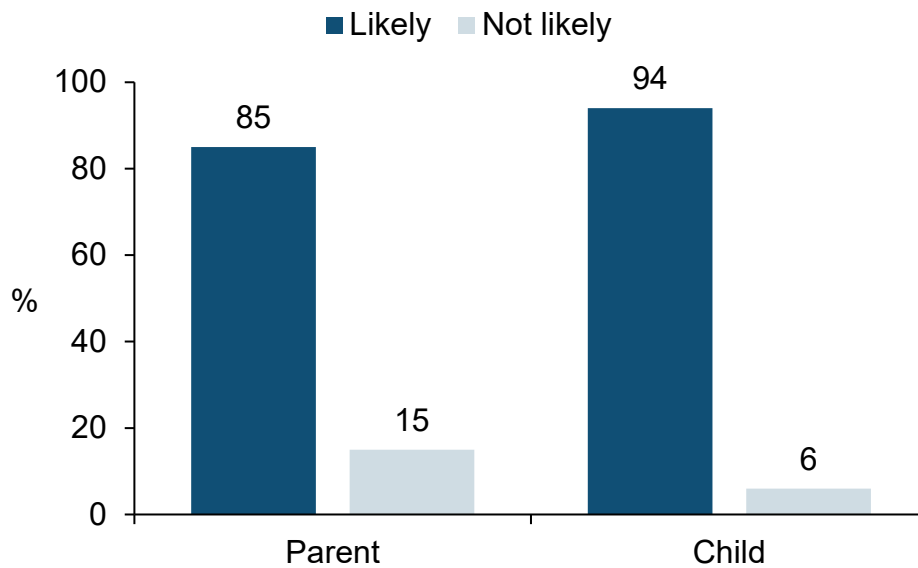


Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category:
Mainstream = 2,523, Alternative Provision = 54, Special = 271.

Parental view on their child's future employment

Parents were asked a comparable question on their child's job prospects, allowing for the comparison of their responses to those of the young people themselves. This section explores to what extent parents' view on their child's future employment matches that of the young person. Specifically, the survey included a question asked of the parents or carers: 'thinking about your child's needs, how likely do you think it is that they will have a paid job at some time in the future?'. The response options to the parent and young person questions differed in the survey. Parents could select from four answer options, ranging from 'very likely' to 'not at all likely', while young people could only answer 'yes' or 'no'. For comparison the parent responses are combined into two categories: 'likely' and 'unlikely'. Figure 17 shows that on these measures the vast majority of parents (85%) and children (94%) expected the child will have a job in the future.

Figure 17 Percentage who think it is likely young person will get a job in the future, among young people and their parents (unpaired comparison)



Base: All young people with SEN (unweighted =2,877) and all parents (unweighted =3,409).

To compare the views on job prospects reported by parents and young people, a new variable was created. This measure had three categories:

- the young person reported that they thought were likely to get a job but their parent said this is not likely,
- the young person said they thought they were unlikely to get a job, but their parent thought they were likely to get one,
- or the parent and young person's answers corresponded (both reported that finding a job in the future was likely, or both report that it was unlikely).

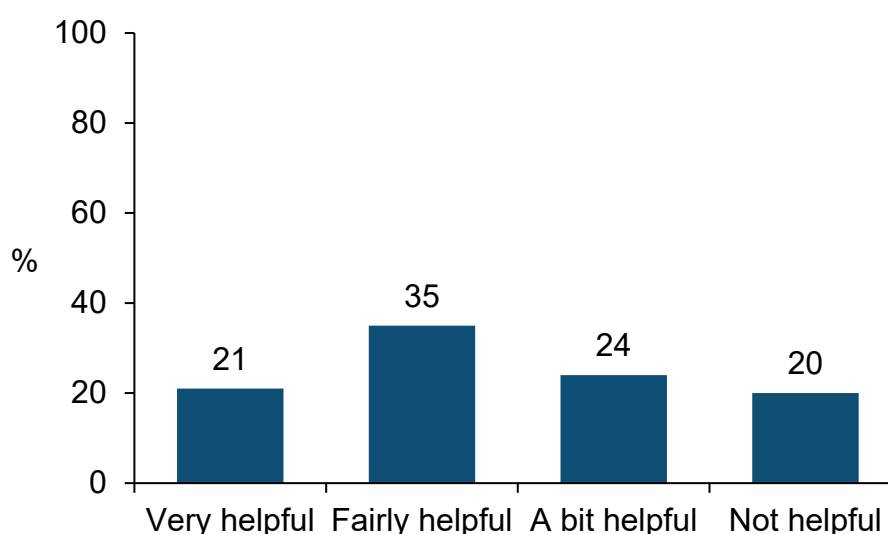
This variable showed a high level of correspondence between the answers of parents and young people. When comparing how likely parents and their children think it is that the child will have a job in the future the parent's response matched the answers given by their child in the vast majority of cases (88%). In a further 9% of cases only the young person reported that they were likely to get a job and in 3% of cases only the parent reported they were likely to get a job. Thus, young people were generally more optimistic in accessing their future employment than their parents.⁸

⁸ These findings are unweighted and so are not representative of the population of young people with SEN in the NPD.

Support from schools to prepare for adulthood

The effectiveness of the support from schools in preparing the young people for adulthood was measured by data collected from parents about how helpful the support from their child's school (or educational setting) was in helping them prepare for adult life. Most parents were positive in their assessments, with more than half (56%) saying that the support was 'fairly' or 'very' helpful. Nevertheless, there remained a substantial minority (20%) reporting it was 'not helpful' and a quarter reporting that it had been only 'a bit helpful' (Figure 18).

Figure 18. How helpful parents found school support for preparation for adulthood



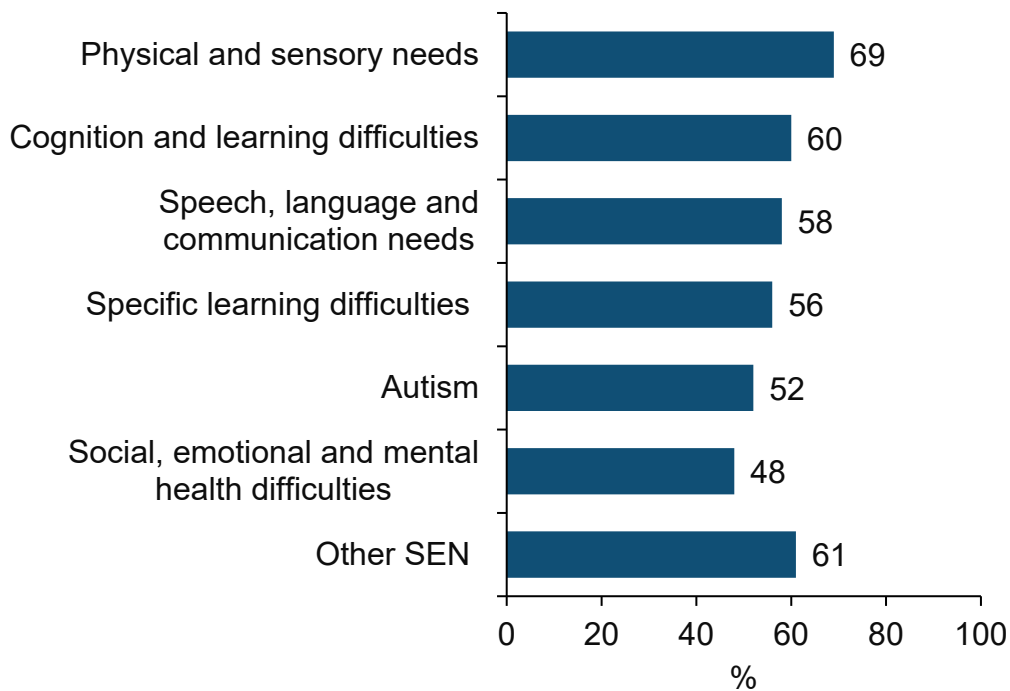
Base: All parents (unweighted = 3,315).

