

The Academic Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning of Key Stage 2 Pupils Following the Pandemic

Introduction and background

This report is the latest publication from a research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. It analyses survey responses from Key Stage 2 children in English schools using **Wellbeing and Attitudes to Learning: Survey and Strategies**. The online survey produced by Hodder Education consists of 41 Likert scale questions that assess children across 4 dimensions and 12 sub-dimensions. The dimensions are positivity, motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience and persistence. Each child's mean score for a given dimension was allocated to one of 3 zones: green, amber, or red. Children whose scores fell into the green zone were demonstrating satisfactory responses for that dimension, those whose scores were in the amber zone may have had some vulnerability in that dimension, and scores in the red zone indicated that these children were most in need of action to support their academic wellbeing. Survey results for 2020-21 and 2021-22 were compared to an earlier trial of around 4,000 pupils conducted in schools in 2018. The 2020-21 survey cohort consisted of 10,000 pupils at 65 schools and the 2021-22 cohort consisted of 8,000 pupils at 55 schools.

Key findings

Positivity

- The positivity dimension covers a child's tendency towards their self-esteem, their satisfaction with the academic / school environment, and their optimism.
- For all 3 time periods, the proportion of children who are positive about school decreases as the children progress through Key Stage 2, with Year 6 displaying the smallest proportion of children who feel positively about school.
- Year 3 showed the highest levels of positivity before the pandemic but also the largest fall since then with more children reporting some vulnerability or reporting not feeling positive about school compared to pre-pandemic levels (a rise of 7 percentage points of pupils in the red zone).
- Across all years and time periods, more girls than boys report feeling positive about school. However, the gender difference has reduced over time, dropping from 7 percentage points in 2018 to just over 5 in 2020-21 and then to less than 5 in 2021-22. This shows that the proportion of girls in the green zone has decreased since the pre-pandemic period.
- The analysis explored whether pupils' positivity varied according to their level of disadvantage. Three categories of schools were used as an indicator - those with high proportions of FSM (more than 35%), medium proportions (20-35%) and low proportions (less than 20%). No clear trends were identified from year to year or between groups of schools.
- In order to provide large enough pupil numbers for comparative analysis, regions were divided into North (North East, North West, Yorkshire & The Humber, East Midlands, and West Midlands) and South (East of England, London, South East, and South West). Although slightly more children were positive about school in the North in 2020-21 (80% compared to 76% in the South) and this increased to approximately a 6 percentage point difference in 2021-22.
- Overall, most children (more than 75% on average) are positive about school. Although this number dipped slightly between 2020-21 and 2021-22 and since the pre-pandemic 2018 trial, the fluctuation over time is less than 5 percentage points.

Motivation

- The motivation dimension provides information about what drives a child's academic behaviour. It consists of task value, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation in the context of academic achievement. It also considers the potential impact of support.
- As with positivity, the percentage of children who feel motivated at school declines as they get older. The difference between the proportion of motivated children in Years 3 and 6 has also changed over time. This closing of the gap between year groups is primarily driven by a fall in reported motivation among Year 3 pupils. Around 11 per cent fewer children in Year 3 appeared in the green zone in 2021-22 compared to 2018. By comparison, the drop for Year 6 was less than half of this.
- More girls than boys reported feeling motivated at school. Although the proportion for girls has dropped over time, it remains higher than for boys.
- The proportion of children of both genders who reported satisfactory responses for motivation has steadily declined over time. Over the 3 periods of the analysis, the proportion of girls demonstrating a satisfactory level of motivation fell by around 8 percentage points (more than the reduction for boys).
- In each period analysed there is no significant difference in responses between children at schools with different levels of disadvantage.
- Looking at regional trends, more children in schools in the North responded that they are motivated at school.



- Overall, the largest proportion of children's responses fell into the green category, indicating that their responses to questions on motivation are satisfactory and children are, on the whole, feeling motivated in school.

Self-efficacy

- Perceived self-efficacy is defined as children's beliefs about their capability to succeed in particular situations and pursue their goals. Self-efficacy is assessed under 3 categories - academic self-efficacy, emotional self-efficacy, and interpersonal self-efficacy.
- Overall, the self-efficacy dimension was unique in that most responses fell into the amber or red zones.
- Between the 2018 trial and recent years, there were large drops across all years for self-efficacy. As with motivation, Year 3 showed the largest change with 11 percentage points fewer children displaying satisfactory self-efficacy in 2021–22 compared to the trial.
- Self-efficacy is the only dimension where the proportion of boys in the green zone is larger than that of girls. This trend only appeared in the last 2 years, indicating that it may be a consequence of the pandemic.
- Between the 2018 trial and 2021–22, girls showed a larger drop (of approximately 14 percentage points fewer) than boys (5 percentage points).
- As with the other dimensions the differences between pupils at schools with different levels of FSM percentages are small.
- Children in the North appear to have higher levels of self-efficacy than those in the South. This was particularly evident in 2021–22 when 8 per cent more children responded in the green zone in the North than the South.
- Overall, the lower proportions responding with satisfactory answers for self-efficacy indicates that this is an area in need of improvement for children throughout Key Stage 2.
- Although it is difficult to attribute the drop in self-efficacy to the pandemic alone, it is likely to be part of the reason for the decline in satisfactory responses since the 2018 trial. Fewer children feel capable of managing challenging and difficult situations than before the pandemic. This may be due to isolation from peers that occurred during lockdown, as peer-modelling of success is thought to influence perceptions of self-efficacy.

Resilience and persistence

- Resilience and persistence explores how well children respond to both success and failure in a school setting and the emotions that are associated with both experiences.
- As with the other dimensions, Year 3 generally shows the highest proportion of children with satisfactory responses, and Year 6 shows the lowest proportion. The exception is 2021–22, when Year 4 pupils had the highest proportion of satisfactory responses.
- Both Year 3 and Year 6 showed fewer children reporting they feel resilient to academic stresses at school since the trial, although Year 3 dropped by more than Year 6 (11 Percentage Points compared to 8 Percentage Points). The fluctuations in Year 4 did

not show a consistent trend across the 3 periods analysed.

- As in the motivation and positivity dimensions, girls have a higher proportion of responses in the green zone than boys both in the 2018 trial and in 2020–21. However, by 2021–22 the gap of 7 percentage points between the genders seen in the trial was largely eradicated. Over the 3 time periods, the proportion of girls giving satisfactory answers to the questions on resilience fell by 11 per cent.
- As with the other dimensions, the differences between the types of schools were not large and did not show any consistent trends.
- As with the other dimensions, higher proportions of children in the North gave satisfactory responses in the resilience and persistence dimension compared to their peers in the South. Furthermore, this gap appears to be widening. During the most recent period, the regional difference in the proportions of children indicating they feel resilient is 6 Percentage Points.
- The proportions of satisfactory responses for resilience and persistence were high regardless of whether children were grouped by geography, gender, school year, or disadvantage level. Although there has been a decrease in children feeling resilient since the 2018 trial, changes over the last 2 school years were small and it is not currently possible to identify a clear trend.

The full documents can be downloaded from:

https://www.risingstars-uk.com/media/Rising-Stars/Assessment/Whitepapers/RSAssessment_Wellbeing-and-Attitudes-Research-Whitepaper_Nov22.pdf