

# Children's social care questionnaires 2020

What children and young people have told us about their experiences of living in children's homes, in boarding schools and with foster carers



## Summary of findings

After analysing the responses from children who completed our social care questionnaire this year, we have found that:

- more children responded to the survey than last year
- children in secure children's homes, boarding schools and further education residential accommodation generally gave less positive responses than other children
- a lower proportion of children in secure children's homes, boarding schools and further education residential accommodation felt that they were well looked after compared with the other children we asked
- 5% of all children did not feel safe where they lived or stayed and 8% did not feel safe outside of where they lived or stayed
- the proportion of children in foster care who felt that their carers helped them with their learning was greater than the proportion of the other children we asked.

The following report gives details on the full findings.

## Background

We use online surveys to gather views about children's homes, secure children's homes, adoption services, fostering services,<sup>1</sup> residential family centres, boarding schools, residential special schools and further education colleges.<sup>2</sup>

The surveys are for:

- children
- learners
- parents
- foster carers<sup>3</sup>
- staff
- social workers
- other professionals, such as independent reviewing officers.

In 2020, the surveys were open between 10 February and 27 March. We received 41,637 individual responses, 6,985 of which were from children. This was an increase of 419 responses from children compared with last year. Overall, there was an increase of 6,712 responses from those we received in 2019.

The survey was carried out earlier in the year than in previous years. This was so we could ensure that all survey responses were available for each individual setting and ready for the start of the inspection year in April.

The last few days of the survey window overlapped with the first national COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown. However, nearly all of the responses to the survey were submitted before the lockdown began. This means that the survey results are an indicator of views from before and immediately leading up to this period, but not of its subsequent impact.

The survey questions we sent out this year were similar to 2019. This year, we added two new questions for children, which asked them if they felt safe inside and outside of the places they live or stay. In addition, we reviewed the wording of some other questions that we've previously asked and, as a result, made some changes to ensure that those questions relate more specifically to the places that children live or stay. We focused on the most important things we wanted to know about children's experiences.

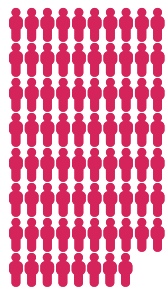
We use the responses, along with other information we have, such as previous inspection findings or any concerns we receive, to decide when to inspect and what to focus on when we do.<sup>4</sup>

This is the sixth year that we have published data and a report about the survey responses. Like last year, we are publishing separately the accompanying data for all adult responses.<sup>5</sup>

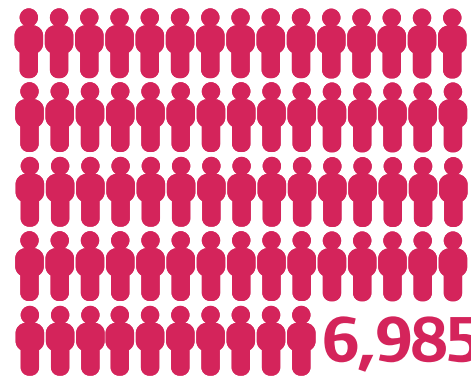
## Who are the children we are talking about?



There are **12 million** children aged 0–17 years in England.



**78,150** are children looked after.<sup>6</sup>



**6,985**

This year, children told us about the places they live or stay,<sup>8</sup> such as their children’s homes, residential special schools or with foster carers.



**72%** of children looked after live with foster carers (56,160).<sup>7</sup>

You can view the accompanying data at:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-questionnaires-2020-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-questionnaires-2020-what-children-and-young-people-told-ofsted).

## What we found in 2020

We asked children questions about the places where they live or stay. The questions we asked children, regardless of their setting, were similar in nature. This means we are able to compare what they have told us about their living experiences across different settings.

We asked all children the following questions:

- Are you well looked after?
- Do you have somebody to talk to if you are feeling upset or worried?
- Do the staff help you with your learning?
- What do you like about being here?
- What would you change?

We also asked children staying in children's homes, residential special schools, foster care, boarding schools and residential further education colleges the following additional questions:

- Do you feel safe where you live or stay?
- Do you feel safe outside of the places you live or stay?

We asked children staying in children's homes, residential special schools and foster care the following additional question:

- Do you feel involved in decisions about your life?