Quality of school support by subgroup

Parents' assessment of the quality of the support provided by their child's school to support their independence varied by all three characteristics explored – primary special educational need, school type and EHC plan status.

As Figure 19 shows, the parents of young people with Social, emotional and mental health difficulties as their primary SEN type were less likely than parents of young people with other types of primary SEN to say that the support was 'fairly' or 'very' helpful (48%), followed by parents or carers of young people with autism (52%). Conversely, parents of young people with Physical and sensory needs as their primary type of SEN were more likely to assess the school's support as helpful, with 69% finding the support helpful.

Figure 19. Percentage of parents who found the support of their child’s school to prepare their child for adult life ‘very’ or ‘fairly helpful’, by primary need



Base: All parents, unweighted base for each category: PSN = 210; CLD = 702; SLCN = 351; SLD = 568; Autism = 512; SEMHD = 693; Other SEN = 225.

Parents of young people with SEN who attended mainstream schools (54%) were less likely than parents whose children attended a special school (78%) or Alternative Provision (83%) to report that the school had been helpful in preparing their child for adulthood.

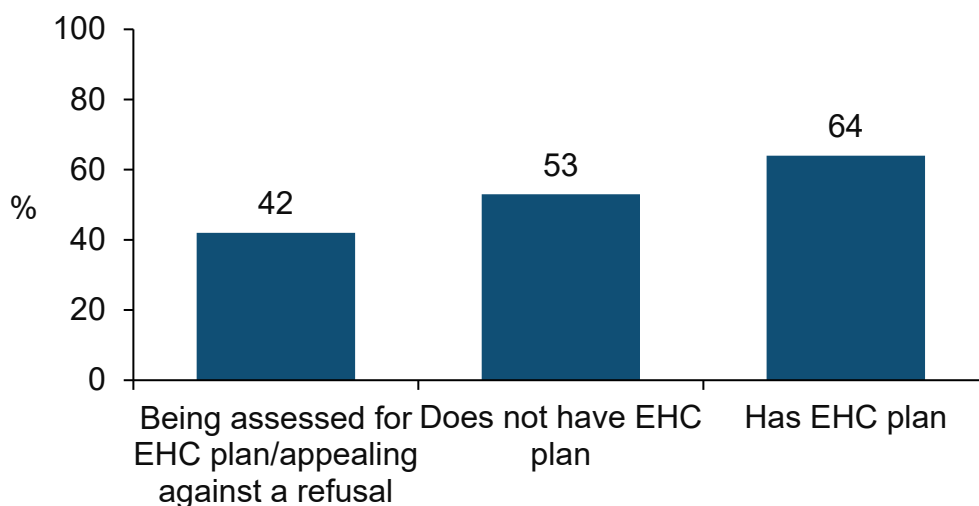
Young people with autism make up a substantial proportion of those attending special schools and Alternative Provision.⁹ As noted in the section on differences by type of primary SEN, parents of young people with autism were, along with those with Social, emotional and mental health difficulties, less positive about the support provided by their child’s school in relation to preparation for independence. This raises the question whether young people with autism who attended special schools and Alternative Provision received better support than in mainstream schools, or whether parents of young people with autism generally had less positive experiences of school support, regardless of what type of school their child attended. To explore this, additional analysis was undertaken to look at whether parental satisfaction with support provided by the school for each type of SEN broken varies by school type. It showed that among parents of young people with autism - and among parents whose child had Social, emotional and

⁹ See details in the Methodological Appendix, Figure 30.

mental health difficulties – parents whose child attended a special school or Alternative Provision were more positive about the support their children received than parents whose child attended a mainstream school: among parents whose child attended Alternative Provision or a special school, three quarters of parents of young people with autism reported the support was ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ helpful, compared with 42% of parents whose child had autism and attended a mainstream school. Likewise, in the Social, emotional and mental health difficulties group, 78% of parents whose child attended Alternative Provision or a special school felt the support was ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ helpful, compared with 43% of parents whose child attended a mainstream school.

To explore whether satisfaction levels with the current support provided by the young person’s school differed depending on the status of the EHC plan application process, the group of parents and carers whose child was waiting for an EHC plan application to be assessed or who were appealing a rejected application at the time of the data collection were analysed as a separate category. We know from existing research that the EHC application process can be a source of concern and frustration for parents, and thus may affect their views on the support provided by the school. This analysis also showed that parents of young people whose application was either pending or being appealed were less likely to find the school’s support helpful. In contrast, parents whose child already had an EHC plan were the group most likely to report the school’s support for preparing their child for adulthood to be helpful (Figure 20).

Figure 20. Percentage of parents who found the school’s support in preparing their child for adult life ‘fairly’ or ‘very helpful’, by EHC plan status



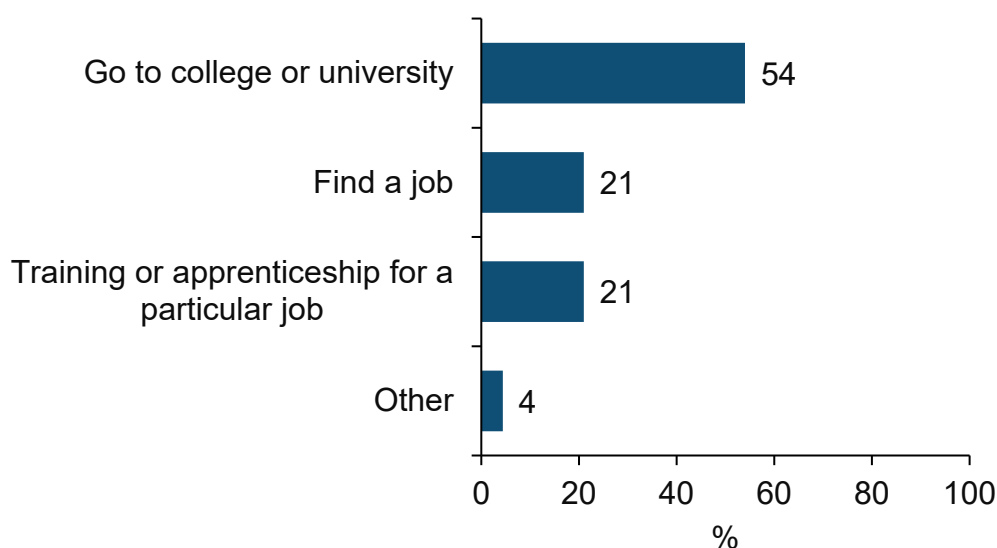
Base: All parents, unweighted base for each category: Being Assessed/ Appealing = 188; No EHC plan= 1,937; Has EHC plan = 1,190.

Plans for life after school

It is relatively common for studies with young people of this age to ask them about aspirations for the future. For example, another DfE study, the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England 2, asked cohort members at the age of 13-14 (in 2013) questions about their post-16 plans. They found that as many as 88% planned to stay in full time education after leaving compulsory education (Baker, et al, 2014, p.97). When asked what they would like to do in more detail, 67% said they planned to continue in an academic route (either in a school sixth form, or sixth form college), while vocational routes were less popular – with 25% aspiring to it (McIntosh, 2019. p 13).

This final section explores the anticipated routes into adulthood among young people with SEN, providing up-to-date figures on aspirations among this group of young people. It also looks at how these aspirations vary across the three subgroups. In the SEND Futures survey, aspirations for life after school were measured by a question asked of young people about what they 'think they would like to do next' after leaving school: either 'go to college or university', 'find a job', 'do some training or an apprenticeship for a particular job', or 'something else'. As shown in Figure 21 over half (54%) reported they would like to go to college or university, just over one-fifth (21%) would like to start training for a job (e.g. in an apprenticeship or similar), and a similar proportion (21%) would like to find a job. A small minority (4%) would like to do something else. Among those who reported wanting to do something else, most were thinking either of some form of self-employment or were simply unsure what they would do.

