Annual Child and Family Poverty Surveys 2024

Children & Young People: Findings Report

Karen McFarlane | October 2024

In partnership with

Cyswllt Rhieni Cymru / Parents Connect Wales
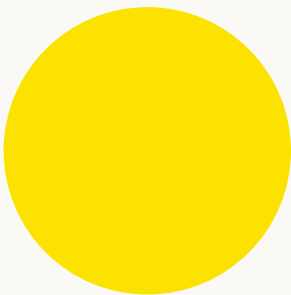
End Child Poverty Network Cymru / Rhwydwaith Dileu Tlodi Plant Cymru

Acknowledgements

The quotes used in this report are those kindly provided by the survey respondents.

The views in this report are those of respondents to the questions in the survey and do not necessarily represent the views of Children in Wales.

This report forms the main publication of the findings from the Children in Wales Annual Child & Family Poverty Surveys 2024. In addition, the findings have been published into separate, smaller reports and are all available on the [Children in Wales](#) website:

Children and Young People: Findings report
Parents/ Carers: Findings Report
Practitioners and Professionals: Findings report
Infographic summaries
Children and Young People's Version of their findings

Contact details: info@childreninwales.org.uk

About Children in Wales

Our Vision: Building a Wales where all children and young people have all their rights fulfilled.

We are the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and their families in Wales. We work closely with Welsh Government and others in Wales to ensure that children's rights are at the forefront of policy and decision making.

To do this we focus on ensuring that children and young people in Wales have a voice, we fight for sustainable and equitable services, advocate for policy changes in Wales and connect and represent the work being undertaken by our membership.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations from the voluntary, statutory and professional sectors. We also work directly with children and young people on a number of different projects and have a dedicated membership for our young audience.

To find out more about our work or to become a member of Children in Wales, contact membership@childreninwales.org.uk

About Parents Connect Wales

Parents Connect Wales (PCW) is a project led by Children in Wales and funded by Welsh Government. It is aimed at empowering the voices of parents/ carers to promote children's rights.

Parents Connect Wales has established:-

- A professionals' forum with 110 members to date

- A parent advisory group with 6 parent representatives

- 22 local representatives, one in each of the local authorities in Wales

- An online platform called the 'Parents Connect Wales' Online Hub

To find out more about the Parents Connect Wales project, then please visit the online hub or contact parentsconnect@childreninwales.org.uk

NB When we refer to 'parents' we use this as an inclusive term that includes parents (both mothers and fathers), carers, grandparents, foster parents, adoptive parents or anyone with parental responsibility.

About End Child Poverty Network Cymru

The End Child Poverty Network (ECPN) Cymru is a coalition of organisations focused on the eradication of child poverty in Wales, co-ordinated and managed on a day-to-day basis by Children in Wales.

Its Steering Group includes representation from across the voluntary and statutory sectors, and the wider network has over 1200 supporting members from a broad cross-section of agencies.

If you would like to join the wider End Child Poverty Network Cymru, please visit the website or contact info@childreninwales.org.uk

Children's Rights and Poverty

Poverty contravenes a number of Articles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The UNCRC is an international agreement setting out the rights of children and young people up to the age of 18 years. It is based on three principles: **participation, protection and provision.**

In 2011, the **UNCRC** became enshrined in Welsh law through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. This Measure places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have a due regard to the UNCRC when developing or reviewing legislation and policy.

Poverty denies children and young people many of their rights:

- Their rights to develop their full potential (Article 6)

- Their rights to the best possible health and nutritious food (Article 24)

- Their rights to benefit from social security (Article 26)

- Their rights to an adequate standard of living that meets and supports their needs (Article 27)

- Their rights to an education and on the basis of equal opportunity (Article 28)

- Their rights to play and leisure opportunities (Article 31)

The **Social Services and Well-being Act 2014** places a similar due regard duty on named public bodies, including local authorities and health boards, to the UNCRC when discharging their functions regionally and locally.

In March 2021, the **Socio-economic Duty** came into force in Wales. This duty means that specific public bodies must consider how their strategic decisions can improve inequality of outcome for people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.

In January 2024, Welsh Government published their updated Child Poverty Strategy to help prevent and mitigate child poverty.

Parents/ Carers and Children's Rights

The UNCRC mentions the words 'parents' and 'families' more than 'children' and recognises that children's rights are protected first within families.

The following articles recognise the crucial role of parents and families in protecting and caring for children:-

- Their right to have their best interests considered in all decisions that affect them (Article 3)

- Their right for the role of their parents/ carers to be recognised and respected so that children can access all their rights (Article 5)

- Their right to be bought up by both parents if possible (Article 18)

Poverty can deny parents/ carers' the ability to fulfil their children's rights and ensure that they are being met.
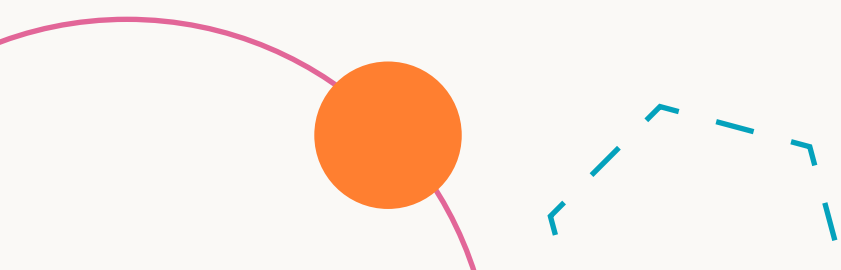
You can find out more about how parents can support children's rights here;-
UNCRC_Understanding_Childrens_Rights.pdf (childreninwales.org.uk)

Contents

Introduction

The Children and Young People's survey is an important element of our annual poverty report, giving them a voice and ensuring that their views and experiences around poverty are heard.

The survey findings provide a greater understanding of the poverty related issues that are important to children and young people and the impact these issues may have on their lives. Sadly, the majority of the narrative remains similar to our report in 2023, as does the cited impact. Given this context, this 2024 report provides a brief summary of this year's findings for each of the areas surveyed.

About the survey

The survey was live for a period of 5 weeks from 30 April – 7 June 2024. It was open to all children and young people in Wales and was completed anonymously by respondents. The survey did not specifically target children and young people who live in poverty and/or live in deprived areas; nor did the survey ask if they themselves lived in or had experienced poverty. Instead, the survey sought their views on how poverty might affect different aspects of children's lives.

All questions were asked in the third person and the survey provided children and young people with careful and easily understood explanations of specific terminology, such as what is meant by the terms 'poverty' and 'debt'. Inevitably, completion rates for individual questions varied from 93%-100% completion. Therefore, all figures are based on the numbers responding to each individual question.

A total of 250 children and young people responded, with ages ranging from under 10 years up to 25 years.