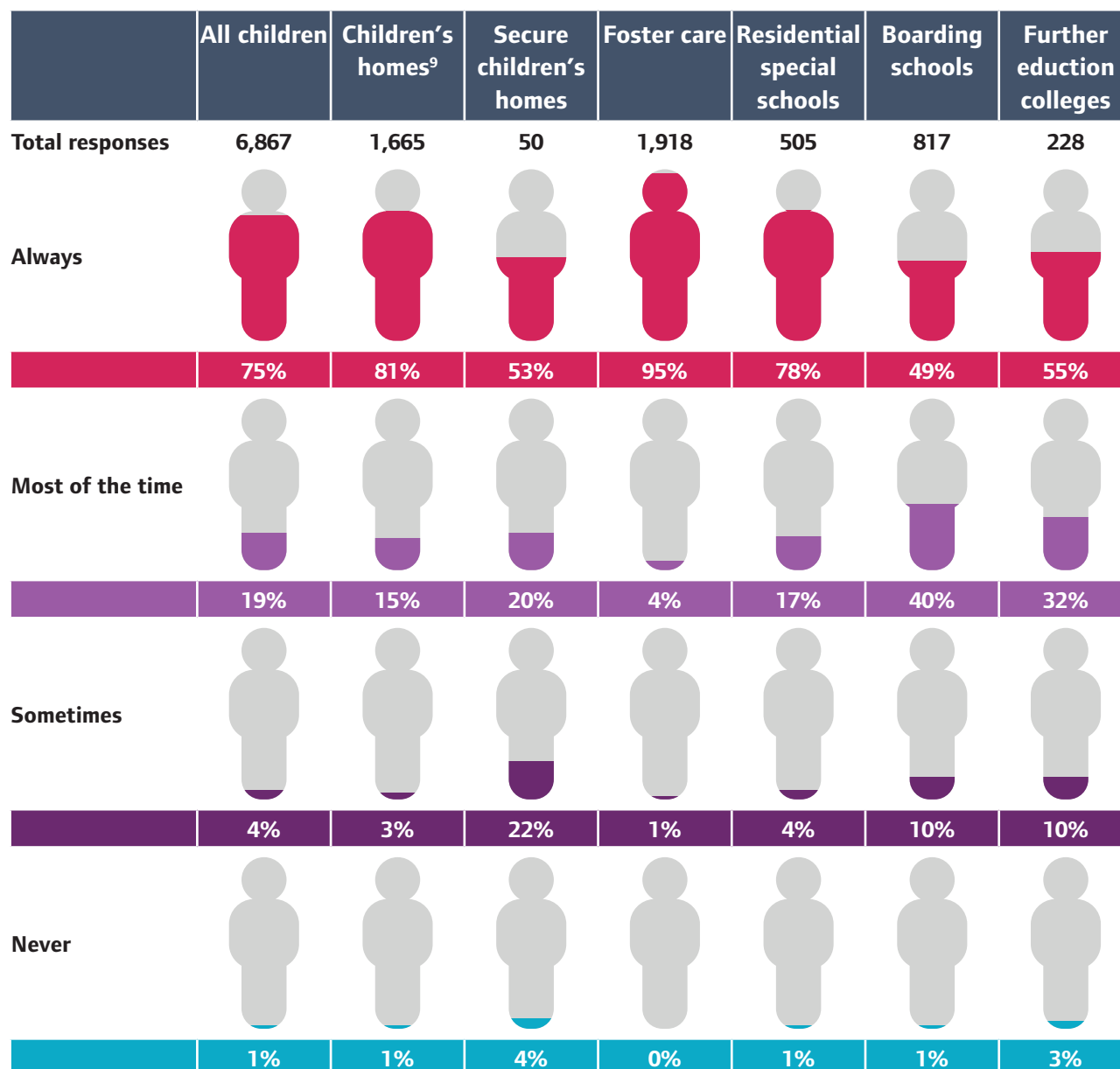
We asked children in secure children's homes the following additional questions:

- Are you helped to understand what is expected of you while you are at the home?
- Are you involved in making plans for when you leave the home?

## Are you well looked after?

For the last four years, we have asked children if they were well looked after by staff/ foster carers. We have found that the combined percentage of children answering 'always' or 'most of the time' in 2020 was very similar to the responses we received in previous years.

Ninety-six per cent of children in children's homes answered either 'always' or 'most of the time' and for those staying with foster carers it was 99%. However, only 73% of children in secure children's homes felt that they were well looked after 'always' or 'most of the time'. For boarding schools, this was 89% of children, and for residential further education accommodation, it was 87%.



## What children told us about being looked after

**'I like the food, activities, staff, room. Also I like the house because it is big and I have got space to do anything by myself.'**

(children's home row 153)

**'Everything. I have a family who loves me very much and I feel very safe here. I get all my favourite foods.'**

(foster care row 29016)

**'I like that the staff try their best in everything they do and they have a great sense of humour.'**

(children's home row 28230)

**'I like learning to be independent and I enjoy all of my activities, my favourite is fitness and swimming. I like being with my friends after school.'**

(boarding school row 1492)

**'I like being here because I have a well-lighted room and homework area, good food, good air movement and ventilation in all rooms. I like that I feel free to talk to my houseparents about issues. I like the many options of recreation.'**

(boarding school row 17579)

**'I love my carers. I am part of the family and the bigger family. I am treated the same as all my cousins and all the grandchildren. I am one of them. I have always been one of them and they are all kind and loving.'**

(foster care row 12748)

**'The freedom, and the care that they give. It's a good balance of the two.'**

(further education college row 1695)

**'It's given me the time to be me and understand myself better, I've been able to build relationships and trust again.'**

(secure children's home row 37906)

**'Their ability to give opportunity to play sport. Winter time we cannot simply go to the field when its wet and boggy and we all want to go to the sports hall but they never have access to it. I'm sure they can open it up to play but I don't think they can be bothered, which I understand but they could still do better, I feel. I used to play football and basketball every day but now it is reduced to average twice a week.'**