Figure 21. What young people aged 12-13 with SEN would like to do after finishing school



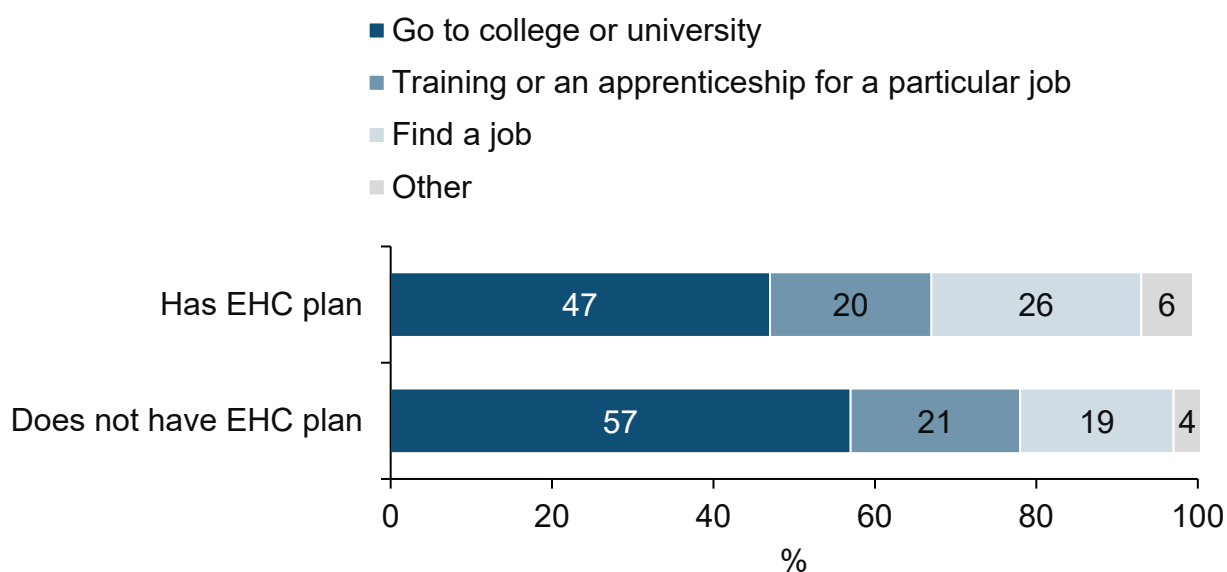
Base: All young people with SEN (unweighted =2,781).

Post-school plans by subgroup

There was some variation in thoughts about future plans according to whether young people had an EHC plan, their primary SEN type, and the type of school they attended.

Young people with an EHC plan were less likely than those without an EHC plan to say they wanted to continue their education – 47% compared with 57%. Conversely, they were more likely to want to find a job straight after they finished school, reported by 26% compared with 19% of young people who did not have an EHC plan – see Figure 22.

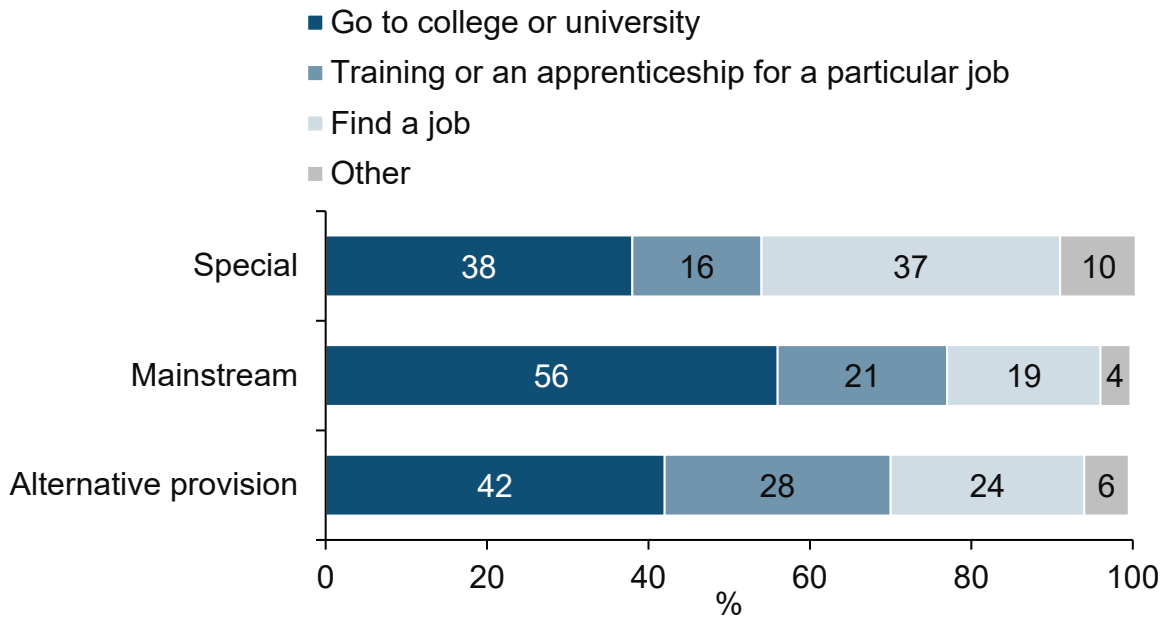
Figure 22. What young people would like to do after school, by EHC plan status



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: Has EHC plan = 813; No EHC plan = 1,950.

Future plans also varied by the type of school a young person attended. Young people with SEN who attended mainstream schools were more likely than those in special schools and Alternative Provision to want to continue in education, reported by 56% compared with 42% of those in Alternative Provision and 38% in special schools. Meanwhile, those in Alternative Provision were more likely than those in other types of settings to report wanting to do training related to a specific job (28%), while young people in special schools were more likely than young people in other types of settings to say they wanted to go directly into work (37%) – see Figure 23.

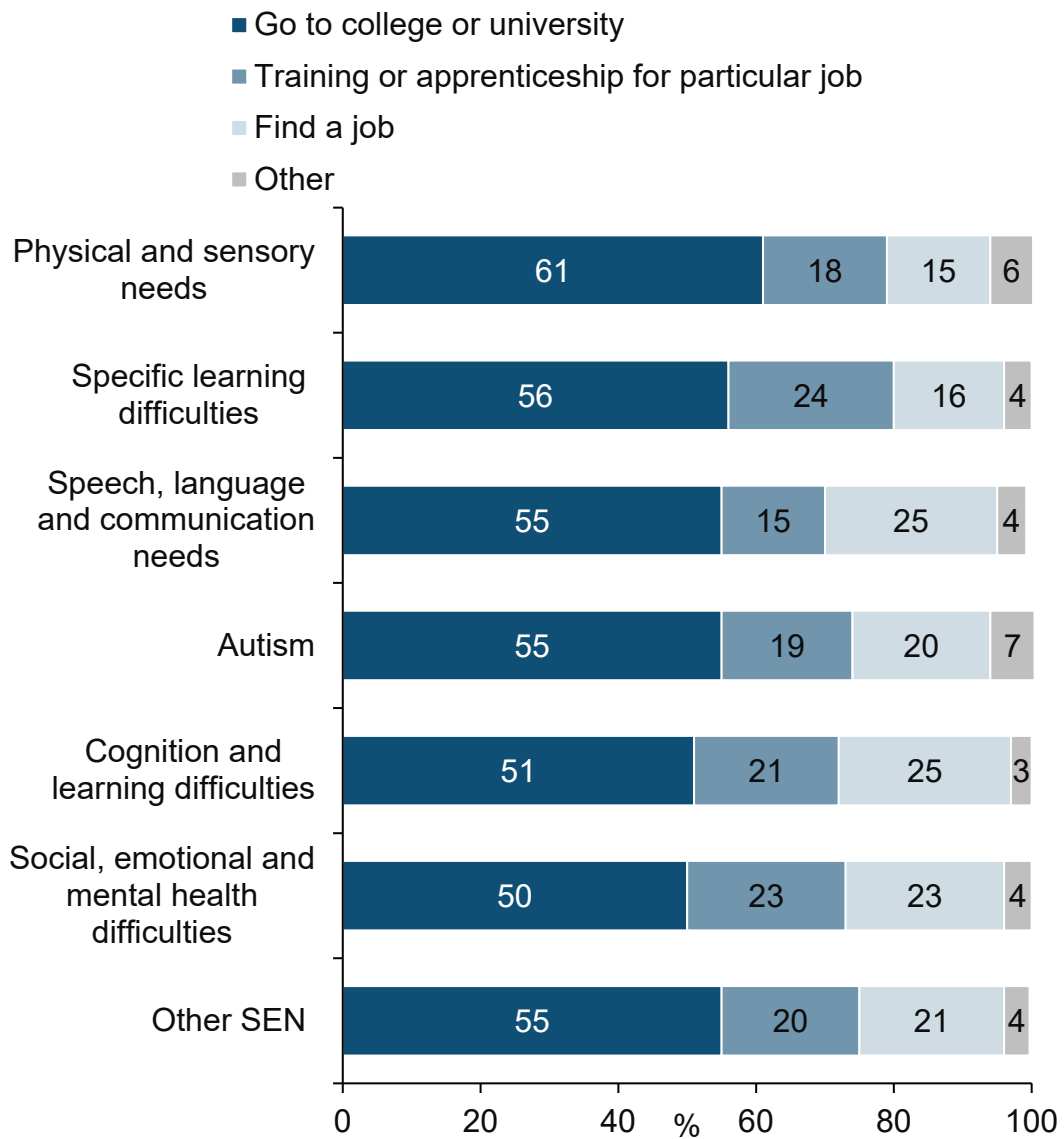
Figure 23. What young people would like to do after school, by school type



