

Executive summary

Introduction

For the third consecutive year, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned by Kent County Council (KCC) to conduct an independent survey of children and young people, to gather their views and experiences across a range of issues relating to the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes and life in Kent, and to inform planning, service development and review at strategic level, local level and in Kent schools.

The survey aimed to:

- provide information on children and young people's needs and priorities across the county, to inform future planning of services
- assist KCC in meeting their 2010 target to 'listen to young people's views and opinions and develop their ideas to improve education and life in Kent'
- enable comparisons to be made with the findings from the NFER 2006/07 and 2007/08 surveys in Kent and with the Tellus4 national survey.

Methodology

The survey methodology was similar to that used in the Kent NFER 2007/08 survey but also involved more sophisticated statistical data analyses. There were two surveys: one for primary pupils (aged 7-11) and one for secondary and college students (aged 11-19), including those participating in work-based learning (WBL). The content of the surveys was similar to the previous surveys to enable comparisons over time, but with some changes to reflect the latest requirements of KCC and its partner agencies.

Primary schools were offered the opportunity to take part in a paper survey. The survey for 7-11 year olds was administered by teachers in school, at class level. The aim was for one class to represent each year group (years 3 to 6 only), giving a total of four classes per school (and up to 120 pupils per school).

The survey for 11-19 year olds was provided online and administered by staff in schools and other educational establishments. In schools, up to 50 pupils per year group (years 7 to 11/13) were invited to participate, giving a total of up to 250 pupils (for schools without a sixth form) and 350 (for schools with a sixth form). Up to 100 students were invited to participate per college and up to 25 young people were invited to participate per WBL provider.

Overall, the primary survey period ran from 5 October to 27 November and the secondary survey period ran from 5 October to 4 December 2009.

A total of 28,417 children (aged 7-11 years from across 339 establishments) completed the survey on paper and 11,316 young people (aged 11-19 years from across 75 establishments) completed the online survey. Overall therefore, this report is based on the views and experiences of almost 40,000 children and young people in Kent.

The survey responses were analysed and reported as percentages. Factor analysis was used to create 'measures' of each ECM outcome and multilevel modelling was then used to explore the pupil- and school-level characteristics that were associated with these outcomes. The aim of this analysis was to provide KCC with more detailed insights into the five ECM outcomes and to provide evidence to support focused targeting of policies and practice (as well as planning and evaluation) towards appropriate groups of children and young people.

Key findings

Being healthy

Most children and young people in Kent knew how to be healthy and reported participating in a range of healthy behaviours, such as sleeping well, exercising and eating fruit and vegetables. However, over half of the children (aged 7-11) reported that they eat crisps, sweets or chocolate (despite a decrease from last year) and watch lots of television. The majority of young people (aged 11-19) also reported participating in a range of healthy behaviours, although the majority reported they regularly watch television or play computer games for two hours or more. About three quarters of the children (aged 7-11) reported they usually feel happy and about four fifths of the young people (aged 11-19) reported that they enjoy their life. There has been a decrease since last year in the percentage of 11-16 year olds who say they feel very sad or depressed regularly.

Overall, it was evident that there was an association between being less healthy (on the being healthy measure) and being in years 3 to 5 or year 9 and above, or having special educational needs (SEN). In addition, there was an association between a low score on the being healthy measure and higher levels of deprivation in the 7-11 age group and being female or being of Black British or Dual heritage/Mixed origin in the 11-19 year group.

Although the proportion of young people drinking and getting drunk has reduced, a minority of young people continue to report that they regularly drink alcohol, get drunk and smoke. Those (aged 11-19) showing a lower score on the measure of attitudes towards smoking and alcohol included those in year 8 and above, with SEN, eligible for free school meals (FSM) and attending a boys' school or special school/pupil referral unit (PRU).

Overall, the majority of young people feel they are getting enough information about healthy living such as about the effects of alcohol and drugs, smoking and internet safety. However, despite an increase in the post-16 group, the majority of young people did not feel they knew enough about where to get advice about relationships.

Staying safe

Most children and young people in Kent felt safe in school and in their local areas and, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, travelling to and from school. In addition, nine out of ten children (aged 7-11) knew how to stay safe and three quarters of young people (aged 11-19) felt that they made decisions to keep themselves safe. In one aspect of staying safe, sharing personal information over the internet, young people (aged 11-16) were less likely than post-16s in Kent to have done so. Nevertheless, most 11-19 year olds felt that they had received enough information on internet safety and, although a notable minority felt that they had not had sufficient information, the proportion had reduced since last year.

