

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO TACKLING ENGAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE

A Brief Overview of Context and Methodology

In 2022, City of Edinburgh Council's Children's Services Partnership identified a need to address a reduction in school engagement and attendance by children and young people in some parts of the city, exacerbated by the pandemic. They agreed to invest in better understanding the underlying barriers to engagement and attendance, in order to find more effective ways of supporting young people and their families.

As part of this work, there was an interest in exploring how partnership working between youth work (both statutory and third sector) and schools can help young people to engage in learning. With this in mind, over the course of the 2022-3 school session, the senior leadership team at Gracemount High School and representatives of three local youth work teams took part in a collaborative enquiry, facilitated by YouthLink Scotland that began with youth workers hearing and recording the perspectives of local young people (targeted because they were struggling to engage in school but had established relationships with local youth workers). The aim was to better understand their views on barriers and enablers of school attendance / learning engagement, and inform a review of partnership working between youth work and school. The following year (2023-24 school session), this work was extended to Craigroyston and Liberton, aligned with Edinburgh City Council's development of a 'Team Around the Learning Community' approach. In Craigroyston, youth work teams were also able to gather the views of parents as well as young people.

The overarching inquiry question guiding the work was:

How can we (young people, parents and carers, formal education team and youth work practitioners) work together to ensure that all young people in our learning community can access and enjoy engaging and effective learning experiences?

Youth workers and schools worked together to identify young people in Primary 6-S3 who were struggling to engage in school but had established relationships with youth workers. Youth workers sought the relevant permissions and were responsible for carrying out semi-structured interviews with young people (and with parents in Craigroyston). In all, 72 young people took part in interviews with 9 third sector youth work organisations across 3 learning communities. Almost all were in the P6-S3 age group, although a few were older or younger.

Interview questions were developed by youth workers and participating schools and covered the following territory:

- Young people's view of themselves as learners
- Learning at home, with your family
- Learning experiences in school
- Learning experiences in youth work
- Learning experiences in other community settings

YouthLink Scotland, the national youth work agency, took responsibility for reviewing the interview scripts and collating the evidence gathered. Findings were subsequently validated by all participating youth work teams. Detailed evidence from each learning community is published here (page 6-50), and synthesized in the summaries overleaf (page 3-5 – note the parental views are from Craigroyston only in the synthesized data).

It is important to keep in mind, when reviewing this data, that the young people and families had positive relationships with youth work teams, and often much less positive relationships with schools. The data offers valuable perspectives from seldom heard voices, rather than scientifically sampled / representative views of a whole learning community.

A short overview of the process can be found here: [A Rights-Based Approach to School Attendance and Learner Engagement](#)

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Summary Outputs

Young People's Perspectives - Examples

Learning at home

"I learn from my dad. He's more encouraging than teachers – I feel like my dad respects me more."

"I learn from my mum how to be independent. I've also learned how to be creative from her."

"Home is my non learning time."

"I cannae be doing any work at home – when you are off school, you are off school, no such thing as learning at home."

"I struggle to learn [at home] because Mum is often needing me to help her with household tasks – cooking, personal care."

Learning at school

"If I'm unsure of something or I don't know where to go or what to do, I'm more likely just not to go – this is why I sometimes skive off school. I know it's wrong, but I'd rather just get out of the situation."

"I get anxiety in the classroom. When I feel it coming, I mess about so I can get kicked out."

"I'm only in class for 5 periods a week... You can get depressed if you are out of school all day, just sitting by yourself. You are on your own."

"In primary, you get help for things like dyslexia but not for mental health. Primaries don't think about mental health. I'll give that to my school now, they have a lot more support to offer."

Learning in youth work setting

"I work better in a community centre. I feel relaxed and happier. a better place to learn."

"I have been given the opportunity to volunteer at the [youth work group] and I enjoy the responsibility."

"I come [to youth work] because it has structured activities and I can see I'm getting better in my skills..."

"Youth workers give me time and space when I need to so I can learn at my own pace."

Living and learning in this community

"I don't feel safe in this area... I worry about getting battered, bullied and homophobia. There is a lot of that around."

"I don't feel safe here because of the people. A lot of them bully me. It makes me feel nervous, sad and worried."

"I go to the West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre for football or community meals – it feels like people know me – that's nice."

"I don't really have any hobbies outside of the house."

"Outside of school, I don't really do any activities during the week."

Parents' Perspectives - Examples

Learning at home

"His lack of concentration gets in the way [of learning at home] – often he struggles to focus and just wants to move on to something else – that makes it hard."

"It's shocking. [My child is] not in school – doesn't leave the house, inside all the time."

"I'm not a teacher and I struggle with dyslexia [like my child] so I'm not able to help."

"They love one to one time, attention, patience, understanding their needs and no judgement."

Learning at school

"It feels like the curriculum is aimed at one type of learning but there are actually many different types of learners in the classroom."

"His timetable being reduced due to his behaviours. I feel his behaviours were because he struggled with the learning and he was not getting the support for this."

"I wish the school saw him as an individual and supported him as an individual, really trying to know what his needs are and what would help him."

"There are some teachers that [my child] has built up a really trusting relationship with – and that helps her learn."

Learning in youth work setting

"She can be herself [in the youth work setting] because she feels safe there and likes everyone there."

"Youth workers are fun and kind and they do fun things with them, but they make sure they are learning too."

"He has started volunteering in a youth group, giving him a focus in life and helping him in course choices and college."

"Youth workers] never give up on [my children]. They are someone they can rely on to listen."

Living and learning in this community

"I think it is hard for him living and learning in this area due to some of the challenges. As a mum, I worry about ...the issues around criminality, drugs..."

"I do worry about him in the community, because I know what his personality is like, and he can get involved in the wrong crowd of people."

"I haven't managed to get him into any clubs for football because no one ever gets back to me."

"It's really hard trying to fit in – there's a lot of trouble here, it's hard to keep them away from that."

Meeting needs of young people in our learning community to support their wellbeing and improve educational outcomes...

Young people say better would be:	Parents say better would be:
• More – and earlier access to - <u>personalised</u> emotional support from a range of trusted adults (school, youth work, therapeutic services) • Improved relationships with teachers • Higher teacher-pupil ratios / more PSAs for classroom support • Shorter school day, more / longer breaks during the school day • More <u>personalisation</u> and choice – and more access to different contexts for learning, encompassing community-based and outdoor learning opportunities with youth work. • More emphasis on practical learning / 'real life' learning in school and with partner <u>organisations</u>. • More opportunities for learning outside of school (<u>Liberton</u> and <u>Gracemount</u>)	• More – and earlier access to - individually tailored and relational support to meet young people's needs (from teachers, youth <u>workers</u> and therapeutic services). • Training and peer-peer coaching for teachers to support relational practice. • More active, <u>practical</u> and creative learning opportunities for young people, including learning in community with youth workers. • Improved and more regular communication with parents about young people's progress

Even more effective partnership working to support wellbeing and improve educational outcomes for young people in our learning community...

Community Youth Work Partners say better in partnership working would be:	School staff say better in partnership working would be:
• More and longer-term resource in place for partnership support (young people need time to build trusted relationships) • More teachers have a better understanding of the youth work approach and its value and impact – joint training? • Improved communication between partners and school - in particular, opportunities for face-to-face planning and review. • There is a consistent policy for reporting safeguarding concerns in the context of partnership work. • Partners have access to <u>appropriate physical</u> space to use in school.	• More and longer-term resource in place for partnership support. • A guide or interactive map of partners in communities- and their 'offer' to schools to ensure schools are aware of the range of support available. • A collaborative approach to consistently setting specific, measurable goals for partnership work so that there is a shared understanding of these. • A more robust, consistent approach to jointly measuring impact of partnership work. • A more effective approach to quality assurance in partnership working.

Draft synthesis of responses (Craigroyston only)

Young people express...

- A desire to learn – excitement about learning.
- A strong link between feeling safe and being able to engage in learning.
- Strong connections with friends and family (and community for some).
- Worries and anxiety (including worries about community safety for some).
- Some - a wish to be in school more of the time (often sent home / sent out of class / on part time timetables).
- Others a wish to be in school less of the time.

Young people value...

- Positive relationships with youth workers.
- Safe spaces to learn and socialise at home and in their communities.
- Freedom to make choices about what and how they learn.

Parents and young people express...

- Anger – feeling misunderstood (or that their children are misunderstood) by school.
- Frustration – A feeling that (some) teachers don't care or don't want to be supportive.
- Feeling stuck – because needs not met.
- A need for more personalised support for wellbeing in school
- Feelings that school learning could be better tailored to meet young people's needs

Parents and young people value:

- Trusted relationships with youth workers – and with some individual teachers / school leaders in the school setting..
- Support for learning, particularly PSAs.
- Support with social and emotional wellbeing from youth workers (and other partners) in both school and community context.
- Personal and skills development that young people access through youth work.
- New learning experiences that their young people access through youth work.

Parent express...

- Worries about their children's safety in their community.
- Appreciation of opportunities for young people to learn and socialise safely in community settings.
- Worries about their children's struggles to engage in school.
- Worries about their children's ability to focus / concentrate.
- A vicious circle of negative interactions with the school which leave their children feeling increasingly excluded / left behind.

Parents would like...

- More regular and balanced communication with schools (focus is too often negative).
- Teachers with strong relational skills to support the development of teachers who don't demonstrate these consistently.

Liberton and Gracemount Consultation with Young People.

Contributors to the consultation

24 young people in total participated in semi-structured interviews in the context of established relationships with youth workers in 2024. Data from a further 21 young people gathered in 2022-23 from Gracemount High School is also included. In the summary below, responses are colour coded as follows:

Primary school out of scope – 1 (Liberton cluster)

Primary school in scope – 1 (Liberton Cluster)

Target group high school 2024 – 8 Gracemount HS, 13 Liberton HS

Target group high school 2022/23 – 21 Gracemount HS

School leaver 16+ -1 (Liberton HS)

Living and Learning in our community

Some young people express negative opinions about where they live:

Gracemount
<i>Community is dodgy – older people – start on you for no reason just cos of who you are with. I didn't feel safe when someone was going around robbing houses in the local neighbourhood. We sometimes muck about at Cameron Toll, but I've been barred. It's hard – people being annoying. I don't want to take part in anything extra because of who I might see when I am out and about</i>
Liberton
<i>If I could choose another place to live I probably would The area is a bit rough. I only feel a bit worried if I'm walking about at night on my own.</i>

Others are positive about their experience of living in their community

Gracemount
<i>It's OK – it's fun [living and learning here]</i>
Liberton
<i>I feel safe in Gracemount / Gilmerton but not Pilton. Most areas up here, I'm fine. I can't go to Niddrie or the Fort I live in a nice area – I feel safe in my house, in my school, in my friend's house I feel safe everywhere I feel most safe at home, but I can go anywhere – I can also go to the Fort I love where I stay. I have friends who live in my street. I feel safe everywhere. I feel safe pretty much anywhere. Minted – I run the community</i>

Activities that young people told us they access in the community include boxing, football, dance, karate and cheerleading and gymnastics.