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: Special = 245; Mainstream = 2,454; Alternative Provision = 53.

The analysis also showed differences in young people’s preferred destination after leaving school by their primary SEN type. As shown in Figure 24, those with Physical and sensory needs as their primary SEN were the group most likely to want to continue to college or university (reported by 61%). Young people in this group, along with those with a specific learning difficulty, were also the least likely to want to go directly into work, reported by 15% and 16% respectively. Continuing education was the most popular choice irrespective of primary SEN, chosen by at least half of young people in each group.

Figure 24. What young people would like to do after school, by primary SEN type



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category: PSN =178; SLD = 476; SLCN= 301; Autism = 372; CLD = 605; SEMHD = 581; Other SEN = 198.

Summary and conclusions

This report has described how young people with SEN aged 12-13 were getting on in the summer of 2022. It has touched on key areas such as their wellbeing, how they were getting on with their peers, and the extent to which they were, and were expecting and expected to be able to, lead independent lives. In this final chapter we summarise the findings and reflect on some of the new questions raised.

In terms of wellbeing most young people with SEN reported reasonable levels of contentment across different areas of their lives. Even so, there was a substantial minority who reported lower levels of happiness, with 15% of young people feeling quite unhappy with their life overall. Of the different areas of their lives asked about – school, family, their friends and how they look – young people with SEN were most happy with their family, and least happy with their school or educational setting and how they look. Looking at wellbeing in relation to the young person's primary SEN, those with autism and those with Social, emotional and mental health difficulties were more likely to report low wellbeing.

There was a similar picture in young people's relationships with peers. The majority, around three quarters, were reported by their parents to have good relationships with their peers. Nevertheless, a quarter were reported by their parents to get on 'not very well' or 'not well at all' with other young people. Turning to bullying, nearly two thirds of young people with SEN said they had experienced at least one of the types of bullying we asked about in the last 12 months. Again, those with autism and those with Social, emotional and mental health problems as their primary SEN were more likely to report negative experiences in terms of their relationships with others – that is, they were the groups most likely to report having been bullied and to get on poorly with their peers.

Young people who had been bullied were more likely to report lower levels of happiness with their life as a whole, suggesting that bullying may be a driver of low wellbeing. However, to ascertain any causal relationships of this nature is beyond the scope of the analysis carried out here.

There was a strong correlation between young people's and their parents' reporting of the young person being bullied, with young people's and parent's answers matching in 85% of cases where both answered the question. This suggests that most parents have a good understanding of their child's life at age 12-13 in this respect.

Looking at current levels of independence in a social context, at age 12-13 the majority of young people with SEN reported spending some time with their friends without an adult present. Nevertheless, there was a substantial minority of almost a quarter of young people with SEN who, at age 12-13, never spent time with their friends without an adult present. While the analysis did not explore reasons for this lack of non-supervised

contact with peers, it suggests that a substantial group of young people with SEN did not at this stage experience this element of an independent adolescent 'lifestyle'. Further research would be needed to understand more about the drivers and implications of this – for example, whether this has implications for young people's outcomes, and the extent to which this is driven by their SEN.

The vast majority of young people (94%) expected to have a job in the future. On this measure – as for bullying – we found a high level of correlation between parent and young people reports, although parents were a little less optimistic than young people in this respect (85% of parents reported they expected their child to have a job in the future).

Parents' views on the support provided by their child's school or educational setting to prepare them for adulthood were mixed, with a fairly even split between positive and negative views. The analysis suggested that satisfaction with the support provided was higher where the young person had an EHC plan and among young people attending a special school or Alternative Provision. The analysis also showed some differences in the quality of support provided to young people with different types of primary SEN – parents whose child had Social, emotional or mental health difficulties or autism as their primary SEN held more negative views of the support provided by the school to prepare their child for adulthood than those whose child had different types of needs. Looked at in combination, these findings suggest that mainstream school support to prepare young people for the future may be less effective for young people with autism and Social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Again, the analysis does not look at the reasons for this but raises questions about how the support delivered by mainstream schools could be improved to ensure it meets the needs of these young people in particular.

Turning to the post-school plans of young people with SEN at age 12-13, the vast majority would like to go into some form of further education, training or paid work. Young people with higher levels of support needs (as indicated by their having an EHC plan and/or not attending a mainstream school) were less likely to want to continue in education and more likely to say they wanted to go directly into work. Young people with Social, emotional and mental health difficulties as their primary SEN and those with Cognition and learning difficulties were less likely to say they wanted to continue in education than young people with other types of primary SEN.

Looking across the areas explored in this report – wellbeing, relationships with peers, bullying and independence – a consistent finding was that young people with autism and Social, emotional and mental health problems as their primary type of SEN were at greater risk of negative outcomes. This raises questions about to what extent more support may be required to support these young people. Young people with autism were substantially more likely to have an EHC plan than young people with other types of SEN, suggesting that these young people had higher levels of need, but also that their

higher level of need was already recognised. In contrast, among young people whose primary SEN was Social, emotional and mental health problems the proportion who had an EHC plan (and thus formal recognition of high levels of needs) was similar to the proportion seen for most other types of SEN. Whilst the analysis carried out here does not explicitly address the reasons for this, the findings may suggest that young people with Social, emotional and mental health problems as their primary SEN have some unmet needs - potentially related to lower levels of formal recognition of their needs. Further analysis would be required to explore this.

Future research

As demonstrated by this report, the SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase provides a valuable new data source for the understanding of young people with SEN. The data from the study enables representative estimates to be made for all young people with SEN in English state education at age 12-13 (and at later ages at subsequent waves). It also has a sufficiently large sample to enable a more detailed subgroup analysis than is often possible with general population surveys, where young people with SEN are generally a small proportion of the total sample.

The findings of this report demonstrate the potential value of a large-scale survey with young people with SEN and their parents, allowing a detailed exploration of these young people's lives in a way that would not be possible through drawing on existing studies of a general population of young people, or on small-scale studies of particular sub-populations within the wider SEN population.

Importantly, this report has by no means exhausted the data collected in the survey, which covered a wide range of topics with relevance for young people with SEN and their families. This includes further details on the topics explored in this report such as detailed questions about specific difficulties the young person may have in their day-to-day lives (related to independence), and other measures of wellbeing (such as self-esteem). It also covers a range of unrelated areas, including the extent to which young people's needs are being met, their transition to secondary school, parents' views on special and mainstream education, and a range of data on how the young person is getting on at school.