Age range of respondents
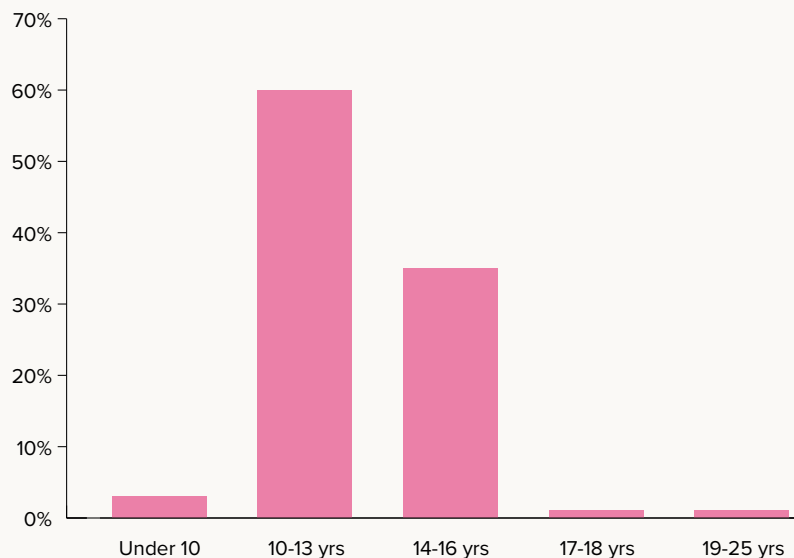
Of the respondents, 4% stated they did have a disability, 3% preferred not to say, 9% were unsure and 84% described themselves as not having a disability.

Children and young people were also asked about their ethnicity and whilst some did not complete this question, those who did identified as: Asian from another country (6%); Asian Welsh or British (12%); Black from another country (5%); Mixed Heritage (5%); White from another country (10%); White Welsh or British (51%); Any other ethnic group (2%); Not sure (6%); and Preferred not to say (2%).

Given the number of responses to the survey, it is not possible to establish if the findings from those identifying as disabled or in minority ethnic groups, are significantly different from those of other respondents.
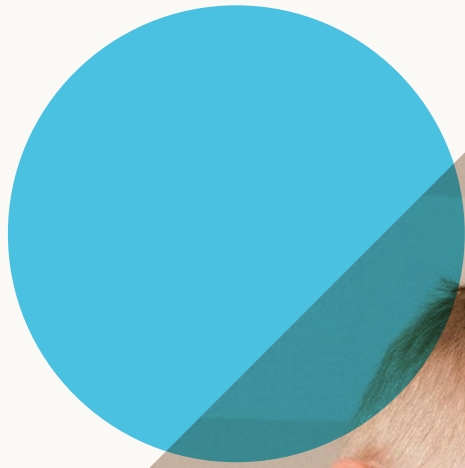
Findings

Poverty issues

"Many young people are reliant on adults and so cannot change the circumstances they are in which leads to more worrying and distress."
(19-25yrs)

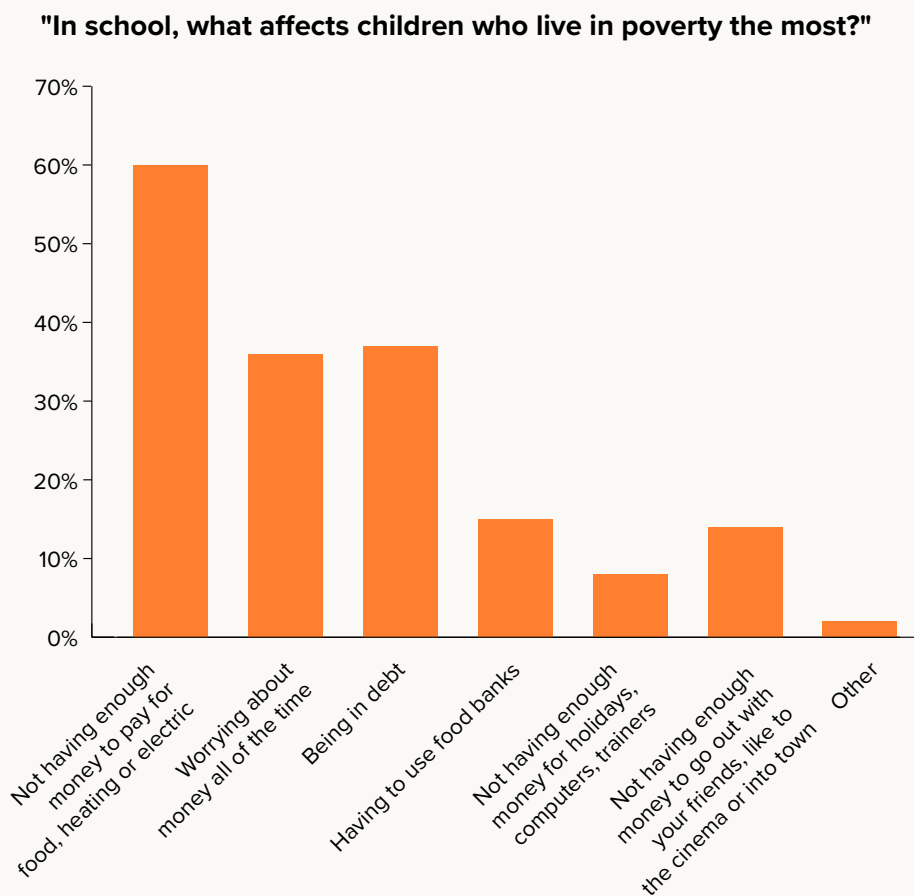Children and young people were asked an overarching question about what they thought affected children living in poverty the most. They were asked to choose 2 options from the list shown in the chart below.

"In school, what affects children who live in poverty the most?"

"If you're in debt, that brings more problems since you need money to pay for bills and once you pay those off, you won't have enough for food."
(10-13yrs)

Children and young people were asked to comment on their choices and as in previous years, they overwhelmingly highlighted the **mental and emotional impact of poverty**. This most commonly included **feeling anxious** about not having enough money, being **unhappy** and **isolated, being in debt** and **feeling left out**. They also frequently referred to feeling **ashamed** and **trying to hide their circumstances** from peers and adults.

"Being in debt and not affording a house and not being able to go to school because you have to feed your siblings." (10-13yrs)

As in previous surveys, children and young people repeatedly raised issues around **poverty related bullying**, both in and out of school. Whilst this question did not specifically mention the school environment or education, children and young people did comment that poverty affected their education, experiences and life chances.

"Witnessing parents dealing with financial stress, that stress in turn affecting familial relationships....missing out on school trips, missing out on events or weekend activities with peers. Hiding their financial situation for fear of being bullied or shamed at school." (19-25yrs)

Poverty and school

"Some kids starve in school or go hungry until the end of the day, then when they get home they might not have enough food to fill their belly or worry about if they're going to eat when they're home, or worry about their parents giving up food for them." (10-13yrs)

In relation to school, the survey asked what is most likely to affect those living in poverty. Again, multiple choice options were given, and respondents were asked to choose 2 options. The options provided were based on issues raised by children and young people in previous surveys.