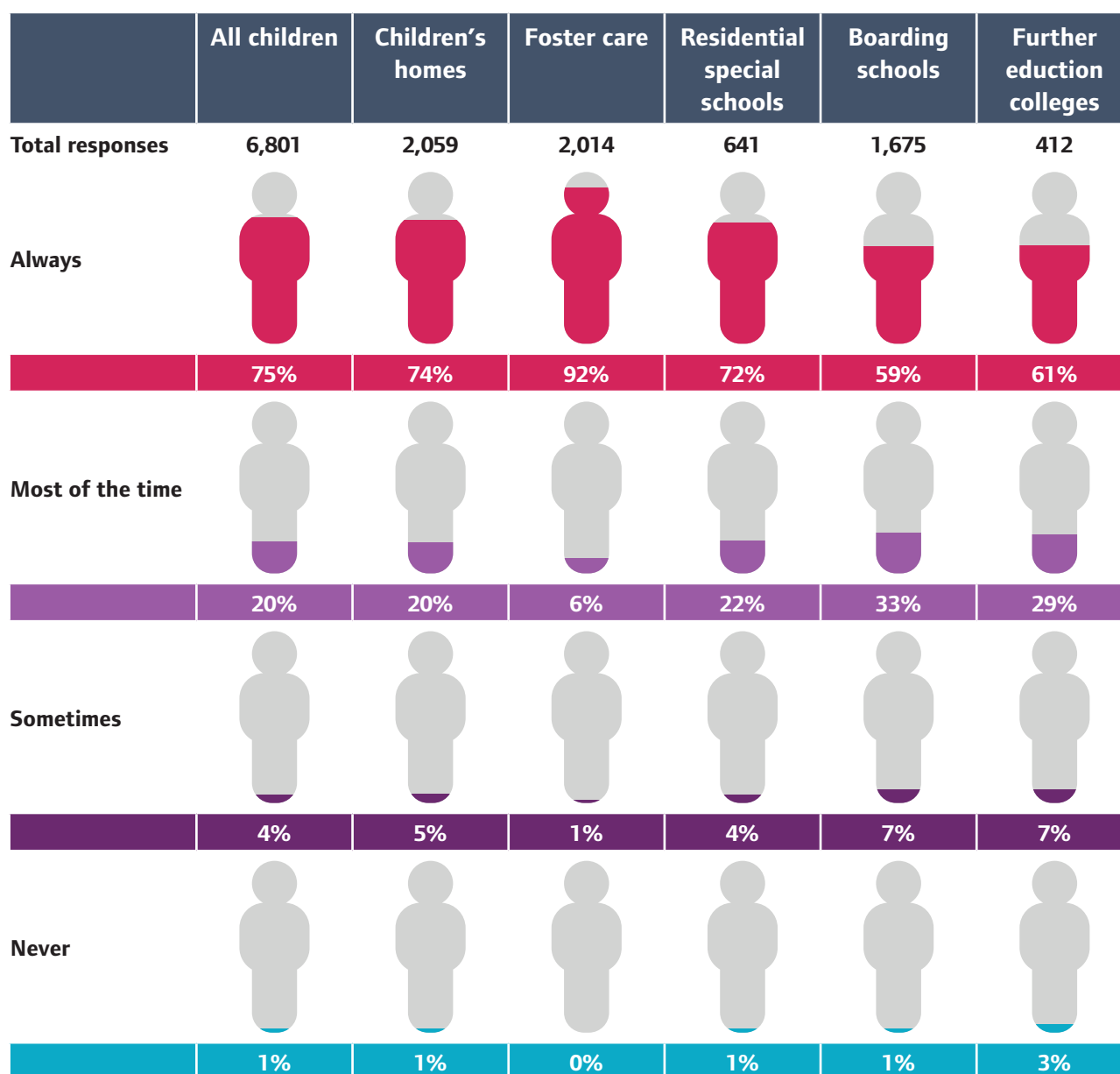
(boarding school row 24657)

**'This doesn't always happen but everyone has been busy and stressed due to large amount of workload, I sometimes get more stressed when I am around my carers because I see them being very on edge.'**

(foster care row 23651)

## Do you feel safe inside of where you live or stay

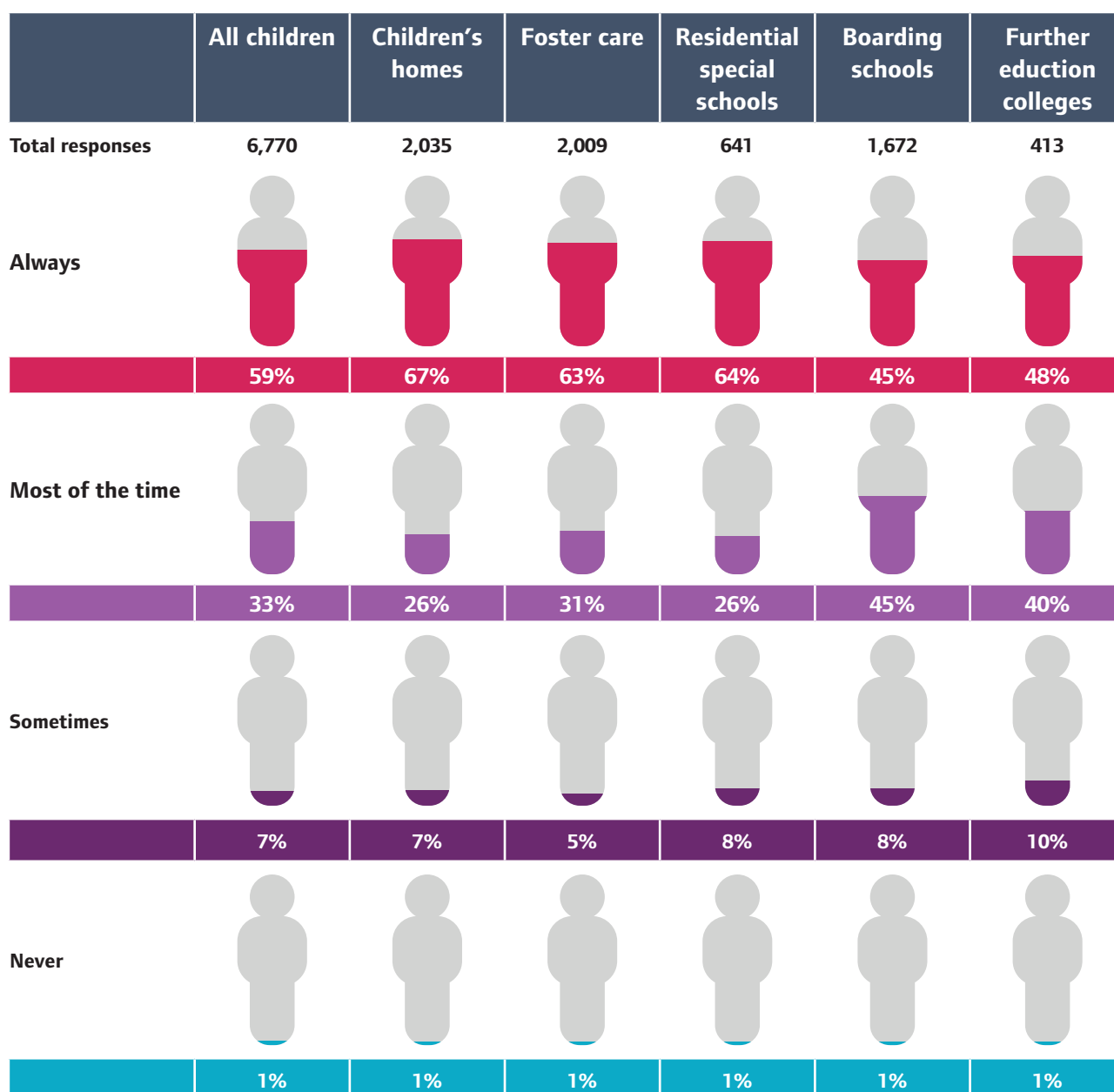
This year, we asked children a new question, if they felt safe inside of the places they live or stay. Ninety-five per cent of children said that ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ they did feel safe inside where they lived. This means that 347, or 5% of children who responded, did not feel safe where they live or stay.