In addition, further details will be added at a future wave of the study, making it possible to track the lives of the same young people over time – and thus opening up possibilities for greater understanding of how their experiences change and why they develop in the way they do. In the following we set out some potential areas of future research which could be explored to shed light on some of the findings presented here.

One potential area for additional research could be to place the data and findings from the SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase in the context of previous research with young people with SEN. This would be beneficial for understanding to what extent estimates from this study are consistent with those seen elsewhere. In addition, where data availability allows, comparisons with young people who do not have SEN may also be of interest.

Moving beyond these points, this report has used bivariate analysis to explore what life is like for young people with SEN at the age of 12-13, and how their experiences differ across a number of characteristics - primary type of SEN, whether the young person had an EHC plan and what type of educational setting they attend. However, these characteristics are closely related to each other, often in complex ways, as demonstrated in the analysis looking at the relationship between primary SEN type, school type and parental levels of satisfaction with school support. This interrelationship between different factors means that the relationships between the characteristics and outcomes we are looking at in the report cannot be fully understood through analysis looking at only one of these characteristics at a time. For example, having an EHC plan is to some extent an indicator of the higher levels of support need, and therefore may be expected to be associated with poorer outcomes. Simultaneously, however, this is an indication that the young person's level of need has already been formally recognised and relevant support put in place, and therefore we may expect them to have better outcomes – all depending on the outcomes being looked at, of course. Adding to this, the analysis carried out here suggests that there are differences in young people's experiences depending on the type of need they have – something which is, again, closely related to their level of need and, possibly, the likelihood of those needs being formally recognised. Understanding more about the links between these characteristics, and, in particular, how they relate to the young person's level of need, would be helpful for identifying which young people are in particular need of recognition and additional support – and how best to provide this.

Another potential avenue for future research would be to explore potential causal links between different characteristics of young people with SEN and key outcomes such as wellbeing or educational outcomes. This could be looked at by making use of the longitudinal nature of the study, once multiple waves of data have been collected. The analysis presented in this report is cross-sectional, meaning that it can identify associations between different variables, but it cannot identify causal relationships between them. Identifying causal links would be of particular value for any future policy interventions, as this would help identify the factors in young people's lives which drive negative or positive outcomes, and/or which work to mitigate against negative outcomes for those at higher risk of poor outcomes, for example, whether support received early during secondary school has a more important role than support received later on. Understanding these drivers within the population of young people with SEN would be key to enabling appropriate targeting of resource and initiatives.

Finally, by over sampling groups of young people who are often less well represented in surveys of this nature, and by employing innovative methods to recruit and retain these sample members, SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase offers the opportunity to explore the lives of several understudied groups, such as young people with SEN who receive free school meals. These groups may face distinctive challenges compared with the general population of young people their age receiving free school meals and to other young people with SEN who do not receive free school meals, and they may require different forms of support to address those challenges. Additional research into these groups would help understand these potential differences in needs and whether existing policy approaches are working for a range of subgroups, as well as informing what types of support might work best for these groups.

Methodology appendix

This appendix provides additional detail on the methodology of the SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase and the data used for this analysis. It also provides more detail on the three variables used for subgroup analysis throughout the report, describes how the analysis presented in the report was conducted, and additional detail on how to interpret the findings.

The SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase

The findings in this report are based on Wave 1 of the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase. The discovery phase focused on a specific school year – Year 8 (ages 12 and 13) in the 2021/2022 academic year, using a sample of young people recorded as having special educational needs in the National Pupil Database which contains returns from all state-funded schools and Alternative Provision settings in England (DfE, 2023a). The study gathered a wide range of data about the education and life experiences of young people with SEN. The survey collected data from both young people and their carers and parents, allowing it to give a more comprehensive assessment of the lives of young people with SEN. This is important because at age 12 -13 there may be areas of their lives which young people cannot give accurate or informative answers about and because it provides an alternative perspective on the same topics, which may show different levels of awareness among parents on certain areas of their children's lives. It is clearly indicated throughout the report where answers are from young people or parents. In some instances where similar or identical questions were asked of young people and parents answers are compared.

A key aim of the SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase was to collect information on how to improve survey response and retention among young people with SEN and their families. To do so, the study incorporated and compared different ways of conducting fieldwork and improving response rates. The study has a complex design, consisting of two 'strands':¹⁰ Strand 1, where fieldwork took place face-to-face, conducted by a trained survey interviewer visiting participants' homes; and Strand 2 which was an online survey. Those selected for Strand 1 were a subset of the SEN population believed to be less well represented in survey research, and face-to-face fieldwork was chosen to encourage higher levels of response. Four groups were selected for Strand 1: young people with 'looked after' status, young people classified as 'in need' (i.e. in contact with social work), young people from minority ethnic groups (excluding white minorities), and young people eligible for Free School Meals. Strand 2 was a random sample of all young people with SEN in the relevant year group who were invited

¹⁰ A more detailed discussion of the methods can be found in the [SEND Futures Discovery Phase Methodological Report](#).

to take part in an online survey. In line with best practice and to improve comparability between these two survey modes, the face-to-face interviews with young people in Strand 1 included both an interviewer-led section and a self-completion section for more sensitive topics (there was no self-completion section for parents in Strand 1). The strands were brought together for this analysis and a single weight for each type of data (i.e. data collected from parents and data collected from young people) was developed to provide estimates of the Year 8 SEN population as a whole (further details on the weights are provided in the section on weighting).

The SEND Futures Longitudinal study: Discovery Phase also aimed to explore whether the length of the questionnaire impacted response rates. To do so, one half of the Strand 2 sample were invited to participate in a 30-minute survey, while the other half of the sample were invited to participate in a shorter 20-minute survey. The longer version of the questionnaire contained largely the same content as the questionnaire used in Strand 1, while some questions were removed from the shorter version. To ensure sufficient sample sizes, in this report we predominantly analyse data collected in both the longer and shorter versions of the questionnaire.

The study also involved additional experiments on how to improve recruitment and retention of young people with SEN. These did not directly affect the findings outlined in this report so are not described in more detail here, but full information can be found in the [SEND Futures discovery phase wave 1 methodological report](#).

Details of key subgroups

This section describes how each of the three variables used in the subgroup analysis were measured and presents some descriptives to show how common each of these different groups are among young people with SEN in the study's achieved sample.

Primary special educational need

Generally, SEN is a term used to describe learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for a child or young person to learn compared with children or young people of the same age. All young people who are part of the SEND Futures longitudinal study were recorded as having SEN (either as receiving SEN support or with an EHC plan) on the National Pupil Database (NPD) at the time the sample was drawn. The NPD also provides a classification of each pupil's primary special educational need. This is the classification drawn on in this report.

It should be noted that some pupils had multiple special educational needs, but the measure used throughout the report focusses on the 'primary' need recorded in the NPD.

Parents' answers to the survey indicate that most young people (63%) had more than one identified type of special educational need.

To ensure sample sizes are sufficient to conduct a robust analysis some less common SEN types were combined into larger sub-groups, in line with the understanding of broad areas of need as outlined in the Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice (DfE, 2015). Please note that this was to enable analysis and we acknowledge this will inevitably result in less sensitivity to the experiences of people with specific types of needs. The resulting six primary SEN types used in the analysis are described below. Reporting by this variable excludes the fairly small (n = 56) people with no information available about their SEN.

Cognition and learning

This group includes three NPD categories: 'Moderate learning difficulty', 'Severe learning difficulty', and 'Profound and multiple learning difficulties'. Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs. Young people with 'Severe learning difficulties' are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and associated difficulties with mobility and communication, while those with 'Profound and multiple' learning difficulties are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment.

Physical and sensory needs

This group is composed of four NPD categories, it includes those with physical disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments and multi-sensory impairments. These young people may require special educational provision because this disability or impairment makes it difficult for them to make use of educational facilities without additional help or support.

Social, emotional and mental health difficulties

These young people experience a range of social and emotional problems and may have underlying mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm or substance misuse. Others may have a diagnosis of a disorder such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder.