"In school, what affects children who live in poverty the most?"
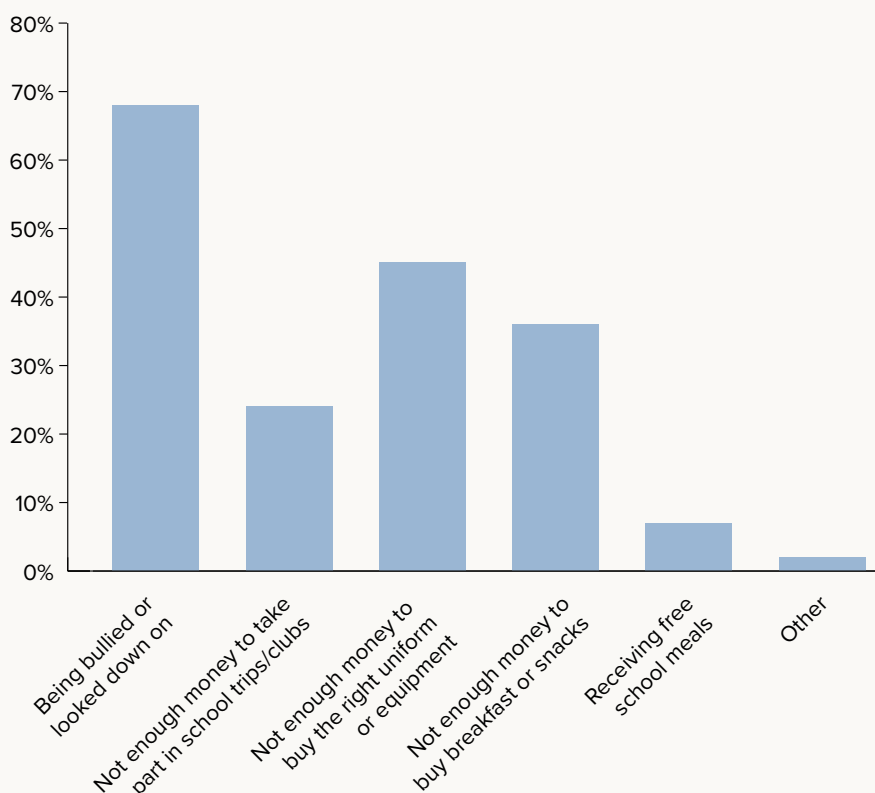
"[Poverty] makes school live unbearable." (10-13yrs)

When asked to comment on their choices, the majority of children and young people, regardless of their choices, commented on **poverty related bullying in school** and the impact this has on **mental health**. They noted **not wanting to go to school** because of this and cited the lack of correct **school uniform** or being unable to afford **school trips** as the major cause of poverty related bullying. These issues are further explored in subsequent sections of this report.

"It hurts. I know." (10-13yrs)

Children and young people noted being **sad, isolated and lonely at school** and regularly commented on being bullied by peers or 'picked on' by teachers. They were upset that **poverty did affect their learning** and access to opportunities or simply 'joining in', for example through school trips and other activities.

"Being bullied is one thing, but not having money to barely pay for food or the school uniform can bring many problems and concerns." (10-13yrs)

There were also a significant number of comments about being unable to learn if they were cold or hungry as they felt it was difficult to concentrate on schoolwork. A few noted that this **increased the frequency** of **punishment** for some learners, often resulting in detention or 'negative behaviour points' or 'concerns'*.

"The school will fine them if they are too scared to go to school because of the bullying and they won't have proper school uniform and get concerns or other form of punishment." (10-13yrs)

* 'Negative behaviour point' or 'concerns' appear to be frequently used by schools to note low-level behaviour incidents, such as talking instead of listening in class, being impolite or unkind. From our survey findings, it is evident that incorrect school uniform is also included in this.

Schools vary as to whether they use this method of recording and reporting behaviour incidents and also in their follow-up actions or punishment. It is not known if all schools apply this system, however it was cited by around 90% of our survey respondents from across Wales.
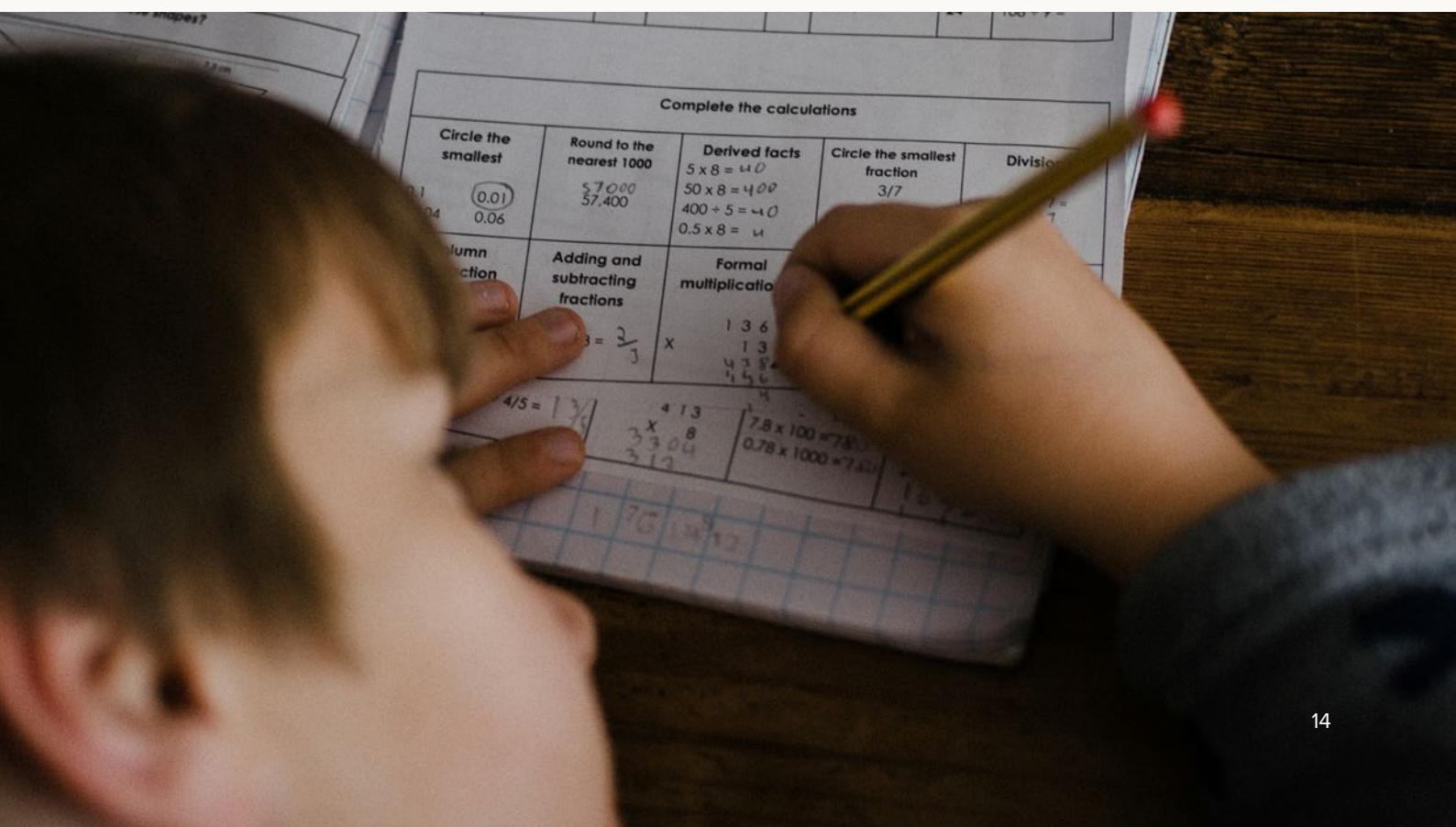
School uniform

**"Kids might not have enough for a school skirt but then they will get told off for not wearing one even though the school skirts cost £20."** (10-13yrs)

Following the comments made by children and young people in our previous two surveys, we began exploring the issues around school uniforms and the potential impact this had on children and their families living in poverty or on lower incomes. As shown in the previous section, not having the correct school uniform was cited as being the **main cause of poverty related bullying** and for many, leading to poor emotional and mental wellbeing.