## Do you feel safe outside of where you live or stay?

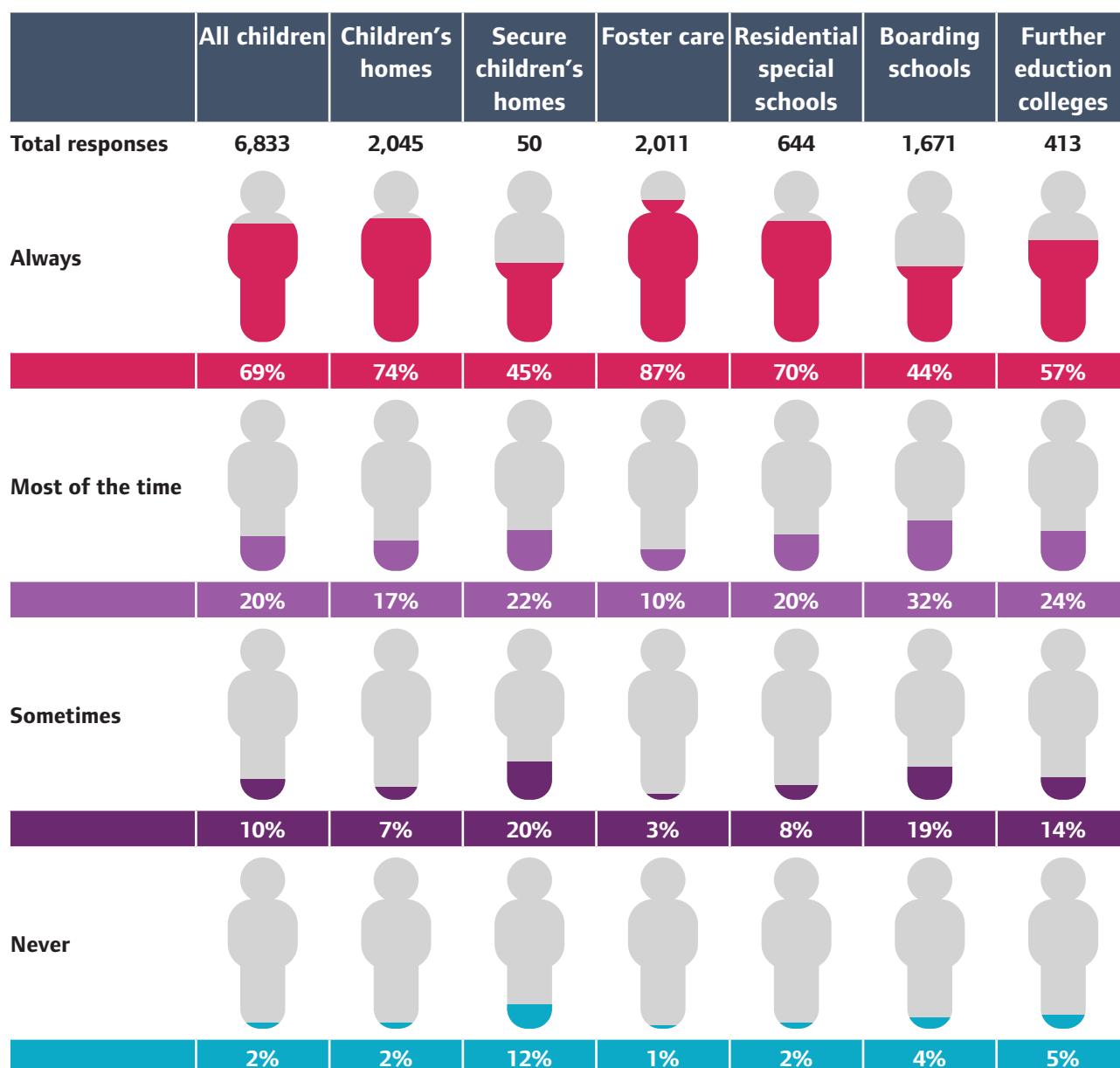
This year, we asked children a new question, if they felt safe outside of the places they live or stay. Ninety-two per cent of children answered that 'always' or 'most of the time' they felt safe when outside of the place they live or stay. This means nearly one in 10 children did not feel safe outside of where they live or stay.