Speech, language and communication needs

These young people have difficulties in communication and interaction with others. It may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding others, or comprehending social rules.

Autism

This includes young people on the autistic spectrum including Asperger's Syndrome. These young people are likely to have difficulties with social interaction, language, communication and imagination, and this may impact their relationships with others.

Specific Learning Difficulties

These are learning difficulties that affect one or more specific areas of learning, and includes difficulties such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia.

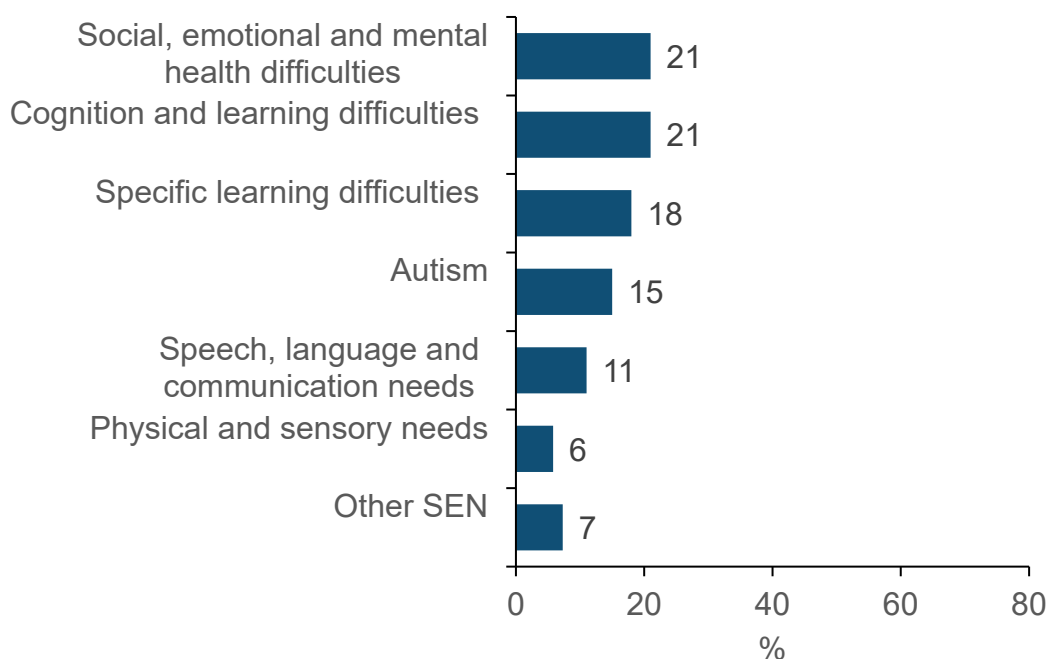
Other SEN

The 'other SEN' group includes all other difficulties or disorders not classified in the beginning of the section called Details of key subgroups.

Prevalence of primary SEN types

The prevalence of these six primary SEN types varied considerably among SEND Futures Longitudinal study respondents. Least common were Physical and sensory needs, the primary need of only 6% of young people with SEN, through to Social, emotional and mental health related and Cognition and learning primary needs, the primary SEN type of 21% of young people with SEN in the sample.

Figure 25. Prevalence of different SEN types among young people with SEN (parent sample)



Base: All cases where information about SEN was available in NPD – parent sample (unweighted=3,470).

School type

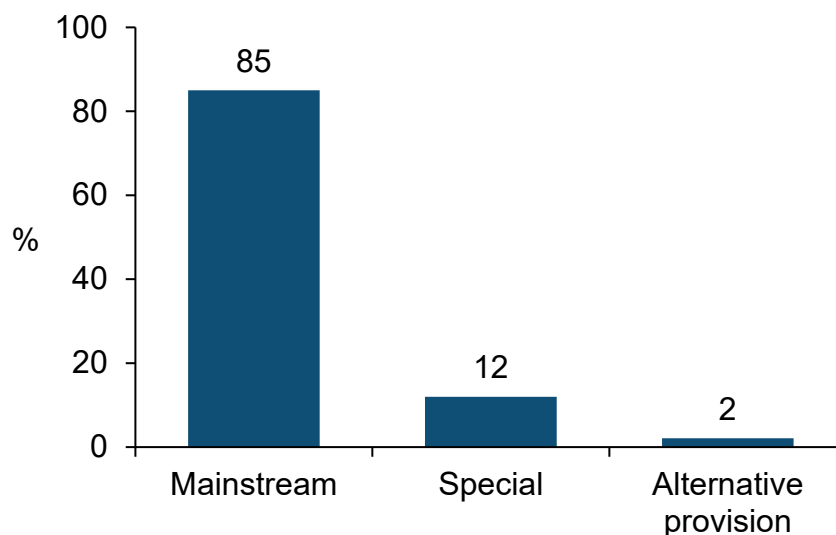
Most of the young people in this analysis attended mainstream schools. It is expected that the needs of many young people with SEND can be met in a mainstream school setting if appropriate arrangements are made. However, special schools that exclusively cater for the specific needs of young people with SEND may be better suited for young people who need or would benefit from more substantial support.

There are also Alternative Provision (AP) settings which provide education for young people who do not attend a mainstream school or special school full time. This often takes place at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), an AP academy or an AP free school, although placements can be arranged in mainstream or independent schools that provide AP. It can also take place in an educational setting that is not registered with DfE.

For analysis by school type the young people are grouped by whether they attended a mainstream school (85%), special school (12%), or were attending Alternative Provision (2%). Figure 26 shows the prevalence of each of these groups. It should be noted that the sample size for the Alternative Provision group is small (n=55 in the young person sample). This means that in some cases it is not possible to provide findings for those attending Alternative Provision, for example, where a question is asked of only a sub-sample of young people with SEN. In these cases, the responses of these young people

are excluded from the analysis. For the analysis by school type we exclude students who were home schooled or not in school, because there were too few students to analyse this as a separate category.

Figure 26. Types of educational setting among young people with SEN (parent sample)



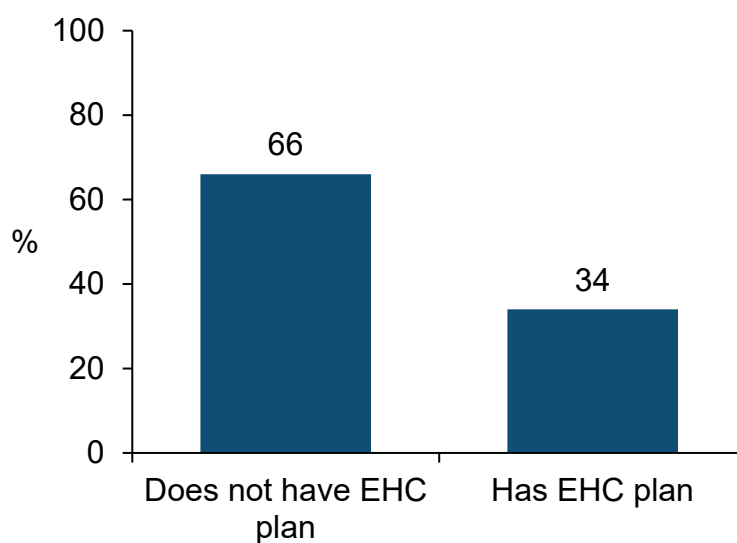
Base: All cases where information about school type was available – parent sample (unweighted = 3,526).

Education, Health and Care plan (EHC plan)

The type of support that young people with SEND receive can vary significantly, depending on their needs. Schools provide support to most young people with SEND through staffing and approaches based on funding relating to SEN Support. However, some young people will need more substantial support. Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans) are based on an assessment of young people’s needs and specify additional support to address those needs (DFE 2015). In this report we compare the experiences of young people with SEN who did and did not have an EHC plan.