"They shouldn't get in trouble because things cost money." (10-13yrs)

Uniforms are expensive and this is exacerbated when school badges or logos are a requirement of that uniform and must be purchased from specialist retailers. In our 2023 survey report, we looked at uniforms costs in more detail, identifying that average costs ranged from £75.50 for a 'non-badged' uniform purchased from a supermarket, rising to £183.50 for 'badged' uniforms requiring one or more items to be purchased from a specialist retailer. For families living on lower incomes, this cost difference is extremely impactful.

Do you have to wear a school badge or school logo on your uniform?

No: 9%

Not sure: 2%

Yes: 89%
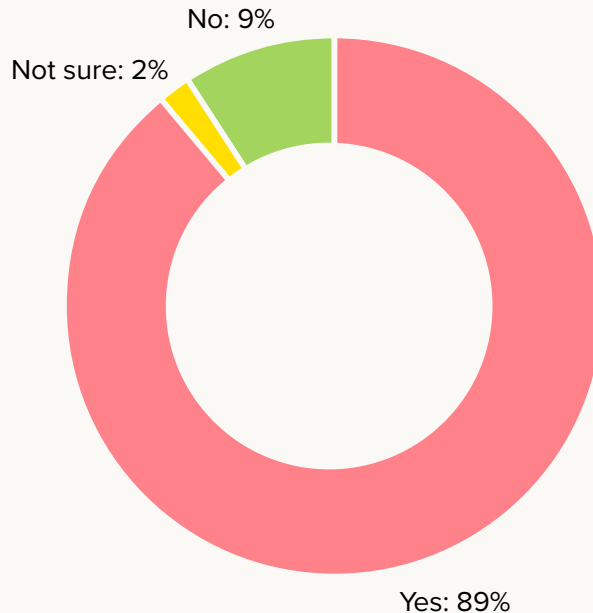
The survey asked children and young people what happens if they don't wear the correct uniform. The most common response to this was being **bullied and/or punished**. Children and young people shared examples of the punishment which commonly included: **detention, negative behaviour points, concerns, sent home and 'being told off'.**

A few described being put into **isolation** and not being allowed to interact with or be part of classes and break times. Some others expressed concerns that parents were called in to 'bring in the right uniform'. This **created anxiety** for them knowing that their parents could not afford to purchase the correct uniform.

"We get a green card and if the green card expires we get a negative point and a detention." (10-13yrs)

Other, less frequent outcomes included **'Green cards', phone confiscation** and attending the uniform hub at the school. Learners described 'Green cards' as a pass which had to be carried by the learner, or in some cases, worn externally. These cards include reasons why the learner is not wearing the correct uniform and a date by which it must be rectified. The learner must show this card to staff members when challenged about their uniform. Should the uniform not be rectified by the specified date, **learners are then punished**.

The uniform hub was predominantly explained by respondents as a place that they could 'borrow' the required item, returning it at the end of the school day. This appeared to be acceptable to some, whilst others stated that items were often unwashed, which led to further bullying. Those choosing not to wear this item, commonly said that they were then put into isolation for the day.

**"We are given warnings, exclusion can be made, always sent to the uniform hub." (14-16yrs)**

On a more positive note, there were comments that highlighted understanding and consideration for children whose families could not afford the school uniform.

"Nothing [happens], the school is very tolerant to having lots of families from low socioeconomic backgrounds." (10-13yrs)

Uniform items requiring a school badge or logo
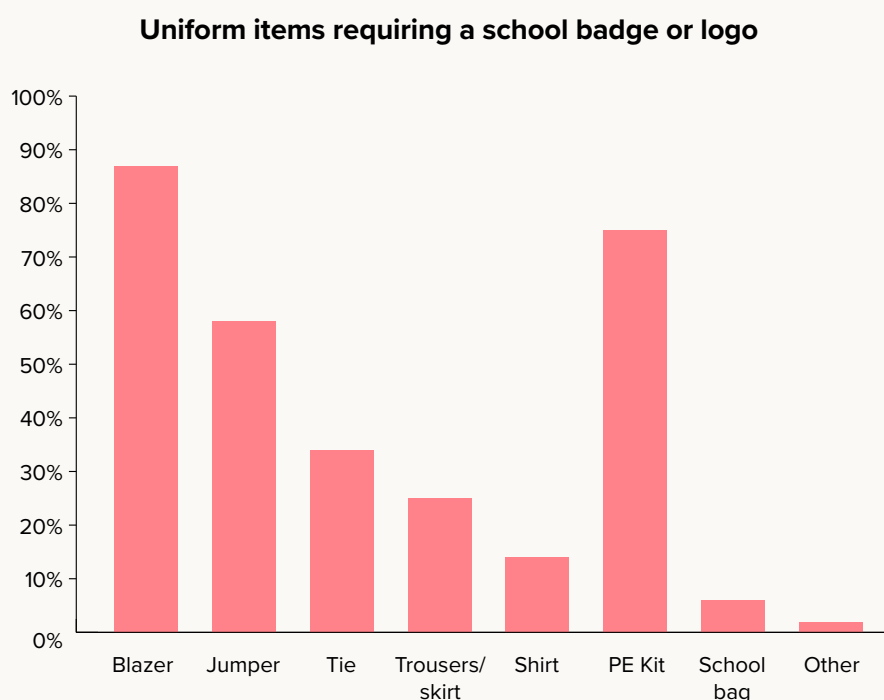
Number of uniform items requiring a school badge or logo
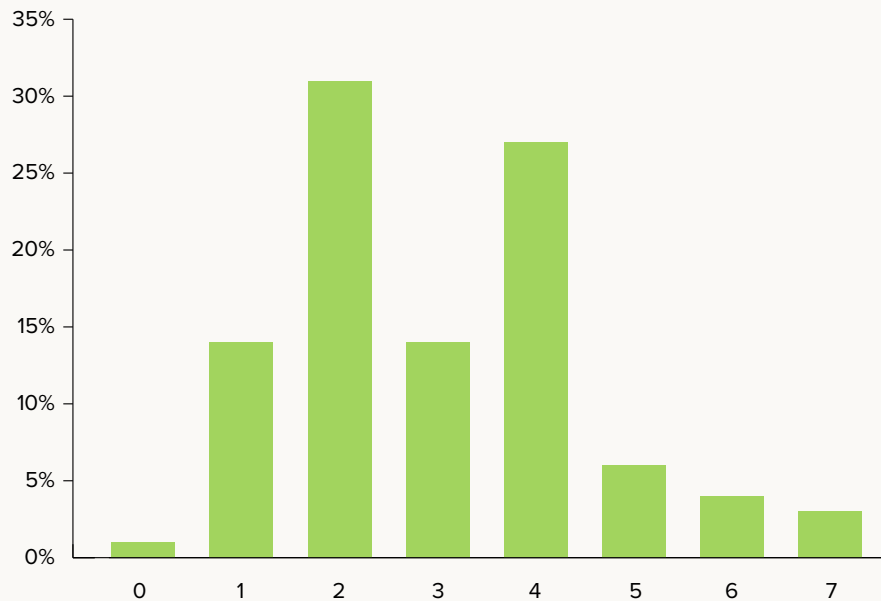
As the chart above shows, nearly a third (31%) of those responding are required to wear school badges on at least 2 items of their uniform, closely followed by 27% who are required to wear 4 badged items. It should be noted that for 2 items and above, PE Kits were often included. For the purposes of this survey, PE kits are regarded as 1 item, however from the comments made by children and young people, it is evident that this category includes at least 2 items, but more commonly 4-5 badged pieces.