## Do you have somebody to talk to if you are feeling upset or worried?

Eighty-nine per cent of all children responded that there was someone available to talk to 'always' or 'most of the time'. This was very similar to the number last year.<sup>10</sup> For those in foster care, this was 97% of the children who responded.

However, it is concerning that 32% of children in secure children's homes, 23% of children in boarding schools and 19% of children in residential accommodation in further education felt that they only 'sometimes' or 'never' had someone to talk to.



## What children told us about having someone to talk to if they were worried or upset

**'I like the support I get and I like the area. I feel really safe here and I know there is someone I can talk to 24/7.'**

(children's home row 506)

**'The support if I am going through anything and the fact that I am accepted into the family.'**

(foster care row 1302)

**'The support from helpful staff.'**

(secure children's home row 41355)

**'Piece [peace] and quiet from home, I like the food in snack time and dartboard in accommodation. Staff are friendly and kind, and they are all very easy to approach.'**

(further education college row 26719)

**'I like the people around me, that I can talk with them and discuss some issues, have fun, chill, help each other and support. I like that we have [a] very strick [strict] timetable. In the future it will help me to be more organised and independent.'**

(boarding school row 40679)

**'I like that it's chilled out, you can have a laugh with the staff and they are going to be there for ya [you]. I like that they are gona [going to] help me get a better room.'**

(children's home row 516)

**'I am happy here. My carers talk to me and play with me. They help me with my homework and take me out everyday.'**

(foster care row 30600)

**'The staff are really committed to my welfare. I am also encouraged to be as independent as possible and the staff help give me the life skills I will require for the future.'**

(secure children's home row 31224)

**'I like that the staff around the halls are always helpful. I always know that there is someone I could go to if needed.'**

(further education college row 36188)

**'Within residential care it isn't ideal being away from your loved ones but the home have helped me have contact with those and have become extended family. There is nothing I would change.'**

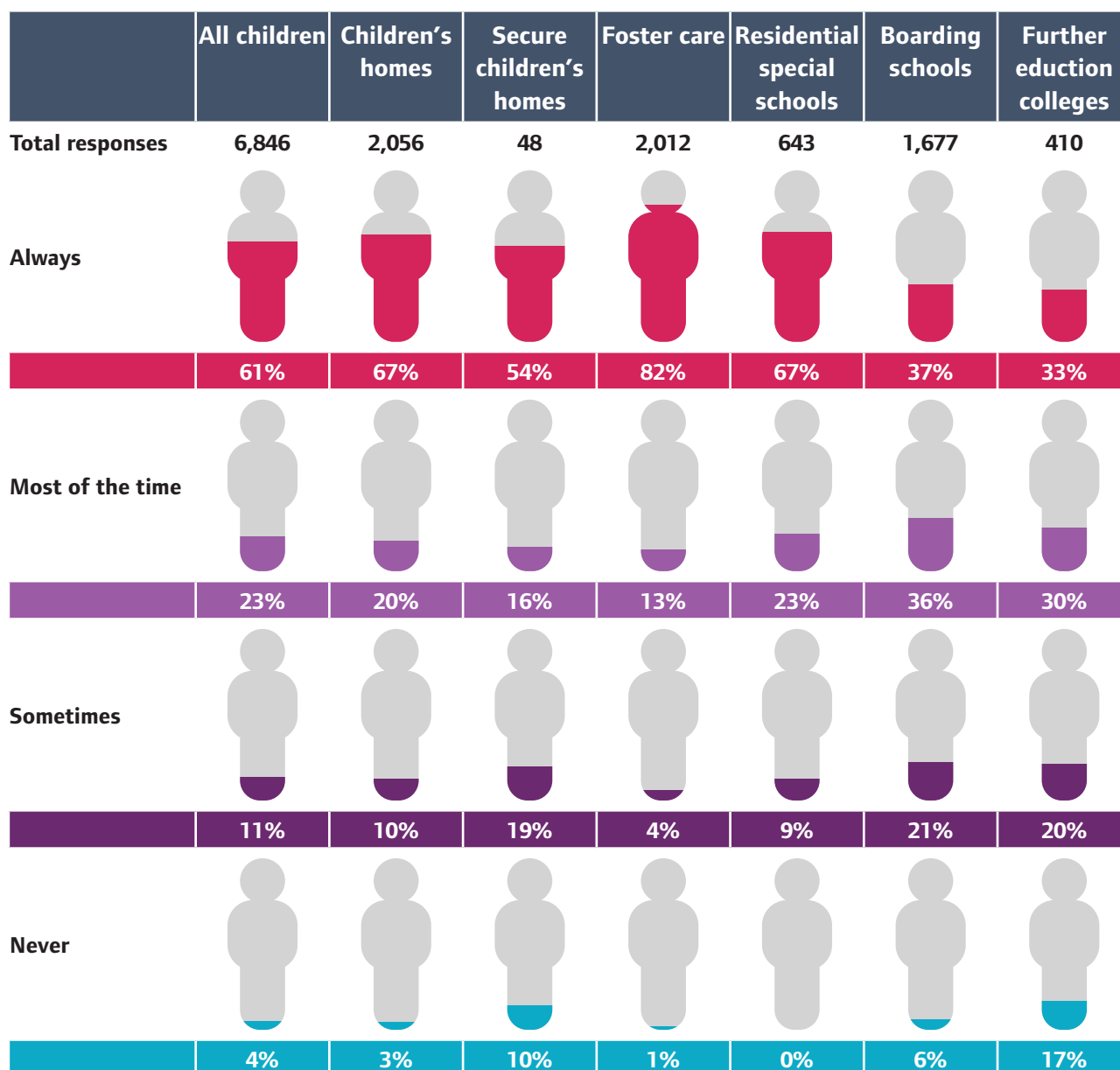
(children's home row 25520)

## Do the staff or carers help you with your learning?

We asked children if the staff or foster carers help and support them to do well in their education. Eighty-seven per cent of children who stay in children's homes and 95% of children who live with foster carers answered either 'always' or 'most of the time'.