I play football for Edinburgh South, division 1.

I go to football like 4 times a week – my coach and my friends help me progress my skills and my confidence. The environment makes it enjoyable. School is more stressful and uptight. My coaches are more relaxed and want you to have fun.

Football training

I have football three times a week – we go to Peffermill with Edinburgh Uni. We learn about football and other things like racism.

I go to a basketball club in our school and a choir club. I also go to a racquets club in school.

There's this thing I go to with Edinburgh Uni. It's a mix of activities that can be between school and football – things like architecture, looking at stadiums, that kind of thing. You're learning about what other stuff you can do that is connected to football – doing football isn't just doing the sport, you're learning stuff as well and there is more to it.

Local community organisations that young people say they attend include Valley Park Community Centre, OAH, Goodtrees, Edinburgh Young Carers; Inch Community; Inch House.

I think there are lots of opportunities in the community.

A significant number of young people say they are bored / there is nothing to do in their community (this section is very different from Craigroyston where young people had access to many activities)

Gracemount <i>Life is boring – lots of spare time.</i> <i>I don't do any other activities where I learn.</i> <i>I don't really have any hobbies outside of the house.</i> <i>Outside of school, I don't really do any activities during the week.</i> <i>[I like to learn about] not really.</i> <i>I don't do much with my spare time.</i> <i>There aren't many opportunities for me to learn within my community.</i> <i>It's shite there's nothing to do.</i> <i>There's stuff that happens at Gracemount High School but in our area there's nothing to do.</i>
Liberton <i>There's nothing to do in my area</i> <i>In the community there's nothing really</i> <i>Shite. Nowt to do.</i> <i>I don't know what there is [to do in my area]</i> <i>I don't go out in the community – I really only game and watch YouTube at home</i> <i>I wish there was more stuff to do.</i> <i>Covid killed everything for good.</i>

Many also talk about activities they used to do and enjoyed, but have stopped doing:

I used to go to rugby, but I gave it up as I wasn't enjoying it anymore.
I used to go to lots of clubs – dancing, judo – I think I'm going to start going to a youth club.
I used to go to Goodtrees but now it's horrible people and all the same people that go.
We could go to Goodtrees if we wanted, but it's quite closed off by other people that go.
I used to go to Goodtrees and do stuff there that was like learning but I haven't been in a while.
I used to go to gymnastics and dancing. I wanted to find a hobby. I tried cheerleading and it just wasn't for me.
I used to go to cadets, but I stopped going because there was too much standing involved and I was struggling physically.
I used to go to Rainbows and Brownies. I did Guides for a wee while, but it was different, and I didn't like it.
I used to do a boys' art group but that was ages ago, and I don't remember much about it."
I used to go to dance, but the teacher was a bitch. She made a point of asking me about the fees when it was my dad that was supposed to pay it. My Dad went radge. I was only like 11 or 12.
I tried loads of clubs when I was younger – I tried everything because it was part of the after-school club that my mum and dad put me into because they were working – most of it was based in school.
I tried stuff like Karate and Judo when I was younger...but I never stuck at it. I used to like Rainbows and Brownies as well. You just stop going after a while."

Others say that, for various reasons, they just don't want to take part in organised activities.

I'm not really interested in taking part in anything right now. I just like being with my friends.
You can't start activities like dance, cheer or football at this age. You need to go from when you are young and be good at it.
I've not being doing my hobbies at the moment – I feel low – I have low motivation.
I stopped going because of a group of boys.
I'm not sure I want to do anything else right now.

A number of the young people express worries and anxieties about family and school

Gracemount
<i>I don't feel safe, my mum is dying.</i> <i>My dad is not coming back from holiday.</i> <i>I worry about what I'll do when I leave school.</i> <i>I worry about my family and the future.</i> <i>I worry about not getting good enough qualifications.</i>
Liberton
<i>When I am in school, I worry about Mum being OK.</i> <i>Mum has some issues, but people don't really know that. We don't really get on that well.</i> <i>I worry about random things because of my anxiety.</i> <i>I do get nervous around big groups of girls. I'd maybe be worried about getting into a fight, but I try not to get involved in that kind of thing.</i> <i>I used to worry about everything but not any more.</i>

What we enjoy

Young people talked positively about a range of interests and things they enjoy doing and learning about in their communities, most frequently spending time with friends and family, gaming, sports, music and going to local youth groups.

Gracemount Being with family <i>I'm happiest when I'm with my mum. I enjoy going out with my dad. I like spending time with my mum.</i> Being with friends <i>I'm happiest when I'm out – just kicking about I feel happiest when I am out with my pals I'm happiest being around the right people I am usually out with friends I like to go out with my pals I like being with my friends.</i> TV / Netflix/ Gaming <i>I like to watch Love Island and YouTube videos Netflix Playstation Gaming</i> Sport <i>Swimming I like to play football out in my garden Playing and watching football I like dancing. Going out on my bike I like horses</i> Other <i>In the car driving I like to go to the shows</i>
Liberton Being with family <i>I'm happiest being out with my mum and sister. It makes me happy spending time with family. Mum especially. Being in my house with my family. Helping mum. I'm happiest at my Gran and Grandad's cos they spoil me.</i> Being with friends <i>I'm happiest being around friends and doing things with them. I'm happiest when I'm with my friends or having sleepovers. I'm happiest with my friends – definitely – it makes me happy being with my pals, I never really argue with them. Gossip. I'm at my happiest with my pals. We go for walks on Sundays – me and my pal – to refresh.</i> Gaming /Netflix <i>I spend most of my time gaming, chilling out Gaming</i>

Gaming

*I am at my happiest when I am online calls with friends that I have met online through gaming.
I am happiest when I'm in my room by myself, watching Netflix. My house is really busy, so I just like that space to myself.*

Sport

I love football

I like going to football matches

I love animals – we have a dog

I play football for Edinburgh South – I love football

Football makes me happy – I'm happy that Scotland has qualified for the Euros.

Doing mud courses – that sounds funny but it's so much fun.

I like to play tennis, football and golf

Other

I like getting to know you stuff.

I like learning about history.

I like learning what's going on in my community so if something bad happens I know which areas to avoid.

Shagging; selling vapes

Getting melted in a bando, snorting C, smoking weed, fighting, going to the gym

I love to draw and write; playing with my friends makes me really happy

Our experience of learning at home

For most young people interviewed from Gracemount HS, home is seen as 'non learning time'.

Gracemount

Home is my non learning time.

I don't learn at home. It's bullshit that you learn something new every day – every day is the same as the day before!

I don't learn at home – I don't want to learn at home except cook etc.

I learn about myself – how to cope with stuff.

If we go out with my sister, we do sometimes learn – she talks about stuff with us.

I watch TikTok.

Exercise would help me learn at home.

NB this is different from last year's Gracemount interviews:

I enjoy reading and have about 200 books at home."

"I like to learn at home and my family often help out. I feel more relaxed."

"I prefer learning things out of school that will help me get a job."

"My dad tells me stuff about the world – he shows me practical stuff like cutting wood and camping."

"I learn from my dad. He's more encouraging than teachers – I feel like my dad respects me more."

"My dad taught me how to fish – he's the person I like to learn from most."

"I learn from my dad – he talks about stuff that interests me and gives me books. I learn what I want to learn."

"I'm learning from my brother who is a plumber – I want to work with him."

"I coded a server for a game called 5M. I got help from my friend who showed me what to do".

"I have a couple of friends I learn from – they teach me stuff that I might have missed."

"My uncle taught me how to paint."

"I learn from my mum how to be independent and how to love myself. I've also learned how to be creative from her."

"I learned my values, respect, manners at home."

"With my friends I've learned how to be myself?"

What helps me learn...

"I learn from YouTube videos".

"I learn a lot from online. I watch Instagram reels".

"I learn stuff from TikTok – I learned about Communism from TikTok."

"I enjoy duo lingo to learn other languages, particularly Polish to speak to my friend's grandma. I can go at my own pace and repeat it as many times as I need or want to. It can be embarrassing asking teachers to keep repeating stuff."

"YouTube videos are good for learning – especially for Maths – there is a really good guy who explains it really well."

More of the young people interviewed from Liberton talked positively about learning with family.

Liberton

I feel safest at home with mum.

I feel safe in my house, my home, my room.

I feel safe at home as I have all my family with me.

I like learning about planes / aviation – I would like to be a pilot someday. I am also always learning new gaming skills.

I like to learn through my computer games... I want to join the army. I want to protect people. My uncle was in the cadets, and I'd like to join.

I like watching nature programmes with my dad and learning about what animals do. I watch stuff and tell my mum random stuff – she's always saying, 'how do you even know that?!'.

I like learning about things to do with future and things about crime – mostly from TV shows.

I like learning about make-up and beauty stuff – either from my sister or from TikTok

I learn communication skills – how to speak to people.

I'm learning how to take care of myself – to prepare me for the future when I move out. I cook, make stir-fries, do washing.

I enjoy learning about cleaning – mum shows me what to do.

I learn how to cook my own dinner and use the oven – life skills.

We learn social skills on the weekends when we are out.

I learn about normal everyday stuff – doing washings and using the dishwasher, that kind of stuff

I learn online – mostly through YouTube videos, livestreams etc.

Having access to the internet and a device [helps me learn at home]

From worksheets or from the iPad

I have a friend that I met online – she is from the US, and we like to research planes/aviation together.

Mum helps me manage money; dad helping me to get a job.

Sometimes I'll watch YouTube videos with Mum.