Given the parameters of this survey, it is not known whether badges, such as iron/sew-on, can be purchased by parents and applied to the required items. However, given that such a large percentage **(73%) of uniforms are purchased from a specialist uniform retailer**, this seems unlikely.

"Where do you get your uniform from?"
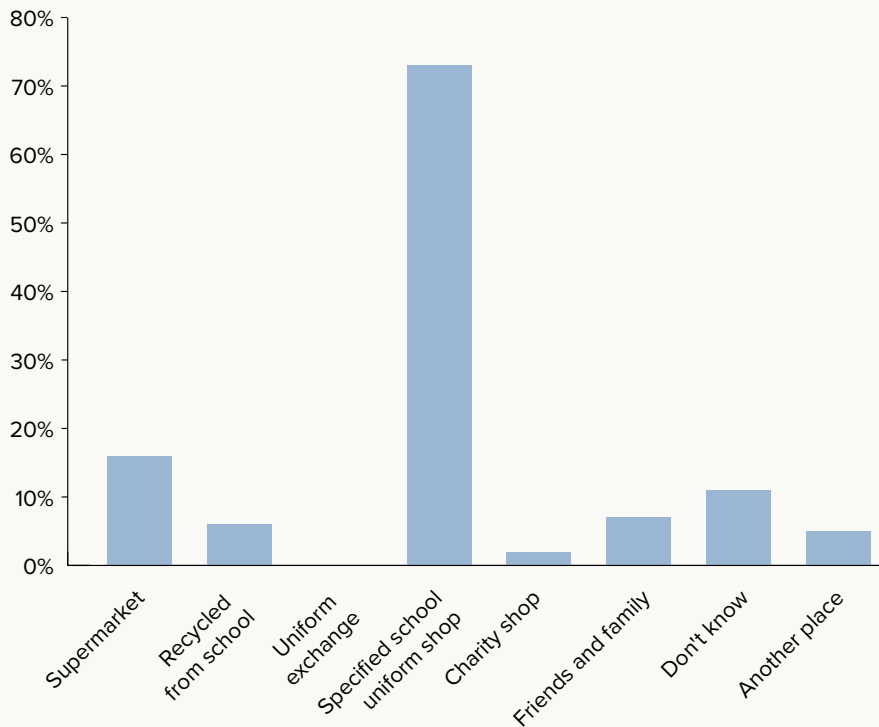
Welsh Government has produced School Uniform and Appearance Policy Guidance which includes advice to schools on ways they can address the cost of school uniforms. However, the findings from our surveys over the last couple of years identify the urgent need for greater and more effective implementation of this guidance in many schools across Wales.

"Make silly things like uniform that don't need to be as expensive as they are, less expensive and more affordable." (14-16yrs)

To help raise awareness and further understanding of the financial and emotional impact of current uniform practice in schools, Children in Wales has produced a briefing and case studies *Supporting Change: School Uniforms*. This was published in June 2024, disseminated to all schools in Wales and promoted by the Cabinet Secretary for Education alongside the Schools Essential Grant. In addition to these resources, *Tackling the Impact of Poverty in Education* provides schools with information on how to mitigate the impact of poverty in all aspects of school life.
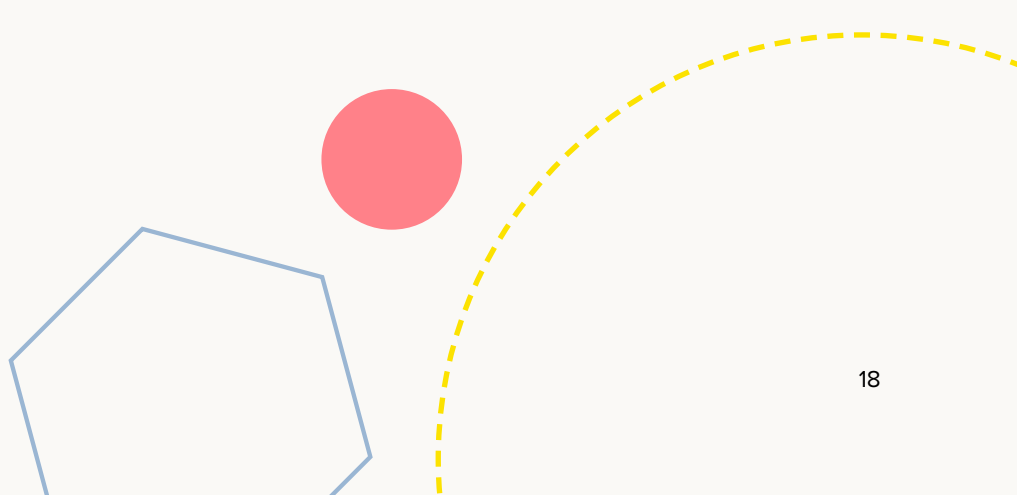
Bullying and poverty

"Having to worry about food and money is enough to process for children and having people bully you for it can make you shut down, become isolated and depressed." (10-13yrs)

Questions about poverty related bullying were first included in our 2022 survey. Prior to this, we did not specifically ask about it, yet so many children and young people included this in their responses, regardless of the question. As a result, poverty related bullying is now included as a core part of our survey.

Two years on, the narrative from children and young people has not changed and still dominates their responses, regardless of the questions. As in previous findings, children and young people described **feeling isolated, depressed and sad, feeling unsafe and of 'hiding away'.** Others described feeling hopeless or 'a burden' and just wanting to give up.

"Very sad because it happens every single day since yr 7." (10-13yrs)

They reported that poverty related bullying **led to lower self-esteem**, not being accepted in school, having no-one to talk to about it, being less likely to want to take part in education and activities and **not wanting to go to school at all.**

"Scared to come to school." (10-13yrs)

Do you see children and young people being bullied because they don't have as much money or the same things as others?