While most children and young people felt safe at school and in the local area, it emerged that children and young people who were eligible for free school meals or those with SEN were associated with a lower score on the measure of how safe they feel at school and in the local area.

From a pre-determined list, the most common safety-related worries for children (aged 7-11) were broken glass, people hanging around and busy roads and traffic. For young people (aged 11-19), knives, drugs and dark places were the most common worries. While around one third of 11-16 year olds and two fifths of post-16s felt that the police were good at addressing anti-social behaviour, there was a level of uncertainty about this among young people. Overall, it was evident that there was an association between feeling less safe (on the safe in the community measure) and being female.

While around half of the children (aged 7-11) said that they had been bullied, there was some indication of an improvement in this as there was a decrease in the percentage of children who said that they had been called names. A slightly higher proportion of 11-16s had experienced bullying over the last year compared to post-16 young people. Of the 11-19s who had experienced bullying in the last year, it was more often verbal than physical. The percentage of young people reporting both verbal and physical bullying had decreased this year. Among children and young people, there was an association between being bullied and being female, being eligible for free school meals, having SEN and living in a deprived area.

Enjoying and achieving

The prevailing view among children and young people was that they liked being at school, though some did not feel this, and most felt that they were doing well at

school. They particularly liked the social aspect of being with their friends and going on trips, but many also valued the cognitive and skills-based elements and, although to a lesser extent, the majority enjoyed the academic aspects of school. Overall, children (aged 7-11) were positive about their teachers in relation to helping them understand but were more circumspect about how far their teachers listened to them or helped children who are good at something to improve, as a notable minority did not agree that this was the case.

While about a quarter of 11-16 year olds and two fifths of post-16s said that they experienced no barriers to learning, the most common barrier identified by those who did, related to other pupils disrupting their lessons. To a lesser extent other barriers related to their relationships with teachers and the amount of feedback and support received. Overall, the evidence suggests that among young people (aged 11-19) there was an association between feeling less positive on the enjoying and achieving in learning measure and being female, eligible for free school meals, or having SEN.

Making a positive contribution

About three in five young people (aged 11-19) had participated in a group activity led by an adult in the last four weeks. In addition to going to the park or a playground, which was most popular, the second most popular activity was attending sports clubs. A notable minority were attending youth clubs and participating in arts-based activities and volunteering, the latter more so for post-16s. The least common activity was participating in an after school club, as was the case last year. Cost and availability are the main barriers to participation but not having someone to attend with and lack of time and accessibility were also factors. Nevertheless, many young people (aged 11-19) say that nothing stops them from participating. The evidence suggests that young people who were female, eligible for free school meals or older young people (year 9 and above) were associated with a reduced tendency to participate in activities.

There was an increase in the percentage of children (aged 7-11) who helped people who were being bullied, put litter in the bin and recycled. Similarly, there was an increase in the proportion of 11-16 year olds who recycled, helped people who were being bullied and helped a neighbour, compared with last year.

Achieving economic well-being

Overall most young people (aged 11-19) thought that they would get the job they wanted in the future. Around half of 11-16 year olds were considering continuing in learning to higher education. The main barriers to their future plans were not having the necessary qualifications, however, a notable minority said that they did not have sufficient information. In the 7-11 age group, the analysis showed that girls and those with a statement of SEN were associated with a lower score on the economic wellbeing measure, while among young people (aged 11-19), those who were eligible

for FSM and those who were recognised for school action on the register of SEN were associated with a lower score on the economic wellbeing measure.

Key statistics

Being healthy

- 68 per cent of children (aged 7-11) and 43 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported eating five or more fruit and vegetables on most days.
- 77 per cent of children (aged 7-11) reported playing sports on most days and 56 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported exercising for an hour or more on most days.
- 6 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported getting drunk at least once or twice a week.

Staying safe

- 36 per cent of children (aged 7-11) reported being picked on or bullied at school and 28 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported being bullied in the last year.

Enjoying and achieving

- 85 per cent of children (aged 7-11) reported enjoying school at least sometimes and 55 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported that they liked being at school.
- 68 per cent of children (aged 7-11) felt they were doing well at school and 80 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) felt they were doing at least quite well at school.

Making a positive contribution

- 57 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported participating in a group activity led by an adult outside school lessons in the previous four weeks.
- 49 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) felt they had a chance to have a say on school issues, at least sometimes.

Achieving economic well-being

- 51 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported that they plan to go to university in the future.
- 63 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) felt they would be able to get the type of job they wanted in the future.

Living in Kent

- 83 per cent of children (aged 7-11) reported that they like living in the area in which they live and 84 per cent of young people (aged 11-16) reported that their area was a good place or an okay place to live.