The categories used are based mainly on NPD data. However, in some cases the survey responses conflict with the NPD information. In cases when the survey answers by parents and carers shows that a young person had an EHC plan, but the NPD does not, we expect the survey data to be more accurate, on the assumption that the young person has received an EHC plan since the sample was drawn, and these young people were coded as having an EHC plan for the analysis. Using this measure of EHC plan status, around a third (34%) of Year 8 young people with SEN in the sample had an EHC plan (Figure 27). This compares with 4% of those with an EHC plan among all school students in all age groups (DFE 2023a).

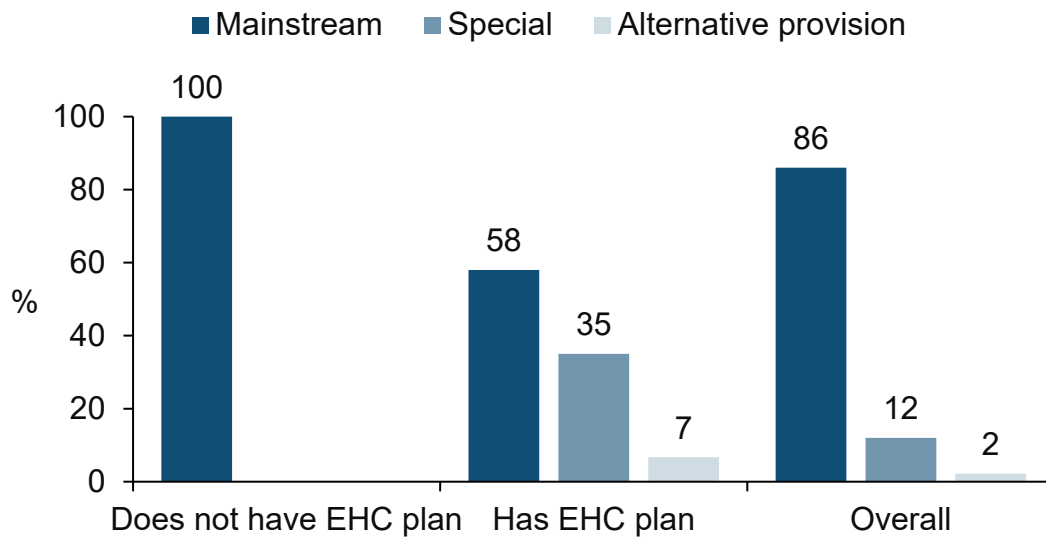
Figure 27. EHC plan status among young people with SEN (parent sample)



Base: All cases where information about EHC plan status was available (NPD and parental report combined) (unweighted=3,526).

Figure 28 shows the proportion of young people who attended each school type broken down by whether or not they had an EHC plan. As can be seen in the chart, all young people who did not have an EHC plan attend Mainstream schools (as would be expected). Among those who did have an EHC plan, 58% attended a mainstream school, 35% attended special schools and 7% attended Alternative Provision.

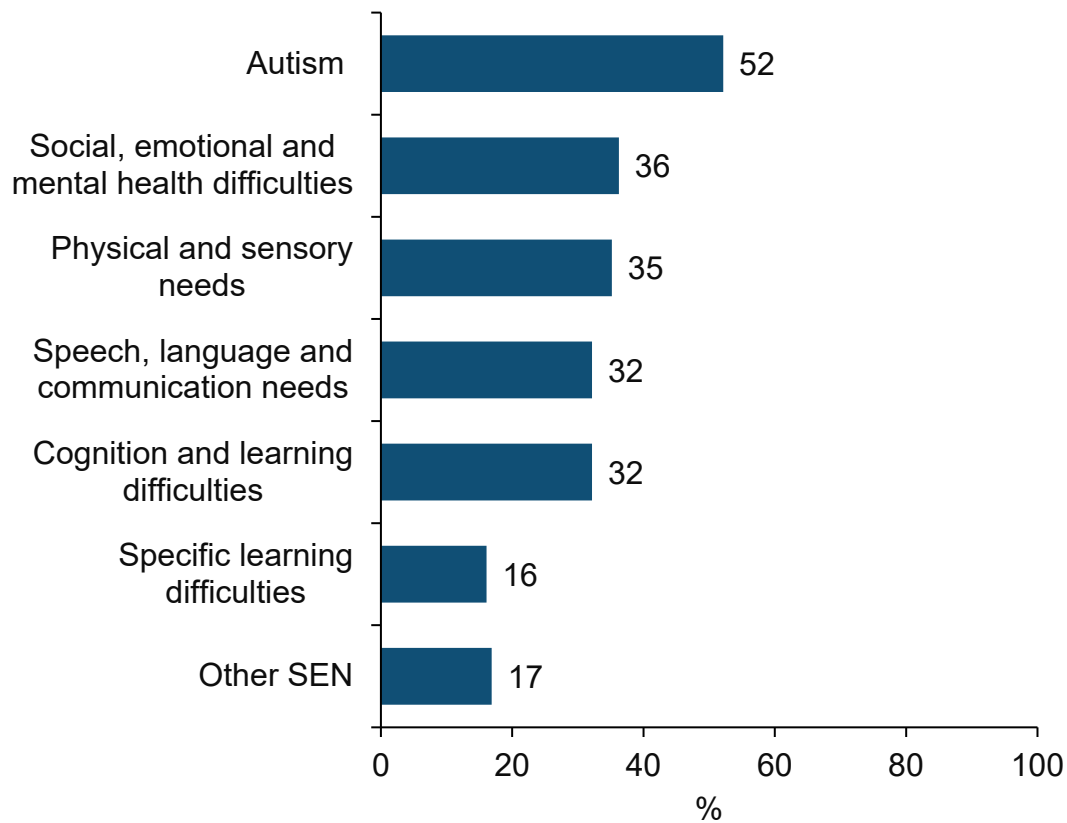
Figure 28. Prevalence of attendance at different school types among young people with SEN, by EHC plan status



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category:
 No EHC plan = 2,034; Has EHC plan = 926; Overall = 2,960.

Figure 29 illustrates the prevalence of young people with an EHC plan among young people with different primary SEN types. Those with autism were most likely to have an EHC plan (52%), while those with a specific learning difficulty were less likely to have an EHC plan (16%) as were those in the 'other' group (17%).

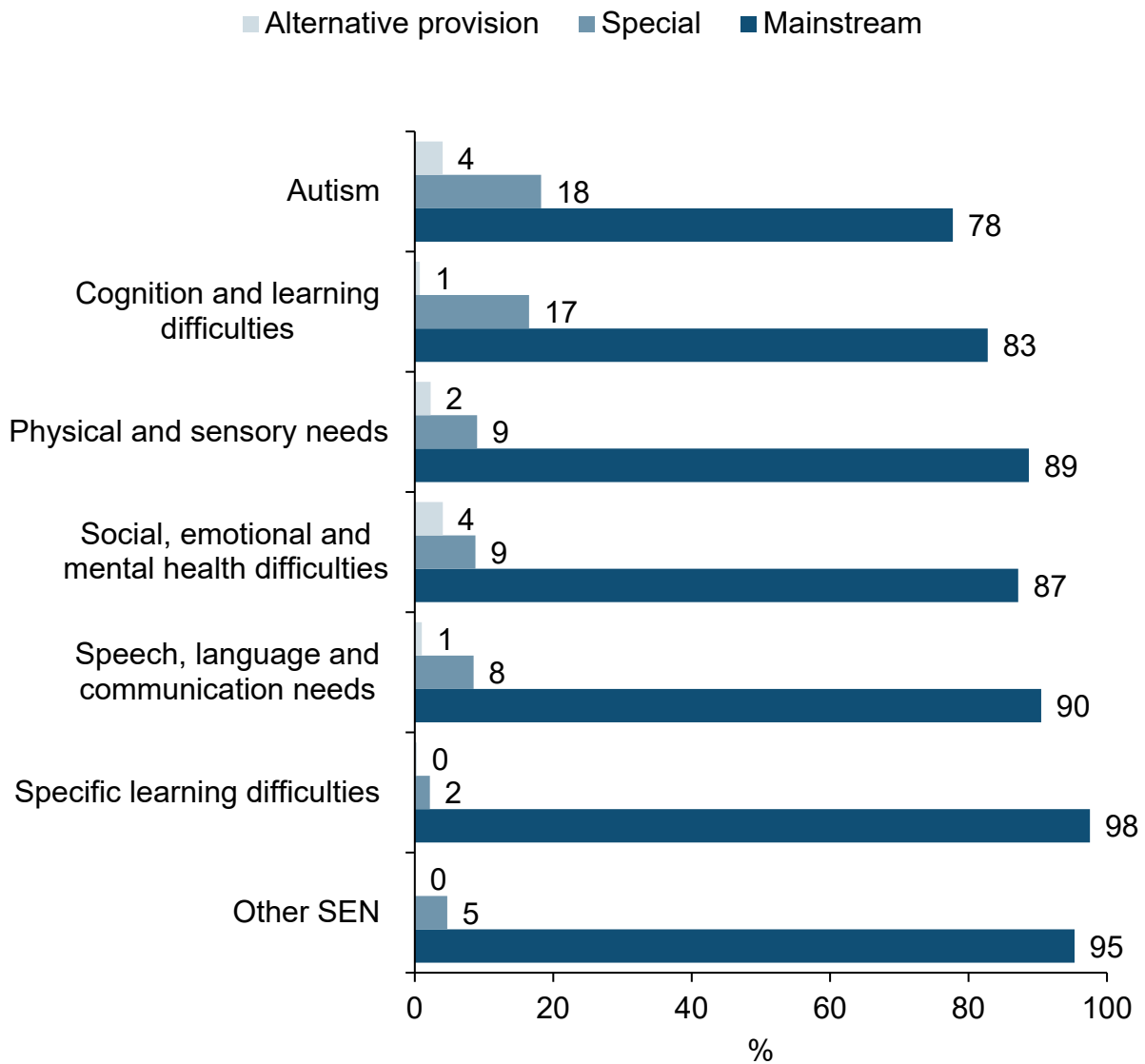
Figure 29. Proportion of young people with SEN who have an EHC plan, by primary SEN type