The percentage of all children who responded 'always' or 'most of the time' was 84%, which was almost identical to last year's responses.

However, more than a quarter of children in boarding schools and more than a third of children in residential further education accommodation felt that only 'sometimes' or 'never' were they helped to do well with their learning.



## What children told us about being helped with their learning

**'Being with my friends. Having access to teachers who can help with my revision.'**

(boarding school row 41330)

**'All fun stuff I do, it's like home from home and they are constantly helping me learn life skills.'**

(children's home row 57)

**'That I am looked after really well, I am helped with my learning and my emotions and most of all [they] keep me safe. They are kind.'**

(foster care row 15692)

**'They are good at teaching you things and making sure you understand so that you can come out with the best grade as possible.'**

(further education college row 35104)

**'Staff are amazing and friendly and always help me with work and when I'm not feeling great. Lots of stuff to do all the time and I know that I am listened to and able to make a contribution to how the house is run. I love it as much as home.'**

(boarding school row 37272)

**'They are my family. They support me with everything. I wouldn't be where I am now without them in my life, I have learnt so much from them all in my two years. I am moving into my own place and know I have their ongoing support.'**

(children's home row 198)

**'What I like about being here is that I get lots of support from my carers when I'm struggling with homework or other things.'**

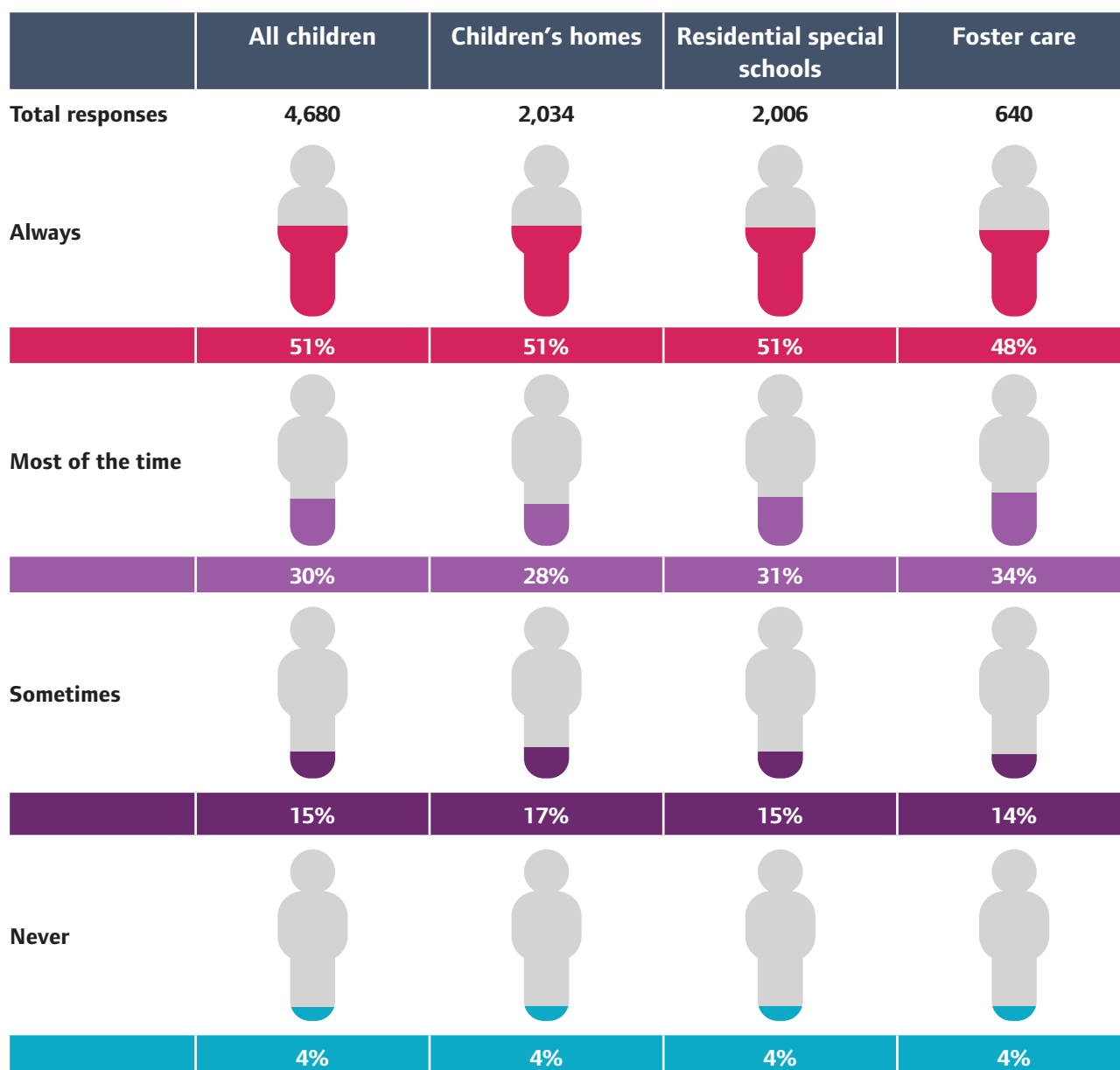
(foster care row 16320)

**'Good school, good education.'**

(secure children's home row 41362)

## Do you feel involved in decisions about your life?

We asked children if they felt involved in decisions about their life. Eighty-one per cent of all children responded that they felt included 'always' or 'most of the time'. This is an increase of 2% from the responses we received last year.