I enjoy learning about characters as I like to draw. Sometimes I use YouTube to help me learn how to draw.

I get reading homework from school. I mostly read to myself but sometimes I read to Mum and Y.

I try to practice my handwriting. I need help with my handwriting. Sometimes words muddle around.

Noone really supports me at home in that way.

I used to play computer games with my dad but now he says no.

I don't really learn at home. I play on my computer a lot. I have learned not to go on sites that could get me into trouble or people asking people to do things.

I don't really have anyone to help me. Mum will help if she can but not always.

I do things in my own time – I hate being told what to do and when.

A reward helps [me learn]. When I want to do something it's fun but when I get asked to do something I hate it.

I'd like my Granny to teach me French – she can speak it because she lives in France.

Learning with someone like my Granny is enjoyable because I don't see her every day.

Most young people mentioned that they didn't get homework. Most of those who expressed a view had a negative view of their experience of homework.

Gracemount

I never do homework.

I don't get homework.

I don't do homework.

Liberton

I don't do homework at home.

What gets in the way of learning at home?

Gracemount

Football training – too busy.

It's [hard to learn] at home because it is so busy with the three younger ones.

I'm not able to learn at home as I'm not allowed a laptop / tablet / phone just now. I don't really do any learning at home.

Liberton

I struggle to learn [at home] because Mum is often needing me to help her with household tasks – cooking, personal care and looking after the cats.

I don't take my iPad home because my brothers will steal it, and it will get broken or lost.

There's a library in my area but it's poor.

My phone gets in the way of learning sometimes.

My phone gets in the way of me doing stuff at home. I get distracted.

My brother annoys me – it makes me want to not do something.

There is always a lot going on which affects my learning.

Our experience of learning in school

Gracemount

I got chucked out.

I don't like the part time timetable – it's boring.

I go to school of football.

We learn all the subjects.

I just dinnae like school

I'm not enjoying school much just now.

I like school but I hate some subjects and teachers.

I learn how much I hate people more every day.

What I like

Some subjects

I enjoy being in craft and design although I've been moved to a different class.

Learning English – I like writing.

"I love classes like modern studies and history where you learn about people and the world".

"I do like modern studies and finding out about the world."

"My favourite subject is art – you can use your imagination.

"Art, Crafts and Design, Maths, PE and French."

"Dance, art or childcare is a good day at school."

"I like making things – woodwork and crafts."

Social time with friends

I have all my pals here.

I like seeing my friends.

I like lunchtime – I just walk about with friends – we don't sit to eat.

Best bit of school is lunch.

Breaks and lunch are good because I get to see my pals.

What helps me learn?**Wellbeing hub**

The wellbeing hub helps me to learning when I am in school.

Wellbeing hub

Wellbeing base – helps me calm down, putting things in place.

The learning hub and teachers there

"Support for learning is different. I go by myself – that helps me sometimes".

"So, the hub makes me feel safe because there aren't many people in there and it's just a really calm and relaxing environment for learning, but anywhere else in the school makes me nervous because of how many people are there."

"I only learn in the school hub, and I really enjoy it because the teachers who are there on the days that I go understand my anxiety."

"I work better out of a classroom – doing one to ones with teachers helps me to learn."

Trusted adults: some subject teachers, some guidance teachers, PSA's, youth workers

Adults I trust – like x, y, z.

There is a teacher I can talk to.

I can talk to my guidance teacher.

I can talk to D – she knows every detail of my life.

I have multiple adults [I trust and can talk to in school]

Having [a youth worker] to talk to – if [they] weren't there, I wouldn't talk to anyone.

My PSA helps me – I go to see her in group most weeks. She helps to support me.

I don't get bullied as much as I did – not now.

Other

Being in a class with a teacher I like and with my friends.

I like going for big walks.

like to take part in activities where I am actually doing things with other people.

Breaks – because I can't concentrate for too long.

Coping strategies to help me calm down.

What gets in the way of learning?**Poor relationships with teachers**

Strict teachers

Teachers that don't like you.

I don't enjoy being spoken to in a way that makes me feel disrespected. This can make me respond in a way that comes across aggressive.

My guidance teacher has changed about 5 times since I started – you start to build up a relationship with them and then they leave. It just makes me not want to talk about stuff.

Poor relationships with other young people

I felt I had to leave a class I liked because there were some people in that class who didn't like me. Now I'm in a class for CDT that I don't enjoy.

Rumours going round about me – finding it hard to settle in with friends.

Other

It's difficult to get out of bed – school starts too early.

When the class is bouncing – when everyone is talking it distracts me.

Breaks – because after breaks I can find it hard to focus.

Getting distracted.

Classroom environment

"I struggle with being in class and think it will never change."

"In the classroom it's hard to hear when everyone else is talking."

"Classrooms are loud – everyone speaks at the same time."

"I'm not confident to ask questions in the class."

"I feel under pressure in the classroom – learning in the [youth work] centre there's less aggression."

"Being in a classroom is difficult. I feel judged and stress out. I often ask to go to the toilet so that I can de-stress."

"I get anxiety in the classroom. When I feel it coming, I mess about so I can get kicked out."

"I can't learn in big groups...I don't like to feel that everyone is looking at me."

"I'd like to do more in class, but struggle and it gets embarrassing".

"Classrooms are like ovens on hot days."

"The idea of it is worse. Once I'm in the classroom I can settle."

"In the classroom I feel horrible."

Other commonly mentioned barriers to engagement and attendance

Difficulty sleeping due to anxiety and/or late nights on computer games make early mornings difficult:

- *"School is so early...when I wake up, I feel like a walking zombie".*
- *"I just want to go back to sleep when I wake up."*
- *"If I came off my PC earlier, I'd be up earlier for school".*
- *"A good day is waking up naturally."*
- *"Getting up is hard."*
- *"I often feel tired in the classroom."*
- *"Anxiety causes sleeplessness, which affects school."*

Crippling anxiety at the prospect of school / travelling to school are obstacles to overcome.

- *"The idea of school is actually worse than being there".*
- *"School gets in the way of school".*
- *"I hate getting the bus to school."*
- *"Getting the bus makes me feel drained before getting [to school]"*
- *"School gates make me nervous – I feel like people are watching".*
- *"School gates are draining".*

- *"I've been away too long – hard to change now."*

Apprehensions about 'drama' with friends

- *"A good day is – no drama."*

...or apprehensions about discipline from teachers

- *"A good day is when I am not getting duty-headed, R and R'd or shouted at".*
- *"A bad day is arguing with my teachers or being sent to Mr Hunter".*
- *"A good day is not getting shouted at."*
- *"Being left alone at school is the best day."*

One young person who has stopped attending school expressed fears about their personal safety:

Nobody worried about fights.

- *Don't feel safe in school – it's horrible, all bad. I can't go anywhere."*
- *"I don't feel safe walking to school."*

What would help?

More expressive arts

I would like to learn more about music – I haven't had the opportunity to do anything like music or drama at school. I haven't looked at options in my community.

Police have said they will get me involved in a music studio – I want to be a rapper.

I wish that within school there were more opportunities for me to take part in music or drama.

More learning that feels relevant to 'real life'.

I would like to learn about things like how to buy a house, how to find a job and how to deal with money.

How to manage money.

Money management; bank accounts; life skills

I need my learning to be relatable and relevant to me and my interests

Teachers doing things differently

If teachers could make activities more fun

If teachers would break down the tasks more.

If teachers were always in a good mood (if people weren't nasty)

Other

Having a youth worker to do one-to-one learning with. Like I could just bring my stuff down and [they] could go over it with me

A room for the youth workers

Trying more – I want to try sometimes but I just get frustrated.

Liberton

I hate every bit of school.

I don't like learning anything in school.

I'm happy in school but I'm not keen on the classes. I've been skiving with [a friend] – we like to muck about.

I don't know [what I learn in school]

I'm back at school full time.

*I am in school random times – I don't have specific dates or times that I attend school.
I have a part-time timetable, so I miss mornings and after school.
I'm on a part-time timetable.
I can sometimes miss out on days at school or be late due to back pain. Sometimes I feel like I can't get going till the afternoon.
Being excluded... Nothing worked. I just sat and did nothing.*

What I'm learning

*I get support in school when I am in, in a special place (I think it might be called the hub?). I'm doing National 3 Maths, English, Geography and RE
In Travel and Tourism, we learn about different countries and stuff.
I learn a lot actually. Cooking in HE, writing essays in English. How to fill out a college application.
We learn loads – what we need further on in life – getting qualifications.
Sometimes being in school makes me happy because I am with my friends, and we have some good classes.
I have French, History, HE, Art. Some of it is useful but some of it I wonder when I will use it.
I learn maths.
I like baking.
In media, I like learning about camera lenses
I like PE – I'm learning to play volleyball at the moment.
I love learning about the Victorians.
I don't always enjoy school but when I do it's when we do PE, and my friends let me play with them.
We learn lots of stuff – maths, writing, French, Spanish and topic.
School is going really well. I am enjoying the topic just now – it's about the Victorians.
In employability you learn about finance and banking and about saving money and about what to do with money.
We learn how to write emails properly.*

Primary school

*I don't really remember much about learning in primary school, but primary school definitely seemed easier.
I didn't get any support in primary school. I would have benefited from that. In primary, you get help for things like dyslexia but not for mental health. Primaries don't think about mental health. I'll give that to my school now, they have a lot more support to offer!*

What gets in the way?

Teaching Practice

*Teachers don't give me any extra help
Teachers having to deal with other pupils and forgetting about the ones who need actual help.
I don't really listen to teachers because half of them are nippy, they talk too much. You try to get on with the work and they just keep on talking,
Some teachers don't explain [the work] properly and it is more difficult to do the task.
It's too boring.
I don't think you learn any proper life skills [at school]. We've been doing shapes and colours in employability – what's that supposed to be teaching us?*

Poor relationships with teachers

*Bad teachers just like the power and control – they like that they can tell people off for anything and send them out.
Old teachers are fed up. They have no patience or time for pupils.
Male teachers are more argumentative – or maybe stereotypes have made us think like that. Girls are more likely to answer back to male teachers – because we're being taught to be strong and stand up for ourselves.
Nobody ever wants to ask for help.
There isn't an adult I trust in school.
Sometimes I'm too scared to talk to my teachers.*

Individual barriers to learning

I can't do reading and writing.