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for each category:
 Autism = 426; SEMHD = 619; PSN = 192; SLCN = 321; CLD = 649; SLD = 503; Other SEN = 205.

Figure 30 shows the prevalence of young people who attend different types of school for each primary SEN type. Autism showed a consistent pattern: autistic young people were more likely than young people with other primary SEN types to attend special schools (18%) and Alternative Provision (4%). Having a specific learning difficulty or being in the 'other' group were also consistent with the pattern seen in EHC plan status – these categories had more pupils attending mainstream schools.

Figure 30. Proportion of young people with SEN attending different types of school, by primary SEN type (parent sample)



Base: All young people with SEN, unweighted base for category: Autism = 419; CLD = 641; PSN = 190; SEMHD = 609; SLCN = 320; SLD = 502; Other SEN = 203.

Analysis

Weighting and representativeness

The findings in this report were weighted to be nationally representative of the population from which the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase sample was drawn, i.e. all Year 8 pupils recorded as having SEN (SEN support or EHC plan) in the National Pupil Dataset (NPD) Autumn Census 2022 and the Alternative Provision Census 2021

(APD). The NPD includes detailed background information which was used to model response to the survey and produce the survey weights. As a result, the weighted estimates are representative of the population of Year 8 pupils with SEN who attended mainstream and Alternative Provisions schools in England in 2021/2022 with respect to the parameters available on the NPD. These included: whether the young person had an EHC plan, their primary type of SEN, their gender, and where they lived (urban/rural location, region, level of income deprivation affecting families).

One of the aims of the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase was to test the feasibility of conducting a large scale and representative survey of young people with SEN, some of whom face significant barriers to participation in standardised data collection as undertaken in survey research. In the SEND Futures Longitudinal Study: Discovery Phase, some young people were unable to take part specifically due to their special educational needs. In 71% of cases where a parent took part in the study but the young person did not, it was because the young person was not *able* to take part. This is equivalent to 6% of all young people invited to take part in the face-to-face strand. A comparable number is not known for the web strand, because no interviewer was involved. These young people who were unable to complete the survey due to their SEN are unlikely to constitute a 'random' subgroup of participants, meaning that their absence from the study can introduce biases.

To maximise participation among all young people, several steps were taken to facilitate participation. These included, allowing parents or carers to provide assistance in completing the interview, and, for the face-to-face strand, briefing interviewers on the circumstances of young people with SEN and their families, encouraging interviewers to check in with parents and carers about how best to facilitate the young person's participation, and providing specially designed showcards with pictures to enhance comprehension (see the [methodology report](#) for full details). Around half of the young people in the study were reported to have received assistance from someone else to complete the survey or interview.

Whilst NPD data allows for more effective modelling of non-response than would be possible in other situations (where less is known about those who do not take part), weighting can only reduce the risk of non-response bias, it cannot remove it altogether. In particular, as above, the needs of young people invited to the survey did, in some cases, affect whether they were able to take part. The exact extent of this type of non-participation cannot be measured for the web surveys, and the impact is not fully known because the NPD data from which the sample is drawn does not have detailed records of the extent and severity of a young person's special educational needs.

Having said this, the weighting models used indicators including whether the young person had an EHC plan and their primary type of SEN, hence the final weighted data were representative with respect to these measures. Despite the lack of a direct measure

of the magnitude of needs, this provides some reassurance that survey participants included a range of young people with SEN, including those with an EHC plan whom we may expect to be among those with the greatest levels of needs. Furthermore, the fact that young people received support to complete the survey may also indicate that the study reached some young people who would not otherwise have been able to take part, thus reducing the potential level of bias from not accommodating all young people/all types of and levels of need.

A further thing to note in relation to the weighting and representativeness of the data is that not all households who took part in the study completed both interviews (i.e. some households only completed a parent survey; some only completed a young person survey). Overall, more parents than young people took part – about 3,500 parents and around 3,000 young people. This is not uncommon in studies of this nature and was anticipated in the design phase. To take these differences in response into account, different weights were applied for parents and young people. However, both were weighted to be representative of the same population – that is, the total population of Year 8 pupils with SEN who were part of the state education system in England. These weights have been used when analysing findings from parents and young people presented in this report, meaning that, although findings based on parent report and findings based on young people report are based on slightly different samples (due to different response patterns seen for parents and young people), both figures reported based on parent report and figures reported based on young people reports are representative of young people with SEN in Year 8.

Subgroup analysis

Unless otherwise stated, where comparisons are made between subgroups, they have been tested for statistical significance at the 5% level. In other words, differences are only reported where they are large enough that there is not more than a 5% probability of a difference as large (or larger) occurring by chance (assuming no differences in the population). Where it is used in the text, the term ‘significant’ refers to statistical significance (at the 5% level) and is not intended to imply substantive importance.

Statistical testing has been carried out to examine the relationship between two variables or characteristics; for example, a young person’s wellbeing and the type of school they attend. The tests reveal whether or not the differences seen in the data are ‘statistically significant’ i.e. whether they reflect ‘real’ differences in the population as a whole (for example, all young people in English state funded education in Year 8 with SEN) or could have occurred by chance/simply as a result of taking a sample of the population.

For variables with two or more categories, the statistical tests used do not compare each pair of categories against each other; rather they are testing the observed variations across the various sub-groups. For example, when looking at differences in the levels of

wellbeing between different types of SEN, the tests do not tell us anything about specific pairs of SEN types (for example, autistic people versus those who have cognitive and learning difficulties); instead, they tell us whether or not the observed differences could have occurred by chance (as a result of sampling) or are more likely to reflect 'real' differences in the population as a whole.

The analysis explored the relationship between individual characteristics and pupil outcomes. It did not control for other characteristics that may affect or explain this relationship. For example, a relationship between the type of school a pupil attends, and their wellbeing may be affected by the type of needs they have, and the type of needs they have may also separately affect the type of school they attend, and their wellbeing. These complexities were not controlled for in this analysis. Further analysis would be required to establish the relative strength and independence of the relationships shown.

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Reference: RR1393

ISBN: 978-1-83870-518-3

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