## What children told us about feeling involved in decisions about their life

**'Staff and manager are fair with the decisions and include me in them. It is my home and I can bring my girlfriend and we cook and bake together.'**

(children's home row 80)

**'Nice environment. Carers always respect my decisions. Always do what's best for us. Lovely place to live, we get to go on brill holidays.'**

(foster care row 26836)

**'The children's home feels like home. I always make my decisions. The children's home is fantastic. I like doing cooking.'**

(residential special school row 35481)

**'I like that I am more involved in what happens in my life and that I feel more generally included and happy.'**

(foster care row 13101)

**'I like the respect and support from staff, if I want something to happen staff listen and try there [their] best to make it happen, like the time in my old placement I always wanted a push bike, but I never got one, but when I came to here I spoke to the manager and he listened to me and put an incentive in place and then I get a brand new bike. I was buzzing. I love the staff they are cool and always want to spend time with me.'**

(children's home row 902)

**'My foster carer is a lot more relaxed then previous ones I have had. My foster carer cares about my opinion and fights my corner more than others have. Everyone around where I live is nicer than previous placements.'**

(foster care row 31838)

## What do you like about being here?

We asked children what they liked about the places where they live or stay. We are able to see from the themes below that the answers children gave reflect what they have told us in previous years.

<b>At their children's home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Staff are kind, friendly and supporting</li> <li>■ Having own room and decorating it</li> <li>■ Feeling safe</li> <li>■ Being with friends</li> </ul>
<b>With their foster carers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Feeling part of the family</li> <li>■ Feeling safe and secure</li> <li>■ Having own room</li> <li>■ Going on holidays</li> <li>■ Food</li> </ul>
<b>At their residential special school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Fun activities</li> <li>■ Making friends</li> <li>■ Friendly and caring staff</li> <li>■ Food</li> </ul>
<b>At their boarding school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Living with friends</li> <li>■ Good variety of outdoor activities</li> <li>■ Learning to be independent</li> <li>■ Supportive and kind staff</li> </ul>
<b>At their further education college</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Supportive staff</li> <li>■ Freedom and independence</li> <li>■ Friends and socialising</li> </ul>



## What children like about where they are

**'I like being able to spend time with my friends and other people I get along with at school. I like being able to speak to some of the elders about my problems 'cause they help.'**

(boarding school row 41597)

**'My foster mum is amazing, she has made me feel part of her family. I am well looked [after] and fed well.'**

(foster care row 40801)

**'I really like everything. All the activities, all the staff and the house.'**

(residential special school row 37749)

**'I like the food and I like that I have my own room so I have my own space to relax. I also like that I get lots of support.'**

(children's home row 40854)

**'I like the staff. I like being involved in how the home looks and have taken part in decorating. I like most things about this place. I am given choices.'**

(children's home row 40758)

**'The food is excellent and we are like a family as [the] majority of our food is homemade. Also, I had my bedroom redecorated to my own according and I love it very much because it's MINE!'**

(foster care row 37269)

## What would you change?

We asked children what they would like to change about where they live. We are able to see from the themes below that children have given answers that also reflect those they gave last year.

<b>At their children's home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Better Wi-Fi, longer internet time</li> <li>■ More pocket money</li> <li>■ More phone/tablet time</li> <li>■ Later bedtimes</li> <li>■ Would change nothing</li> </ul>
<b>With their foster carers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Later bedtimes</li> <li>■ More phone/tablet/computer time</li> <li>■ More independence/freedom</li> <li>■ Able to have a pet</li> <li>■ Change nothing</li> </ul>
<b>At their residential special school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Food</li> <li>■ More freedom/fewer rules</li> <li>■ Better Wi-Fi</li> </ul>
<b>At their boarding school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Food</li> <li>■ More access to mobile phone</li> <li>■ Better Wi-Fi, longer internet time</li> <li>■ More freedom and later curfew times</li> </ul>
<b>At their further education college</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Food</li> <li>■ More independence, especially with cooking own food</li> <li>■ Later curfew</li> <li>■ More evening activities</li> </ul>

## What children said they thought could be changed

**'My coming in times, I want to be able to stay out later with my friends.'**

(children's home row 816)

**'I wouldn't change anything to be honest.'**

(children's home row 1179)

**'There is so many rules sometimes I feel like it's not as much like our homes as it could be.'**

(boarding school row 2230)

**'Some of the boundaries in my placement like bed times and my phone.'**

(children's home row 3791)

**'More options to cook for yourself and not have to go to lunch/tea on weekends.'**

(boarding school row 25064)

**'The wifi and have more things to do like playing a game and some more table tennis.'**

(further education college row 28630)