My dyslexia.

When I feel behind in class.

Me giving up.

If I'm unsure of something or I don't know where to go or what to do, I'm more likely just not to go – this is why I sometimes skive off school. I know it's wrong, but I'd rather just get out of the situation.

My teacher helps me to learn but I don't always have the confidence to ask for help.

I have Tourettes and that can be a pain sometimes

Getting distracted

I find it hard to go from subject to subject and stay focused.

I get fidgety if I don't move around a lot.

I get distracted easily. By my pals or by being too tired. Sometimes I get distracted on my phone.

It doesn't work for me when I am sitting beside certain people, people I don't like, I then spend the whole lesson worrying about who I'm sitting next to rather than my work. Sounds stupid but it's true – I hate it when I am not sitting with my pals.

Classroom environment

I don't enjoy being in mainstream classes as it gets too loud when everyone is talking

Students misbehaving [gets in the way of learning] – it holds the class up and we all have to wait while the teacher deals with whatever it is.

School buildings

During breaks there's not many places to go or be – it's even worse when exams are on. We get into trouble for being in the toilet but where else are we supposed to go?

The school is dirty – that puts you off – classrooms are minging.

What helps?**Support from teachers**

My teacher helps me – she will explain things to me if I am stuck.

A teacher I like – if I don't like them, I don't want to go.

If a teacher likes me, that makes it easier to learn.

Teachers when they explain it properly.

Teachers that make the effort and make it fun.

Being shown examples.

Positive relationships with teachers

It helps if a teacher is not that strict – being nice but having boundaries – they make the best teachers.

Mrs R is so nice to everyone – she always tells you how well you're doing, she's complimentary.

My English teacher is funny, and she helps.

If teachers know you are good at something, they will be better to you.

There's one teacher everyone loves. She's respectful of us and we respect her. We know she has boundaries. She makes sure everyone is included and she's so nice... There's a few nice teachers in this school.

There's a history teacher I trust

If it's something I enjoy – if the teacher is good. [My teacher] for social subjects is my fave.

In school I trust Mr S and J. J sometimes picks me up and drops me off for school

I can speak to my guidance teacher and some of the younger teachers.

My trusted adults are school are Ms G or my nurture teachers.

Positive Relationships with Youth Workers, Support for Learning and other adults in school context

Youth workers in school – my mum reminded me that I was seeing you today and I came into school

I could speak to my youth worker and my support for learning teacher

Support for Learning x2

I go to [Support for Learning] for help with homework

I trust... the Jannie...she helps with drama.

I have lots of trusted adults at school – there are lots I would talk to.

Friends

My friends help – if we're both stuck on something, we work it out together.

My pals – they'll help me when I need it, and I'll help them.

All my friends being there

Asking my learning partner.

My friends help me. I worry that I might get into trouble asking for help.

Breaks etc. are alright.

School feels safe as I have good teachers and friends around me.

I like school and enjoy learning – seeing my friends helps a lot.

Tech

iPad for research and stuff

What would help?

Nothing

Nothing would make it enjoyable.

I wish I didn't have to go to school at all. I wish school wasn't a thing. Get everyone out and let them just experience life, we'll figure it out!

More creative and practical / active learning experiences

Classes should be more interactive – do treasure hunts and stuff – things you can actually do, Doing more stuff that is useful – that you'll use outside of school – some things we won't use. We should learn more about actual life skills.

Learning life skills

I would love more PE and less handwriting

I can't do lessons like woodwork as I need 1:1 when in school but I would like to try to be involved in some more practical lessons like that

I'd like to learn about making money.

We should have more drama and expressive arts.

Something that is missing is drama like the actual class, not between people! I've been told I'd be good at that, but we don't have it at this school. You should get the chance to do everything at every school.

Anything to do with motorbikes – I love them, and I want an electric bike

A more supportive learning environment

A teacher I could really talk to about my reading and writing.

Being allowed to speak in the class and work things out together.

Having something to look forward to, like the [youth work programme]

Spaces that are pleasant to be in

Schools need a youth work room – painted nice and calming with things on the wall. The first room where I met [my youth worker] had nice fairy lights – there's not really a nice space for meeting in school.

They should make the classrooms look different...they all have desks pointing towards the front.

They should change that.

Parents' experiences of school

Dad was an idiot in school.

Dad went to Gracemount. Mum went to Westerhailes – she did really well in school and stayed till S6. I want to do well in school. I want to be a social worker.

My mum went to private school. My dad went to Broughton. I think they did OK. I don't want to be a disappointment.

My mum moved schools a lot; Dad went here. A lot of his family did as well. He was quite bad at school, I think. Some of my brothers were bad, some were good. They all have jobs or they're doing something. I'll do better than them. (check Gracemount examples)

My gran encourages me – she thinks if I don't do better in school, I won't get a good job.

"Mum says if I don't do well, I will have a hard future life."

"My dad wants me to do well- he didn't do well. My mum did well."

"My mum tries to encourage me by telling me to do well. She always asks me to work harder."

"Mum takes time to ask what I am doing and tries to help me."

"Both parents wanted me to succeed in school, but it made me struggle even more."

"Mum tries her best to help."

"Mum and auntie try to convince me that school is useful."

"Parents are encouraging for higher education."

"Mum encourages me to go to school – everyone does."

"Mum is not proud or happy about me not going to school, but she understands my fear."

"Dad left school early but is encouraging me to finish school."

"Mum and dad didn't finish school but are insisting I finish."

"Mum tries to encourage me as a learner but no one else really pushes me."

"It's different with every family member – some of them understand my struggle with school, but others don't."

"My brother hated school, but my auntie tries to talk me into trying harder."

"I don't think my family encourage my learning. Dad thinks school is bullshit."

"My auntie forces me into school even when I am sick."

"My dad didn't learn much in school. My mum says the importance of school, but also knows the impact that school has had on me and so doesn't push me to go."

Our experience of youth work support

Gracemount

What we learn in the youth work setting

"Water safety, sex, drugs, vaping, health, about each other

I learned that anxiety can be controlled – it doesn't control you, you control it.

At Goodtrees you can learn about being around other people – lots of people go.

We learn about each other.

How to be pals / get along with people

Team building skills.

Help to cope, enjoy life, be happy.

[Learning is enjoyable] because I accomplish something e.g. how to cook.

At the youth centre I'm learning things like communication skills and working together"

"I'm learning to respect different kinds of people. I've learned about people living in poverty in my own community...I've learned to work with others".

"At the centre, we focus on things that are important life stuff. At school, it feels like we do a lot of what teachers want."

"In [youth work] we do challenges, team games and more practical tasks."

"We do a lot of confidence building and get the chance to lead on stuff ourselves – at school it's not like that."

Learning is different from school because.

Smaller groups – more support

It's quieter.

The group is smaller.

Less people, more support.

It's easier to focus because it's a smaller group.

One-to-one learning helps.

Less formality – more relaxed

Less stress – no pressure – more time

In school, teachers are stressed out, but youth workers are not stressed out.

We're not sitting at desks – it doesn't feel like work.

"I like being part of something. In the youth group I can help other people and learn about the pressures that different people face."

Positive relationships with staff

You can talk natural to the staff – teachers don't talk or ask.

We can talk about anything we want – express our feelings.

It's easier – no grumpy old teachers.

I feel like I can talk about anything.

"I feel valued for the effort I put in."

I get on with all the youth work staff – I talk to them about everything, and they listen and try to help. They give advice; they help us try to sort problems."

"I can actually speak to youth workers about things I would never dream of speaking to teachers about – or even at home. They take a genuine interest in me – and they tell you the truth as well."

"I speak to youth workers about everything. They listen and they ask me how I am."

"I get on well with adults. I like to have good chat, and you get that with youth workers."

"Youth workers are almost like your pals – you feel they care."

"I respect [the youth worker]"

"Youth workers actually have respect for you and are not just judging you on your ability to complete a book."

"Staff don't shout at us. It's a calmer place and the staff respect us and listen to us."

"With youth workers it's fun, it's safe and you can be yourself."

"You can learn... and not have people on your back the whole time."

"It's different with the youth worker, I don't feel nervous."

Youth workers trust us to be mature and listen to what we have to say more."

"Youth workers are more approachable than teachers, teachers are focused on a whole class whereas youth workers are genuinely interested in paying attention to individuals."

"Youth workers show you what to do, help you when it's going wrong, and I can feel comfortable asking them to show me again."

"Youth workers don't shout if you keep making mistakes."

"It's chill at the centre, no stress, we get the job done without knowing it."

"Being in a community centre is more relaxed, no shouting or moaning and I can be myself".

"Being at the centre allows me to feel normal and no pressure."

"You are learning with your pals. You are not forced to learn."

"The staff are so chill and like to have fun with you."

We don't like

Working with S3 – some are nippy.

[I work 1:1 with a youth worker], but I haven't been to [youth] group [in person]. I don't want to leave the house without a phone. I am also worried about bumping into peers who don't particularly like me.

When it's busy or there's not enough time.

It's hard to join clubs at this age – being new is not good at this age – you can't be the new person.

Better would be.

An S2 [only] group

More time with youth workers

Money for food; going places; shows.

Would youth work support in primary have helped?

[In primary] a social worker helped.

Would have been useful in primary – a wee break.

Youth work stuff would have been useful at primary.

P7 transition with [youth work] helped.

It would have been good to have a youth worker in primary- might have helped with writing, reading and spelling.

"I work better in a community centre. I feel relaxed and happier. a better place to learn."

"It's different because I actually learn in the youth work setting. I think because you are actually involved with the work, getting to speak to people and meet others."

"At the youth centre I do work alongside quite a big group but it's different to school as I'm more used to the group. I enjoy going there – it's easier as we get more breaks and time to play games."

"I have been given the opportunity to volunteer at [youth] groups and I enjoy the responsibility."

"I'd like to do more sessions at the centre. I prefer that environment rather than classrooms."

Liberton

What we learn

[Youth work] has helped my confidence

Being involved [in a youth work group] has taught us how to deal with kids and talk to them. Being part of the group taught us it's OK to talk about your feelings.

I've learned to make friends at [my youth group]. I enjoyed the activities.

I learned how to deal with stress.

I learned how to get jobs.

Less formality – more relaxed

You can say what you want and not get into trouble.

The group was good because it wasn't as restricting as school – everyone felt more comfortable and there were no boys.