Prefer not to say: 1%

No: 34%

Yes: 38%

Don't know: 27%
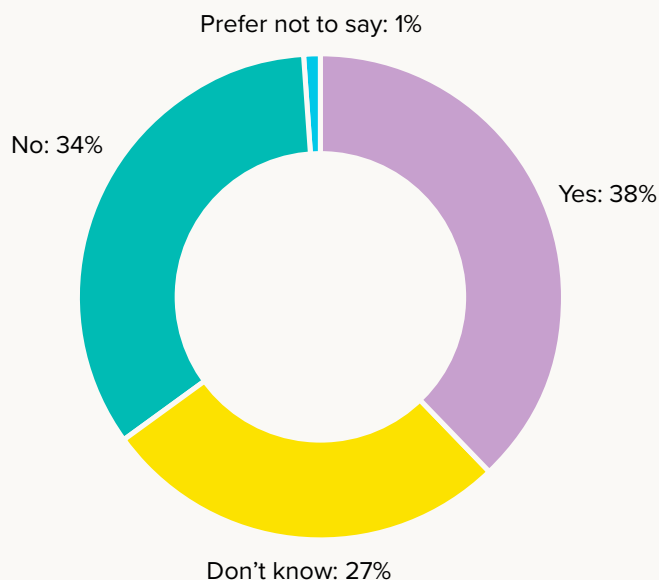
The consequences of bullying were clearly identified by children and young people. There was understanding and recognition of the **negative impact this has on mental health**, physical health and the ability and/or willingness to engage with and do well at school.

As shown in the previous section, *School Uniforms*, it is clear that being unable to afford the correct school uniform leads to increased bullying, however other factors were also cited. These included having to ask for sanitary products, being 'told off' for poverty related issues, such as incorrect uniform, and being unable to afford school trips.

"It makes them vulnerable from bullying since they may not have money to buy personal basic hygiene stuff. No teenager would want to go up to a teacher and ask for basic hygiene need." (14-16yrs)

Punishments linked to poverty related issues were also likely to **increase the severity or frequency of bullying**, for example detention, being sent home, isolation and green cards.

Children and young people were asked what should be done to stop poverty related bullying in school. Unsurprisingly, many of the measures suggested related to the issues they had raised, but predominantly focused on the need for **school to take actions.** These included; reducing school uniform costs; reducing school trip costs; educating the whole school, including teachers about the causes and impact of poverty; creating a better understanding and culture of empathy within the school; stringently following through on anti-bullying policies in school; and better, non-stigmatising practice by teachers and staff.

"Educating children about the economic state of the country, destigmatising poverty and focusing on community and wellbeing." (19-25yrs)

Throughout their responses, children and young people repeatedly noted the **need for respect, understanding and both emotional and practical support** for children and their families living in poverty or on low incomes.

"Reinforcing anti-bullying ideologies and showing that people are all equal despite their economic status." (14-16yrs)
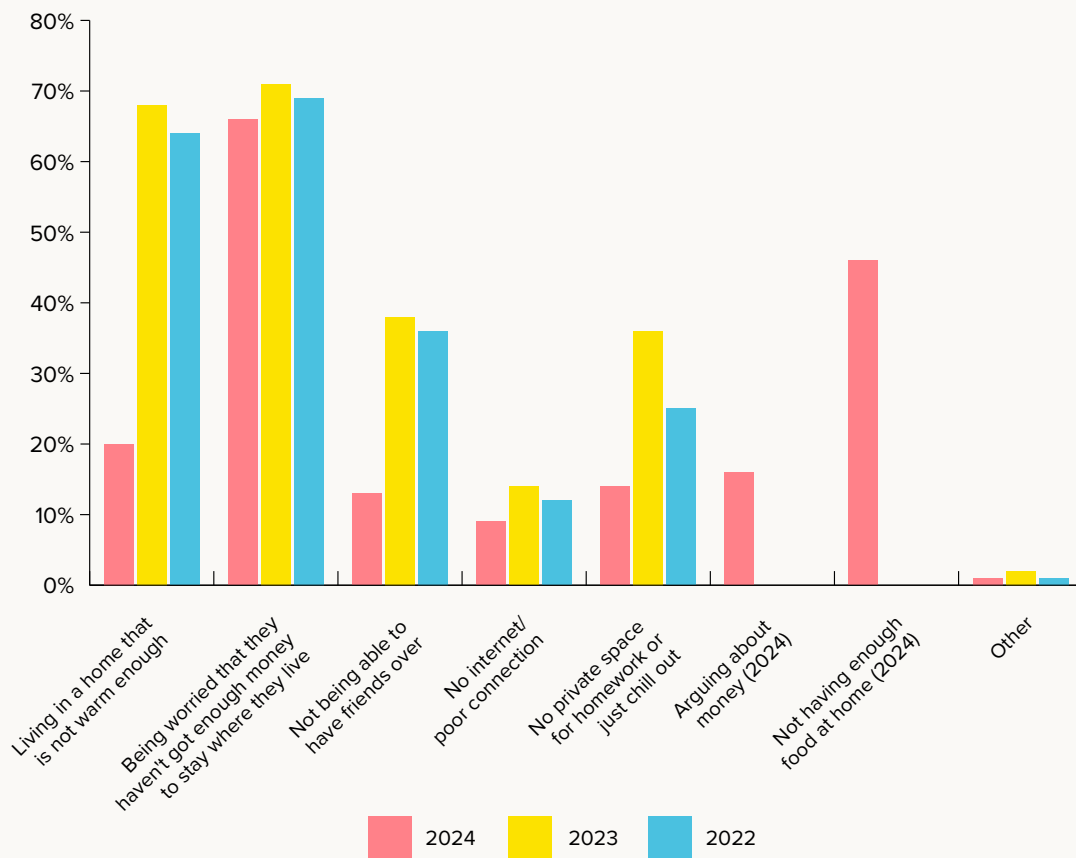
Poverty and home

"Being around arguments over and over about money and worries can make children aggressive and lonely." (17-18yrs)

The survey asked respondents to consider what they thought would affect children who live in poverty the most, when they are at home. Again, the question format asked respondents to choose 2, from the list provided.

"Children get lonely and hungry." (Under 10yrs)

As in previous years, the chart below shows that children and young people are or would be worried about being unable to stay where they live. For other issues, there does appear to be significant fluctuations in their choices. For this survey, additional options were included which may account for these changes. These additional choices are based on last year's findings and have been included to better reflect the children and young people's comments and experiences captured in previous years.

At home, what affects children who live in poverty the most?

Category	2024	2023	2022
Living in a home that is not warm enough	20%	68%	64%
Being worried that they haven't got enough money to stay where they live	66%	71%	69%
Not being able to have friends over	13%	38%	36%
No internet/poor connection	9%	14%	12%
No private space for homework or just chill out	14%	36%	25%
Arguing about money (2024)	16%		
Not having enough food at home (2024)	46%		
Other	1%	2%	1%

Legend: ■ 2024 ■ 2023 ■ 2022

As with many of the responses given throughout the survey, emotional and mental health was commented on throughout this section. Children and young people noted **loneliness, sadness, stress, isolation and dealing with mental health issues**. Other issues frequently raised were a lack of social life and being unable to interact with friends; not being able to focus on school work; being hungry when at home and also having to go **without the basic essentials.**

"Effects their mental and physical health." **(10-13yrs)**

There were also references to 'having to help the family', with comments including the need to take care of siblings or earn money in order to 'help out'. All of these findings align with responses from previous years.