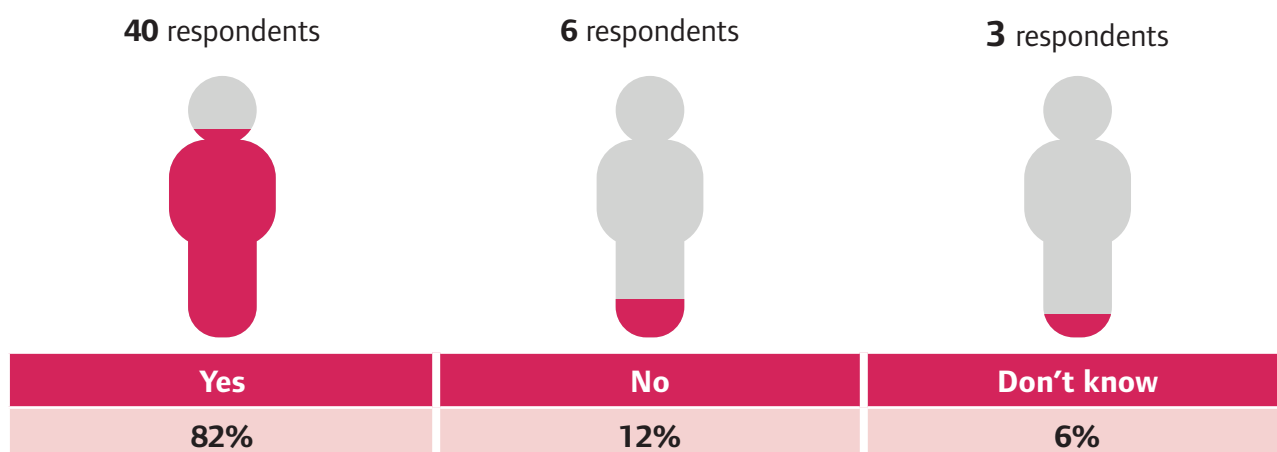
**'I would like a bit more freedom such as having a phone when I go out on my bike and stuff.'**

(foster care row 27085)

## Secure children's homes

### Are you helped to understand what is expected of you while in the home?

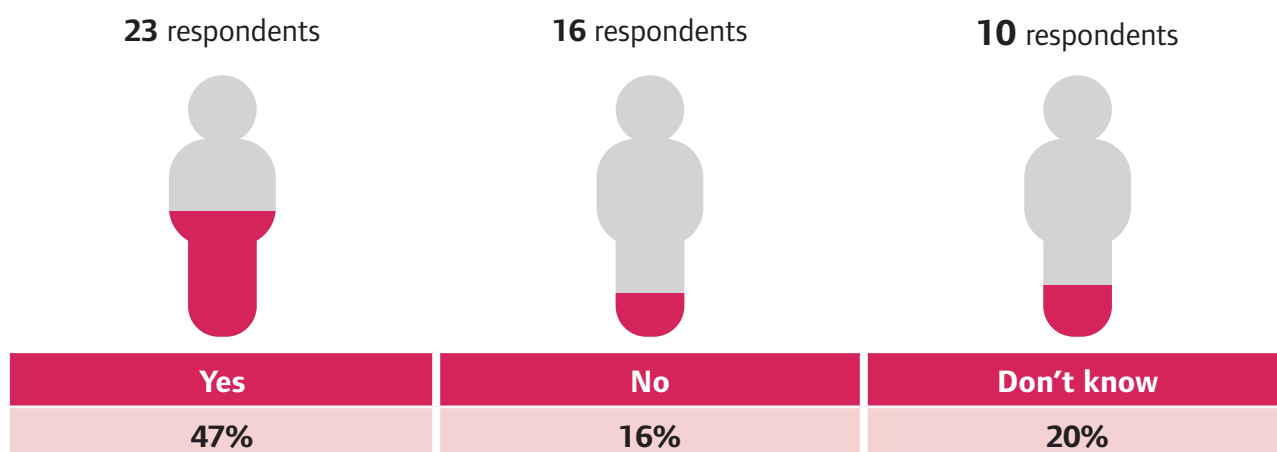
We asked children who stay in secure children's homes if they are helped to understand what is expected of them while they are in the home. Eighty-two per cent of children said they did understand. However, 18% said they didn't understand or didn't know.



Total number of respondents: **50**

### Are you involved in making plans for when you leave the home?

We asked children who stay in secure children's homes if they were involved in making plans for when they left the home. More than half of children answered 'no' or 'don't know' when asked about making plans for their future.



Total number of respondents: **50**

Thank you to everyone who has completed our surveys and shared their views with us.

## References

- 1 'Adoption services' includes voluntary adoption agencies and local authority adoption services. We sent the surveys to regional adoption agencies where they now carry out some local authorities' adoption functions. 'Fostering services' includes independent fostering agencies and local authority fostering services.
- 2 Under the Care Standards Act 2000, Ofsted has the powers to inspect these types of services. There is no law to say that children, staff and professionals have to share their views with us through this survey. It is optional, and we highly value the information we receive.
- 3 We do not inspect individual foster carers. We inspect the local authorities and agencies that recruit them.
- 4 For more on how we use information, see our privacy notice: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notice/social-care-ofsted-privacy-notice](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-privacy-notice/social-care-ofsted-privacy-notice).
- 5 The data throughout the report has been rounded to the nearest whole number. This means that some percentages may not add up to exactly 100%.
- 6 'Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019', Department for Education, 2019; [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019).
- 7 'Children looked after in England including adoption: 2018 to 2019', Department for Education, 2019; [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2018-to-2019).
- 8 In relation to children's homes and fostering services, the responses from children do not solely relate to children looked after. A number of children who are not looked after receive services, for example, children who receive short breaks or are placed under other arrangements. Most users of short breaks are children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities but other children in need may also receive short breaks. The breaks usually have two aims: to enable the child to participate in fun, interesting and safe activities and to provide a break for parents.
- 9 Children's homes data includes the views of children staying in children's homes, secure children's homes and residential special schools registered as children's homes.
- 10 We have amended this question this year to make it clearer. Last year, we asked 'do you have someone to talk to if you were having problems'.