You don't need to go to an alternative learning space if you shout out.

Being part of the group gave us a break from the stress of the week and it was good to have it after all the drama that had happened. I think the group helped with the drama, but it's hard to say because one of the girls moved away and that might have been what changed things.

Positive relationships with staff

Staff listened to us.

The staff listened to us.

If you can make me laugh, that's the best way for me to relax and enjoy learning.

You just listened to us, and we enjoyed going to that group every week.

My worker helps me when I am worried – and the other workers help me too.

Variety, choice, fun

I like the fun activities, like when we came at Christmas and did the quiz.

Fun staff who are engaging. They make it fun, and I am more than willing to learn.

I sometimes have more fun learning a new skill when it's interactive and I don't realise I'm e. learning

We get a variety of things to learn – we don't just have to stick with one.

We got more of a choice.

I'm really looking forward to being more involved with [my youth group] – I think I will enjoy the activities and would like to do more over the summer. [A friend] told me he was at paddle boarding last summer – I don't think I've ever done any water sports.

At Goodtrees they have classes – like baking – I like baking there, but I don't like my Home Ec teacher at school.

[My youth group] is more fun than school – I get to do more activities.

Smaller group, more support.

It's different to school because there are no teachers and it's a smaller group

There's more staff at EYC and they take time to explain things to me on my own

Learning with friends

Anywhere I have my friends around me I enjoy more – I like to learn with others rather than on my own.

Working in smaller groups is best because it can be more controlled.

I liked learning with pals in groups.

I was with my pals. I wouldn't have liked it the same if it wasn't.

A safe, confidential space

We could say what we wanted and not worry about getting pulled out by Guidance. Like if you say something is happening between you and someone else in front of a teacher, they report it and guidance will pull you out for a chat.

What gets in the way of learning?

I was worried I wouldn't know people there.

If there was to be another group, I think that everyone should know each other, or no one should know each other. Being in a group where you know a couple of people but not everyone can be awkward and make it harder. Our group worked because we all knew each other.

Craigroyston Consultation with Young People.

Contributors to the consultation:

27 young people in total have participated in semi-structured interviews in the context of established relationships with youth workers. In the summary below, responses are colour coded as follows:

Target group primary – 11 young people in P6-7 identified as struggling with engagement and attendance.

Target group high school -11 young people S1-2 identified as struggling with engagement and attendance.

Wider group high school – 5 young people with positive experiences of learning in youth work and school

Living and Learning in our community

Young people's views of their neighbourhood are divided:

Some young people focus on positive community assets:

There are two parks down the road, the duck pond, and the beach.

The people who live around are all in my year at school...we have a football pitch and a basketball court, so we all used to meet up there.

I go to the West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre for football or community meals – it feels like people know me – that's nice.

I'm looking forward to the new Arts Centre being built.

Others focus on what's missing or wrong from their perspective:

*I think the area I live in is not the best (I'd call it a s**thole). I wish there was more to do and more places to go. I wish there was more to do in my area for kids my age' [primary 7]*

They need to make the parks better – something for us to do in them.

Other places I've been to they're a lot nicer. Nicer streets. Our streets have got some rubbish down them, not many trees.

It's rubbish. It's Muirhouse – what do you expect? It can be a bit sketchy sometimes, but it's alright....The new shiny buildings will get wrecked. People will draw on them or set fire to them. It makes me feel sad because people put effort into the new buildings.

The group is also split between young people who report feeling anxious and unsafe in their community and those who feel a positive sense of belonging and connection.

Concerns about safety:

If there are groups of teenagers around, I wouldn't feel safe.

I can sometimes feel unsafe in the community.

It's coming to a big war – people are always causing trouble and fighting.

I don't feel safe anywhere.

The area is a bit dodgy...you've always got people going around on bikes and in balaclavas threatening people.

I don't feel safe in this area...I worry about getting battered, bullied and homophobia. There is a lot of that around.

It's shite – people don't feel safe.

I don't feel safe here because of the people. A lot of them bully me. It makes me feel nervous, sad and worried.

I don't like being out at night – it's dodgy and you've got to worry about people coming into your area that want a fight...I don't want to be a gang member and I don't want a fight but if I have to I will.

People are getting killed, getting stabbed and that is normal here.

If I go outside with me and my pals, it's not safe. People want to cause trouble. I'm worried about getting robbed – it happened to my pal.

I don't really feel safe outdoors.

A lot of fights. It's quite calm sometimes, most of it it's not. Motorbikes are mental, people robbing stuff. Not always. But I'm used to it.

...there's lots of police vans and motorbikes and I can sleep because of it.

I worry about motorbikes in the area, getting hit by one.

It's not the safest at night. There are motorbikes in the park and fireworks shooting through the park.

I don't want to walk alone at night. I get buses or get my pals to chum me.

Positive connections

I feel part of the community and safe– I don't really think about there being trouble.

I like where I live – I feel part of a community.

I enjoy living in my community.

Everyone in the community is sound. I know a lot of people.

I like it – I like staying near the park.

People say this is the most boring and terrible place but once you've lived there for a wee while, it's really nice...I can live my life.

I got taught how to bake a cake. A laddie I used to talk to round the corner – his mum used to teach us how to bake.

I feel safe here, it depends who you know.

I feel safe in my community – it's fun to live here.

Many of the young people express other worries and anxieties

I worry about my mum dying.

I worry that something bad will happen to my mum or dad or a family member because of all the bad stuff that goes on in the streets

I worry about my family getting hurt.

I worry about getting injured in school.

Anger is tough for me sometimes...My main worry is dealing with my anger.

I worry about losing family members and friends.

My main worry is losing people around me. That's happened quite a lot, but I've started getting better pals now.

You could be a good person, always at school, or you could not go all the time – but bad things can just happen to anyone.

I worry I will not do well in school and get good grades.

I find it very difficult to get to sleep at night because my brain will not switch off.

What we enjoy

Young people talked positively about a range of interests and things they enjoy doing and learning about in their communities, most frequently spending time with friends and family, gaming, sports, music and going to local youth groups.

I spend a lot of time on the phone, and I go out with my friends – usually to the High School astro.

Spending time with family and friends.

I'm happiest when I'm around family and friends.

My happiest would be when I'm out with my pals.

Hanging out with my pals in the park.

I don't do much – just hang out with my pals in the parks and stuff.

Being out with friends, playing football – just being around in the community with friends.

Go out and about, spending time in the local park with friends.

I like spending time with friends.

I feel happy most of the time. I'm happiest when I'm with my boyfriend.

In my free time, I normally speak with my friends on the phone or hang out with them in my area or up town.

I like going out with friends, either in the community or in the city

I'm happy when I'm seeing my pals. I like nature and walking. I like walking to Cramond. I mainly like walking with my dad.

I sometimes draw, talk to my pals and play with my animals.

Seeing my pals

I have friends who support me. We've got places we can go.

When I'm out with friends, I learn how to problem solve...I hang out with my friends before and after clubs. I like getting to know new things – it opens up more opportunities.

Spending time with friends in the park.

I like family time on a Sunday.

I like rugby and I play football a bit...I like dancing too.

Playing football. Being with my football team

Football and friends.

Football and basketball.

tennis, rugby, badminton, basketball

I enjoy learning about football.

Playing sports and swimming on Fridays.

Playing football.

Parkour, biking

I like football, [my youth group] and being outside playing.

I like hanging out with my friends and that's when I feel happiest. I mainly do that at [my youth group]

Fun youth groups

Spending time at [youth group]

I enjoy going to [youth group], [frequently mentioned]

Gaming

X-box [frequently mentioned]

X box [frequently mentioned]

New computer games.

Coding.

Playing the keyboard.

Music, my guitar, Guitar, that takes me back. I was at a friend's house who went to [a youth group] and offered me a shot at his guitar. And another friend who went to the same group got me a secondhand guitar. I ended up loving it. I started writing my own songs. I joined [the youth group] when I was 10 and I knew some people who went to the hub already. I just thought I'd give it a try.

I like dancing. I like music, drama, woodwork.

I like listening to music and dinosaurs.

Musicals

Going to new places

I like make-up. My passion is skin-care and make up.

I like making or watching TikToks

My hobby is walking. I walk a lot. It relaxes me, see if I'm having a stressful day, I'll take myself out for a walk. I'll take my dog with me to the beach. Anywhere to calm.

I used to have a hobby of trying to write songs. I have two songs I've written on my phone, but I stopped writing songs and started writing poems instead. I love poem writing so much.

I like learning anything really.

Drama, art, music, role play, history, going on trips with the Ediburgh Uni group. I love going to the playhouse and other venues to watch shows with my mum.

Community organisations that young people say they attend include: army cadets, Ferrywell Youth, Project, MYDG, PYCP, Spartans, West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre, Gold and Grey, School of Hard Knocks, Open Hours, Passion for Fusion, sports coaching. Activities that young people told us they access in the community include swimming, rugby and football, judo, gym, music, **art, dancing, trumpet, drama, coding.** In the small group of engaged young people, school clubs are also mentioned: drama, LGBTQ+, choir.

Some young people reflect that services they enjoyed at one time are no longer available:

I had friends from all over who came to the North Edinburgh Arts Centre before it shut down.

Muirhouse Library before it closed – but as a chill space to be – not to learn.

I used to go to other groups before, but they have stopped. I had a befriending thing I was part of that was really good, but that's finished now.

Others reflect on the importance of local access to community learning opportunities.

I don't attend anything outside of Pilton or Muirhouse – people don't go across areas.

If Passion for Fusion was closer to home, it would be easier to access their services.

Not all young people access the activities on offer – some prefer to be at home

I don't go to any other groups or clubs at the moment.

I used to go to 'The School of Hard Knocks' but I stopped because I'd rather hang out with my friends

I don't have any hobbies, I just like sitting in my bed.

I don't go to any clubs.

Our experience of learning at home

Young people talk positively about home as a place of sanctuary – time alone in their room, time to chat with family members and participate in online gaming and social media with friends and family:

I'm happiest in my house, cos I have everything I need including my games consoles.

I'm happiest in my room. I have my bed and my X Box.

I feel safe at home and at my Nana's house.

I'm happiest at home. I like being with my sisters.

I only really feel safe in my room at home. I'm not exactly sure why that is.