Poverty in the community

"It affects young people as it means they are essentially 'trapped' in their homes. They can't engage in things that would increase their quality of life and general wellbeing and they can't enjoy life and be a child." (19-25yrs)

Poverty and low incomes can affect all aspects of children and young people's lives, including how they are able to interact within their local and wider communities. Their responses to our question about poverty and their community follows similar trends across the years, with **'Living in a place where they don't feel safe to go outside'** being cited as having the greatest impact on children and young people.

Over the last couple of years, children and young people have increasingly expressed concern that they cannot afford to see their friends or family. This option has therefore been included in this year's survey and may account for decreases in other areas, particularly around transport.

"Outside in the community, what do you think would affect children living in poverty the most?"

Legend: 2024, 2023, 2022
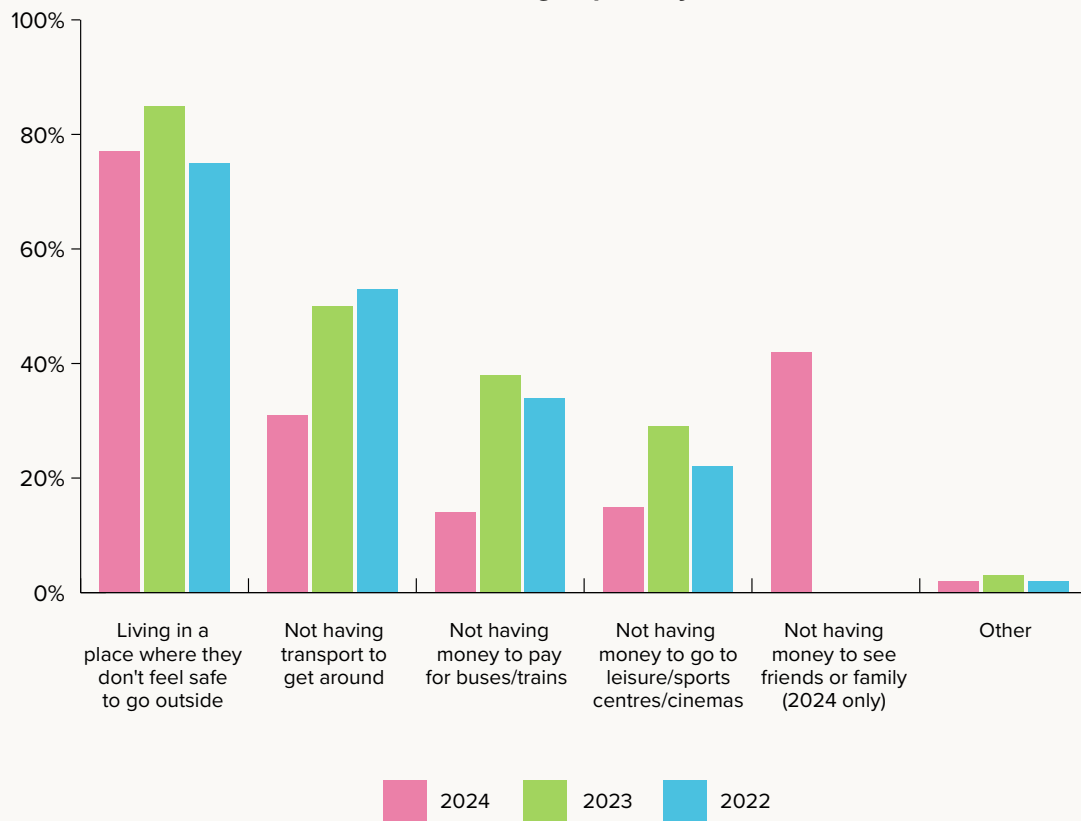
"Feeling unsafe and depressed." (14-16yrs)

It is evident from their responses that poverty can be an isolating experience and as with responses throughout the survey, children frequently noted **'depression'** and **'sadness'**. Comments around isolation focused on not being able to afford to see friends or family members or not feeling safe to go outside because they worried about being bullied or 'gangs'. One 10–13-year-old expressed being ***"very anxious all the time and very tired"***.

"They can't see the people who care about them." (10-13yrs)

Their responses also showed that children and young people's wider family provide a much-needed source of support. This was predominantly emotional support and being unable to see them meant that *"there was no one to talk to or support you"*. For some, extended family members provide financial support, for example through food and clothing.

"If you might want to see your nan and she might be in hospital and you won't have enough money to get there." (10-13yrs)

Leisure and activities

"Rarely go out with my family, sometimes with my friends, but can't do very much to be honest." (14-16yrs)

This year, a new question was introduced around leisure and activities. The survey asked children and young people about their activities during the weekend. We wanted to understand more about whether poverty has an impact on what they do, who they do this with and what barriers or challenges they may face during their leisure time.

We asked *"What do you normally do at the weekend?"* The majority of **children and young people stayed at home or spent time with friends**. For those spending time with friends, this appeared to be predominantly in-person, although a number interacted with their friends through on-line games. Going for **walks or 'playing out'** was also a common activity and where stated, the most common place to do this was 'the park'.

A few children and young people mentioned seeing a parent at the weekends or spending time with extended family members. Playing or watching sport, usually rugby or football was also cited, with around 12% normally doing this over the weekend. There were also a number that stated that they didn't go out at the weekend at all.

Who do you do this with?

% of respondents
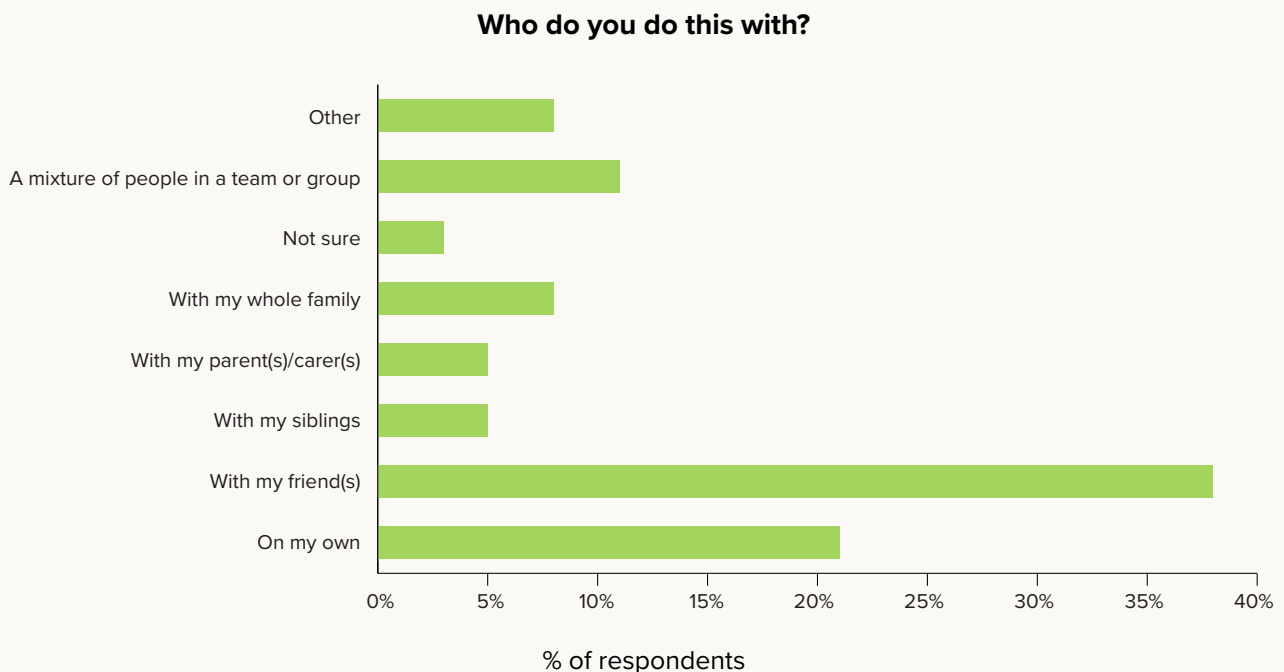
Overall, there was little difference across the age ranges as to who they did their activity with.