I play games on my PC. I play a game online with my dad (who doesn't live at home with me)

I sit in my room and do nothing. I like video games. I rest. I cook for my mum.

I like spending time in my room listening to music and speaking to friends on social media.

I play computer games with my brother.

I play Fortnite when I need to get some anger out – I get to scream at the TV – I play with my brother or my pals.

I talk to my sisters a lot.

I don't really hang about with my family but I do talk to them.

I sometimes talk about school with my mum and brother.

A number of young people don't see home as a place for learning (some equate learning at home with homework):

I cannae be doing any work at home – when you are off school, you are off school, no such thing as learning at home.

I don't want to learn at home.

Why would you want to learn at home? ...Why would you do anything at home? That's your free time – you do what you want.

I don't do any learning at home. I don't like to learn much at all.

I don't do any [learning] in the house. I've always been there to help, without being told to do anything.

I don't learn much in the house.

There's nothing to stop me learning at home and there's no one who particularly helps me with learning at home.

Others value the support of parents with learning at home:

Mum teaches me baking and songs and stories about her life.

My mum, my brother and my brother's girlfriend all help me learn. They say it step by step and they don't rush me.

At home I like to draw, game, learn boxing and football skills. My big brother helps me with gaming.

I learn cooking and we do board games and family games – I like playing with my dad.

Mum and Dad help me learn. They make it fun. What helps is people being patient.

Usually, it's mum I'm with in the kitchen. She'll show me it sometimes and then I can usually do it on my own.

I learn with Mum and Dad – they make it fun.

I learn football and cooking.

My mum helps me learn – she helps me to understand the work given.

My mum helps with my learning at home – she is very supportive and helps with maths and homework.

My mum helps me learn life skills like cooking.

My mum tells me how far I've come on the guitar. I want to be a musician.

I like learning different things at home.

I have to learn at home with my family – you can't learn at school when they are just chucking you out.

*I enjoy learning with my parents – we have a laugh while learning.
 My parents help me learn at home and help with homework but it's not enjoyable.
 Dad teaches me a lot at home about physics – he takes an interest in what I say and what I have learned at school. We talk a lot about history; he talks to me on my level.
 Being able to go to my mum for support would help me – and not to be judged by what I say.*

Others notice that home is a place where they feel comfortable to try things out and use the time they have to learn independently:

*Sometimes I learn on my own – like working out how to wrap a wrap!
 I taught myself how to cook because I love baking.
 Sometimes I like cooking... making scrambled eggs. I make my own lunch sometimes too.
 I do things around the house. During Covid I learned how to shave my head and I went for lots of walks with the dog – that was good.
 I have helped with gardening at my Gran and Grandad's house.
 I help in the garden sometimes too – but only if I get pocket money for it.
 If no one is in my bedroom, I'll put the speaker on and sing any song that comes on my playlist. The main thing I learn at home is what songs I can fully sing and practising those for Tuesday Hub [at the youth group].
 Sometimes I finish [school] work at home. I finished a painting at home yesterday...I take some of my English work home with me because I like English*

Some young people talk positively about resources they use to support their learning at home:

*Videos to help you learn.
 I like watching DIY videos of people showing you how to build stuff / make things.
 I like to learn about building and trade.
 I play games online – you learn something from that – and I'll sit and watch YouTube and learn stuff off that.
 Having access to school resources at home.
 I learn from TV.
 I have a tablet, a phone and an X box at home.*

Most young people mentioned that they didn't get homework. Most of those who expressed a view had a negative view of their experience of homework.

*We don't get homework.
 I don't get any homework. My last school said I wasn't capable of it. I've not had any at [my new school]
 I don't do homework. I have to learn all day in school so I shouldn't have to do homework in my free time.
 At my old school, they said 'you're not doing well enough to do any homework. It made me feel rubbish and I stopped doing work in general.
 I don't get given any homework. It's boring. Sometimes I wish we had it, especially during lockdown as it got boring...At primary school I got homework, but I never did it.
 I don't do or get set any homework.
 I don't get much homework right now, but I will start to get more...I didn't do my homework in primary school. When I got to high school, I would sit behind and do it there. I knew I wouldn't do it at home as I struggle to remember and do other stuff at home. At school, I have support from teachers.*

We don't really have any homework from school. We sometimes get assignments on Teams, but we don't have to do it. It's only if we want to get a little bit better at what we are doing but I don't usually do it.

What gets in the way of learning at home?

Younger brothers and sisters are most often mentioned as the principal culprits for distraction!

*When my little brother and sister are around
My sibling and I fight sometimes and that can affect my mood and wanting to do things. We share a room, and I don't like that as I want my own space.
Distractions like the game console and my little sister
My brothers get in the way of learning.*

Our experience of learning in school

Some young people say they don't see the point of school:

*I feel rubbish – I dinnae get why do we have to spend six hours of our day in school.
Everything in school is pish.
I don't find I learn much at school – I learn on the streets.
You know I ken more when I hang out with my pals than I do in school...why do we need to be in school, it's a shite.
I learn from my friends. We talk about stuff.
The school day feels draining. I feel trapped and I don't like being told what to do.
There's nothing I enjoy about school.
I don't learn much – it's boring...I'm not in school much.
I'm only in class for 4 periods a week. I don't really pay attention – my mum just tells me to go in [to school] when I'm meant to. I don't want to be in [school] any more than I am. I don't see the point.
I'm in school full time at the moment but I want to go on a part-time timetable. I avoid going straight to classes and hang about in the halls instead.*

Others would like to be there more than they are

*I like learning stuff that can get you a job. I don't want to not learn but I just get kicked out so I can't.
I'm only in class for 5 periods a week... You can get depressed if you are out of school all day, just sitting by yourself. You are on your own.*

Others say it just depends on the class and the teacher.

*I don't feel I am learning much – it depends on the teacher and the class.
Some teachers help and some teachers don't.
Some of the teachers help me learn.*

Some young people feel insecure and anxious in school

Sometimes I leave at lunchtime – I feel like I can't manage any more, and my friends are on part-time timetables.

I talk to my wee brother about what high school is like and how to get on and stuff. I say to be careful who you hang out with, you can't trust a lot of people.

I don't go to school – and I can't remember the last time I went...I stopped going because I was bullied.

I worry about school.

I don't really feel safe at school – there's so many people in school and I don't know a lot of them.

Most young people could identify school subjects they enjoy. By the time they are in High School, most (not all) express a preference for practical subjects:

PE works for me because I like it and we aren't just sitting about for ages. We are running about and doing things and I like that.

I enjoy PE and spelling.

I do like English and Maths.

I like learning about stuff we need to know – like for when we are older.

I enjoy practical classes -DT, PE, HE

I like PE and English but I'm not in school a lot.

We're doing a fire safety course. It's practical – I like that. It's a double period and we get to move around. The course makes me want to come into school.

I want to be in the trades – maybe a painter and decorator. I want to go to college and do that. My cousin told me that when I'm 16, I can get an apprenticeship with them. You can't do that at school.

At school I like English, History and Maths...and I like hairdressing.

I like sports, English – I like making up stories.

My favourite class has to be Biology because I love learning about animals and photosynthesis and adaptations...and I smashed my Biology test!

I like most subjects. I enjoy learning and I'd like to be in school.

I like practical subjects. Not theory. I just want to do the work – for example in cooking I just want to follow the recipe and do it, not talk about it.

I enjoy music and home economics, but no maths, I can't do maths.

I love music, but they want you to do a certain thing and I want to do my own song.

Art – I'm alright when I do my own thing.

I like history because we learn about World War II – I like that. It's very important.... I like science, especially Chemistry, because it's fun. I like Drama too.

Being outside. I get a headache if I'm inside for too long.

Maths, History, English, French, History, Music, German

Maths, English, Drama, Art, PE, Social Subjects, HE, CDT, Music and science

My favourite classes are DT, HE and Drama. English is alright. I just had an essay where I was supposed to do 300 words minimum and I did 1000.

I like being active and not so much theory work. In school, it's hard for me to sit for 45 minutes. I like to have something to focus on rather than getting distracted.

Spending time with friends both in and out of class is seen by most young people as a positive:

My friends help me in school.

The lunch and break times are good – you can be outside and play football or mess about with pals.

Break and lunchtime are the best parts of the day for me because I get to play football.

Having a good partner [helps me learn]

I like break and lunch and being with my friends – it's class time I don't like.

*I enjoy walking with friends to school and school break times with friends.
I just get tired at school. I enjoy lunch and break times because I get to spend time with my friends.
I rely on friends for support.
My friends help if they understand it better.
Having friends in class makes it more enjoyable.*

Young people say that what helps with learning in school is...

A positive relationship with at least one trusted teacher/s

*If I get on with the teacher, then that really helps me.
The deputy head teacher is helpful.
My guidance teacher – she knows when I get triggered and she knows what happens when I lose it.
She's the staff member who knows me most.
There's one teacher I talk to – a supply teacher.
Some staff members know my mum, so we have good bonds.
The teacher that runs support for learning is really lovely. She makes support for learning feel like a really safe place...If I'm in early enough, I'll go and see that teacher and they'll ask me how I'm feeling about my day and my classes. It gets me in a happy mood. It's a teacher that cares."
My guidance teacher is really good at helping me. ...he helps me go through all the different tasks we're doing so I thoroughly know how to do it. And now I'm getting better in that class."
See if I'm having a bad day, they will help to make the day a little bit better. If I'm not wanting to sit in the cafeteria at lunch, I'm allowed to sit in a teacher's classroom, because they've learned to trust me enough that I'm not going to break anything...Or if I've got a test and I've got all stressed, they will sit me down and talk it through and they will make me feel good about knowing how to do the test.
Some teachers try but they don't understand as much. That understanding is all about them trusting me and me trusting them to tell them stuff about what is going on through the day and why I'm struggling.
If a teacher is sound, they make it easier to learn.
There was an English teacher that used to help but he's left now.
My guidance teacher helps me. If something goes wrong, I can tell him. There are a couple of my teachers that I get on with and they help me.*

Teaching approaches that are engaging – or being trusted to get on with independent work:

*Teachers at your table.
I've been writing stories recently in class...the stories I was able to make up, I used some topics, but I could also decide what I wanted to write about.
In English [I enjoy it when] our teacher would set us different characters and we'd have to read it out.
Most of the time I was Macbeth or Lady Macbeth.
Teachers who let you put airpods in when you are getting on with your work.
Being able to wear my airpods to listen to music whilst doing my work in class really focuses me.
My favourite subject is French because of my teacher. She is really nice, and she understands the way we learn – I learn more hands on, actually doing stuff and listening...I can't sit and read something.
The nice teachers are the ones in the subjects I enjoy.
I learn more from subjects I enjoy...I love history and music as the teacher makes the subject interesting which helps me to engage.*

Teachers that motivate you and celebrate achievements in and out of school:

My art teacher is really good at trying to hype me to finish my paintings and drawings. One teacher helps me feel good about my achievements in school and outside school. She's the one who got the painting I finished yesterday. My science teachers, she's been hyping me up for singing at the North Edinburgh Community Festival.

1:1 support - from PSAs in class, and from other partners offering support outside of class:

I'm happy at school. I like my PSA that I work with. I like Maths. PSAs to help you solve problems or help with spelling, help you to work together, help you to be kind and respectful. PSA helps me learn by reading through things and going over the work. My PSA – she is the best, my [class] teacher and the senior staff. [My experience with a youth worker] helps me learn in school, that's the main thing that helps me. I like meeting [my youth worker] in school – it breaks up the day and I can get out of class. Seeing [a youth worker] has helped – you take me out and that gives me a break and then I can go back and do work. Or like the other day we did some maths – I was OK to do it cos I knew I was gonna go with you after it. Having support workers take you out helps – it breaks up your day.

PSAs, Support for Learning, youth workers and mentors help me to feel supported with my learning. PSAs – works with me mainly 1:1 and it helps me learn faster. I've always struggled with reading. I feel like I am supported with this. I get support in a couple of classes – I need that in Maths and English. What helps is just me in a 1:1, quiet and it helps me focus if I can play my guitar. I have a mentor in school and a 1:1 with a youth worker in school. I mostly go to a PSA, she's the one who knows everything about me. She wants to help me...It's not always 1:1 but mostly, and a group in support for learning (3 or 4 of us). Being able to access counselling once a week really helps me talk about all my stuff I have held on to during the week. My counsellor listens to me and helps me look at situations in different ways. I tell her how I feel different to others and she does not judge me. She does not tell anyone unless she thinks I am not safe.

Quiet spaces

If my anxiety has gone up, I can go to support for learning. I can get the playdough out, calm myself down and then I finish the work in my tray. And they are really good at helping with everything. I like going to support for learning because it's quiet. I can get stuff done that I can't do in class. When I get overwhelmed, I go to support for learning and I work there. I sit in support for learning. It's chaos everywhere else. People running about, throwing stuff and screaming.

Other resources / personal strategies to support learning:

iPad; Number Square; cubes for counting; Trips. Having our phones – yeah, we will go on snapchat and TikTok but I know I will do my work too, Listening to music.

I have a fidget toy with me and on a Monday and a Friday my guitar. Playing guitar helps my ADHD. I'm allowed to play when I read stuff, by myself, not in a class with everyone else. Sometimes the iPad helps me learn. I get overlays...I get scribes for tests.

Support to adapt timetables:

My mum talked to my guidance teacher...she could see the effect of my getting into trouble four times a week because I wasn't picking up on the languages.

More opportunities to participate in favourite subjects:

I'm on a part time timetable but the school won't change it so that I can attend the subjects I enjoy. I like art, but we only get that on Tuesday in school

Young people say that what gets in the way of learning in school is...

A feeling of not being supported / looked after in school:

I don't get help in school. Teachers always say 2 minutes...sometimes they help but most of the time they just dinnae get it.

No one helps in school.

It's mostly teachers not helping me get through the work, not explaining it thoroughly.

When I was at school, it didn't feel like anyone was really helping me with my learning.

I don't have support for learning or a PSA. I have a counsellor, but I've only just met her. She cancelled last week because she was busy."

I never got help [in school]

I didn't feel welcomed when I moved schools.

Teachers are moody – and that affects how I feel too.

I don't get encouragement from teachers still.

Feeling that teachers are not on their side:

*Teachers do f**k all – all they do is exclude you even when it's not your fault. I nearly got stabbed with scissors but it's still my fault.*

When teachers get me into trouble for things I didn't do. Or getting me into trouble for trying my hardest not to react. I don't like when they accuse me of backtalking. I sometimes feel it isn't fair because I am really trying.

[Senior members of staff] – they are on at me all the time and always shout at me, even when I haven't done anything.

Getting into trouble for no reason gets in the way of learning. It's unfair. Like asking to go to the toilet and they don't let you.

Some of the teachers are rude sometimes – they'll just sit and shout and scream and some of the time they just send you home [rather than try to find out the reason you're not in class].

In P7 my teacher would shout and make horrible comments about us...I think that's why I felt bad about not doing certain classes – because he made me feel rubbish.

[In primary], the teacher would always tell me I'm not trying hard enough and say the meanest things. I don't feel like the teachers want to help. I don't like how they speak to me.

Sometimes teachers help, sometimes they are two-faced. Like they'll say you can do things and then they phone my mum to tell her I'm doing something wrong. Or they'll apologise just to say they have but they don't actually care or help.

They tell me to be good and they'll up my periods but when I am good and I ask about it, they keep saying to try for another week and another week and that's been happening for months and it still hasn't changed.

Only one teacher helps us and when they aren't in, none of us [on part time timetables] are allowed in because no one wants to do anything with us.

Sometimes you do feel bullied by [the school staff] when they threaten to kick you out for small things.

Some teachers make it harder to learn as they are annoying.

Some teachers moan

Feeling that teachers don't understand them / their needs

I have noise cancelling headphones for fire alarm day, and I can't listen to the alarm because it's stressful. The teacher screams at me for putting them on – that's just one example.

My disabilities make it difficult to learn, and teachers don't see it. My brain says don't ask for help, you'll get made fun of, and I explain to teachers this is what happens, but they tell me to grow up and say something. But physically and mentally I can't. Especially when I ask about fidget or stress toys – I'm not allowed because it's a distraction to the class.

When people annoy me, talk about my past

When you have a supply teacher / cover, it's a nightmare, they don't get told stuff so it's a nightmare trying to explain. I have accommodations for my disabilities and they don't believe me when I tell them...

Feeling left behind:

I used to really like Maths in P6 but I found it got harder and I don't like it as much.

When you don't know what to do.

In primary school I'd always be getting in trouble because I didn't understand the work.

Not everyone gets things quickly. I struggle with languages. I always used to get into trouble for not understanding how to do languages...

Distractions:

Distractions and other people annoying me

Noisy people beside you

People causing trouble and blaming it on you

Being in the Base isn't helpful. It's worse than being in class. We just chat if my friends are there or go on phone – I definitely do no work in that space.

When I get sent to Base it doesn't help because my pals are in there and we just muck around. A quiet space where I could chill when the class or the work is too much would help.

Distractions online like YouTube and games on my phone

People being distracting

People being annoying

Loud noises and sensory issues, especially noise disturb and distract me...If classes are disruptive I do not cope well...I cannot handle noises in the class and pupils who are disrespectful to the teachers.

Feeling angry, stuck, frustrated:

I find everything hard. I just get so stressed.

Nothing is helpful because I hate learning.

*What doesn't help is when I'm annoyed or angry and the teacher follows me about...just leave me alone for f**k sake. Teachers are just nippy as f**k*

I can't think of anything that would help me get back to school.

I want to be a bricklayer or painter decorator but if I can't get to do that because I have no qualifications then I'd rather be a drug dealer than have no job. I want to work, not just sit around doing nothing

When I'm in school I play on my phone, colour in and do wordsearches. Every time I'm in [the Base] I do a wordsearch then colour in.

[The school] are giving me harder work so I just leave.

Break and lunch I find stressful due to the noise level and the rush to get food at the canteen .

Some young people recognise that their own mood, choices and social interactions impact on the nature of their learning experiences day to day:

It depends on what mood I'm in. It depends on how everyone is going to act that day. One minute someone is your pal, then they talk behind your back.

I'm calm and I'm happy when I come into a lesson, yeah I'm late because I've gone to Morrisons or something and I say sorry I'm late and they go mental. I'm taken out of class for this a lot.

I like my classes but then I get into trouble and I'm not allowed to go.

When I come in late I don't know what to do. Sometimes I sleep through alarms

In writing, I get easily distracted.

Break and lunchtime can be hard – getting into fights.

Teachers think I'm just looking for an excuse to leave and mess about. I know I do do that, but I just can't sit for that long and when teachers don't listen to you or believe you, you're gonna act up like!

Difficult transitions:

My new school is a big change and I don't like change because of my disabilities. I'm still not over it and it's been 6 months....[When I moved schools] I got put in bottom sets....Then in most classes I've been moved up sets.

Classroom environment:

Class sizes. I don't like that. I get really stressed by so many people talking at once.

What would help to make learning experiences in school better in the future?

Improved relationships with teachers:

Teachers need to stop being negative.

I'd ask the teachers who don't help me to help me ask the right question to help me understand better

I'd ask the teacher to ask me why I'm late and be nicer about it.

If teachers didn't shout.

Supportive staff who understand me – who don't shout and blame me for everything, just someone who listens really.

More 1:1 support / higher teacher-pupil ratios:

If I had 1:1 support in school more, that would really help me. Even if it was for a short period of time, it would help me get back on track.

1:1 would help, but I've never had that.

More 1:1 learning

More teachers

Smaller class sizes.

Classes should be smaller. They are hard to control and there are a lot of people.

Shorter school day, more / longer breaks during the school day:

A bit of a longer break time – it's too short and more in class time

More breaks

More break time

More breaks during school time to make you calmer

I don't like getting up early – I think school should start later – we need more time on the astro to play football.

I think the school day should be 10am-2pm

A shorter school day 9-2.30pm

Shorter class times.

Short breaks during periods to make it easier to manage – like 20 minutes and then a 5 minute break

Longer break times

A different kind of learning environment:

Smaller numbers of people in class

Being out of class helps

I need to move around. I find it hard to sit.

If people struggle being in the classroom, they should be able to go outside, go for a walk in the fresh air because they will feel better after that.

More emphasis on practical learning / 'real life' learning:

If classes were more practical, they would be more interesting

If school was more like [my youth group] and prepared you for real life situations.