The survey asked children and young people *"If nothing was stopping you, what would you like to do at the weekends?"* Given the open parameters of this question, it is interesting that their responses predominantly focused on 2 areas: **spending time with family and spending time with friends.**

"I'd like to have a picnic when my Mum isn't busy with work." (10-13yrs)

For those wanting to spend more time with their family, they stated that their **parents usually work** over the weekends or that they **cannot afford transport** to visit relatives. Many would like to just *"go out for the day"* with their family and this included visiting national parks, beaches, the zoo, nearby towns and cities or simply going for long walks. The costs of travelling to and accessing these places were also identified as prohibitive.

"Go for a nice walk in the countryside or spend time with family who are far away." (14-16yrs)

Children and young people conveyed that seeing friends more often and being able to 'join in' with their friends was important to them. Around **half wanted to be with their friends more often**, but could not afford the transport to do this, or their family *"would not take them"*. The remainder wanted to join their friends on visits into town or to go bowling or to the cinema. Whilst some were able to do this, many again cited transport and activity costs, alongside distance and family work commitments as barriers.

Reasons why you can't do this
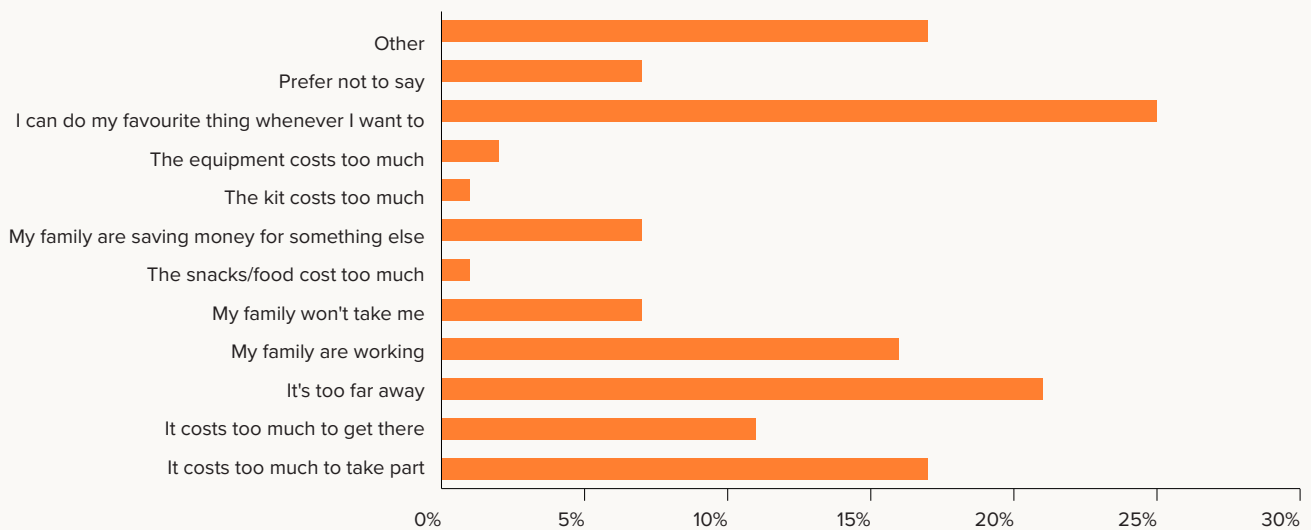
Respondents were asked to choose up to 2 options

As the chart above shows, a significant proportion of children and young people (25%), were able to do their favourite thing whenever they wanted. The majority of these activities were spending time with their friends, 'just hanging out', playing in the park or visiting their homes. However, others choosing this option, preferred to stay inside by themselves.

The desire to take part in organised sporting activities was also expressed. This mainly included rugby and football, but also gymnastics, kayaking, horse riding and climbing. Reasons for being unable to do this were due to the costs of transport, equipment, fees and distance.

Some children and young people expressed an interest in experiencing different places and activities and a small number just wanted 'stress free' time to themselves.

"Honestly, just lay in and not worry about anything." (14-16yrs)

If I was the First Minister......

"Put funding into school equipment and food for the children and families in need, to help them get the education they deserve to let them have a future." (17-18yrs)

Each year, our survey asks children and young people, if they had the role of First Minister, what would they do to stop poverty happening. We describe the First Minister as the *'person who is in charge of the whole of Wales'.*

Across the years, their focus and responses have overall, remained very similar. They would seek to **address bullying; school costs, including uniforms, transport and school meals;** helping people into **work with more and better paid employment** and **increasing childcare** availability.

They also expressed the need to **increase benefits**, have better access to grants for more people and for a greater increase in grant application approvals. One young person would ensure that Universal Basic Income was implemented.

"Support the people who are going through it so they know they are not alone." (10-13yrs)

Aligned with their responses throughout the survey, children and young people would address the issues around **inequity and fairness**, not just financially, but with a specific focus on *'treating everybody the same'*, and with **kindness and respect**.

"Make people more aware to open up and people to stand up more for others, to be there as a whole community. All humans have feelings and lives." (14-16yrs)

"I would be kind to children." (10-13yrs)

Other areas that were important to children included the need for **secure tenancies** and **affordable housing**, ensuring these were within **safe communities and environments**. They also cited the need to **build more homes**, so that everyone has a place to live.

"Improve council estates, families should be able to live safely no matter the situation. Having an unsafe home only makes matters worse." (14-16yrs)

"Build more houses and make sure police patrol everywhere to make the city safe so people can live in peace and are not used for bad things." (10-13yrs)

Once again, our children and young people have been amazing. Children in Wales would like to sincerely thank all the children and young people who took part in this survey. Listening to and actively hearing their voices is at the core of our work.

We will ensure their voices are heard by sharing their comments and findings from this survey with practitioners, professionals and policy makers, both locally and nationally, as well as Welsh Government officials, Cabinet Secretaries, Ministers, and of course, the First Minister.