I'd like to learn more about mechanics – how to fix bikes.

[Learning to play guitar] has really helped. If it wasn't for my guitar, I would be a lot more depressed and anxious. My guitar has helped me a lot.

Practical, fun, not just sitting about.

Doing practical work in science – we've not done any practicals yet in the whole of first year.

More support from youth workers:

More time with youth workers – longer sessions.

I wish they had [my youth group] in primary school because I wasn't getting along with my teachers. I was on a part time timetable then, I couldn't cope in school.

Offer more personalised emotional support:

I would like teachers to listen. Sometimes when I've been on the edge of a breakdown, and I've asked to step out, they've said I'm not allowed. When I get upset they can't do anything to help me. I got more support in primary school – they knew me better – I knew I could go to someone and they would help me. I don't have that relationship with anyone at high school.

In primary school support was higher as it was quieter and there were less people about. The staff seemed to care more.

I wish teachers were more aware of how difficult it can be for pupils to cope in school and when they are not coping to allow them to have time out, have spaces where they can sit in silence, allow them to use earphones to calm down and block out other noise.

I would like to be able to have time to speak with someone every day I am in school...Place2Be was in my primary school and I used to post notes in the worries box and speak to someone.

A Fresh Start:

Get out of high school

I've been accepted to join a new school but I don't know the name of it or when I am starting. I'm feeling nervous about it, but happy that I'll be going back to school.

Better ways to tackle bullying:

I'm really concerned about the treatment of LGBTQ pupils in the school and I've been trying to help them have a safe place to be because they are bullied and it doesn't matter where you are in school, people will find you and bully you, and it's not right. There should be a safe place for them. Especially there should be a safe space for them to sit at lunch without people harassing them.

At lunch and break I am annoyed by some pupils following me around or calling me names...I feel judged in some groups.

Don't know:

I can't make changes

I dinnae ken what we can do to change, cos nothing will ever change, cos we do have to learn!

Cannae [youth workers] just teach us stuff?

I don't know what will make learning more enjoyable – nothing probably.

Our experience of youth work support

Youth work buildings in the community provide safe, trusted spaces for young people to socialise with peers:

I like coming to clubs as I see my pals and I can have fun with them.

I don't feel safe in this area but I feel safe [in youth work setting]

I feel safe indoors at clubs.

It feels safe and fun and like the [youth] workers actually want to talk to you.

I get to have a good conversation with people there.

[Youth workers] let us into their buildings outside of club times with our friends... it's nice we can do that because there aren't many places outside when it's cold and there's not much to do.

I like it because I get to hang out with my friends in a safe place.

Young people feel accepted and supported by youth workers (in and out of school)

I'm more social. I am my true, full self there, with no care. I don't know why that is. A lot of places can be really judgmental. [In the youth group] no one is judgmental towards another person and I like that because it doesn't cause any drama.

I've learned a good lesson at [my youth group] – that it's OK to be myself...That's the most valuable lesson I've learned.

Everyone here is so supportive...the environment is supportive. If I don't know someone, they will introduce themselves.

School doesn't ask you how you are feeling but you do.

Young people have positive, trusted relationships with youth workers

Adults are funner and nicer than the teachers – they understand you and dinnae just shout at you all the time.

You get grumpy if we don't listen or start to batter each other, but it's not like how the teachers act with you.

Youth workers listen better

All the staff are helpful and have good information and good advice about life.

I've come here since I was very young.

It feels like [youth workers] like and respect us

Adults are nicer here than in school and they're helpful.

The staff are kind.

I like [the youth workers] and can speak to [them]

[Youth work] staff are better than teachers – how they speak to young people – they don't shout or moan.

Noone tries to trick you or do things behind your back [youth workers always explain if they need to talk to your parents and they don't 'make you out to be trouble']

[Youth workers] are there if you need to talk about something. They always listen to you and help with stuff as much as they can.

We talk. There's lots of conversation. [Youth workers] are not on my case constantly.

The workers are very kind and easy to talk to.

Young people notice that youth workers take time to talk to them about their feelings, and sometimes get to the root of problems:

I learn respect and to speak through things I find difficult.

[My youth club] helps with feelings, like looking at things like anger – and friends

I do work about my anxiety. I see [a youth worker] who talks to me about my emotions and friendships and stuff and we make slime and stuff too.

Having more workers can help – talking to people individually.

In school I'm more silent, I don't speak as much...I don't like talking about problems or anything. I can talk here.

Staff listen to me – to what I want to talk about.

In school if you get into an argument, you just get separated – here someone will sit down with you and sort it.

Young people say that they access new / different learning experiences through youth work.

[Youth workers] give me opportunities.

I learn cooking, arts and crafts and other activities like sports.

I learn new games

I learn about faith at one of my [youth clubs] and I like that.

I feel like I learn stuff here.

I like learning about rapping at [my youth group].

*I learn how to get better on keyboards.
I learn how to make stuff.
Cooking, new games and sports.
I get to go to new places.*

Young people say they enjoy the active, practical learning approach that youth workers offer – and the fact that they can relate learning to their own lives:

*I learn better when I am doing things.
I like doing things, not sitting at a desk and writing or reading.
It's practical learning through conversations. Learning about community and behaviour in the community.*

Doing practical things is easier than school stuff

We learn about life.

Sometimes we discuss skills in PSE [in school] but at [the youth group] it's better because it's actually about our lives and stuff that happens to us.

It's different from school – school is all qualifications but [the youth group] is more real and about life scenarios we could face.

It's more interesting here because we move around.

Here the learning is more practical and through conversation.

Learning is fun because it's practical – not just sitting about.

We learn about real life situations, things that might happen, and we need to know what to do / who to speak to

It completely different learning [here at the youth group]. At clubs we're physically doing things rather than learning about them.

[Here] we have musical instruments we can learn on, but at school we didn't have the instruments.

Young people enjoy the learning environment and opportunities to learn in smaller groups and make choices about what they learn.

. Youth workers make learning fun and it gives us something to do.

Because it's funner, better

It's calmer, quieter.

1:1 support is good. You ken you will have someone who will listen to you.

It's more relaxed.

It's more relaxed and that makes me feel better

I see other kids doing something I can learn from.

I have more choice about what I want to do.

I learn better when things are explained.

I like it when there is more space and I can spend time with my friends.

I like the outdoor group better than the indoor one.

It can be annoying, but it's funner than school

The way they talk to us – not shouting. And being outside.

It's fun as long as we respect everyone.

There are more young people here than in my classes but also more adults.

Because it's fun – no one shouts or moans at you.

The niceness of the leaders [helps me learn].

I love the energy [here at the youth group]

Staff organise things we like and want to do.

I attend [youth groups] 2 days a week instead of being in school. It's good because there is stuff to do.

We learn by ourselves in a small group rather than being shown stuff.

You learn from workers and other young people.

Youth workers give me time and space when I need to so I can learn at my own pace.

Nobody really helps us learn at [the youth club] – we're kind of self-taught you could say.

[At the youth group] we mostly learn by ourselves in a small group

The youth workers make learning fun, because they do it in less serious ways.

I like the freedom to walk away from situations when they become too overwhelming for me.

The community settings are smaller groups than in school.

I used to go to [another youth club] but I prefer this one because it's more structured and I feel like I'm learning.

Young people notice their skills improve as they learn through a youth work approach:

I come here because it has structured activities and I can see I'm getting better in my skills...

There are times when I get really nervous for performing but I can overcome that."

[Youth workers] teach us life skills.

We learn practical skills and life skills but they don't feel like actual learning at the time.

[I learn] social skills – how to work in a group with people and peer support

[I learn] life skills, music and how to get along with people

It doesn't feel like school and sometimes you learn something and don't realise you have – learning social skills not subjects.

[My youth group] helps me with music and my friends.

We learn how to get along with people.

Youth work provides opportunities for young people to try new things and build confidence in their skills:

I go to choir which just started at [my youth group]. I like singing but I don't know the songs. I never sang, but it's taken me 4 months to get out of my shell to sing.

I like going to a group where there is a big option of something to do – like swimming or playing music, rather than video games that I can do in other places.

I get involved in trips. New, first-time experiences.

[Youth workers] encourage me to come out of my comfort zone and try new things..

What gets in the way of learning

Other people annoying me...distractions

One club I find a bit nippy, as it's crowded with too many people in one place.

I'm not sure that I feel that I learn – it's very different from school

It's annoying when other people are using the games consoles

Young people say youth work would be better if...

Quieter groups, less people, less noise

Less noisy, less people

More activities outside

Access to youth groups more often – some are only every 2 weeks

Longer youth work sessions; 1:1 sessions

More time [with youth workers]

...you had a bigger space so you could have more stuff and in this group [boys on part time timetables] it would be good just to go to the movies together or something.

We went to the beach.

If [the youth group] had a bigger space, we would be able to learn more skills.

I would have liked the support of [a youth group] in primary school – it would have been useful to make more friends.

There was more one-to-one support.

Like in school the noise – it can be too much but I can go away from it to a quiet spot.

Craigroyston Consultation with Parents

Contributors to the consultation:

11 parents in total have participated in semi-structured interviews in the context of established relationships with youth workers. In the summary below, responses are colour coded as follows:

Target group (Primary) – 6 parents of young people in P6-7 identified as struggling with engagement and attendance.

Target group (High School) – 3 parents of young people in S1-2 identified as struggling with engagement and attendance.

Wider group (High School) – 2 parents of young people with positive experiences of learning in both youth work and school

Living and Learning in the community

Parents offered a range of perspectives on their children's experience of community.

I think it is hard for him living and learning in this area due to some of the challenges. As a mum, I worry about that and the issues around criminality, drugs etc. I worry he would get involved in the wrong crowd.

I do worry about him in the community, because I know what his personality is like, and he can get involved in the wrong crowd of people.

I haven't managed to get him into any clubs for football because no one ever gets back to me.

It's really hard trying to fit in – there's a lot of trouble here, it's hard to keep them away from that.

There's nothing for them in the local community.

I don't feel there's enough for them to do in the community to keep them out of trouble.

[My child] had a bad experience when attending [sports class in the community]– the teacher pushed her too hard and would not listen when I tried to explain to her, so she stopped going and now she won't do anything after school.

Positive Covid experience – anxiety about being with people from school was lifted. He learned guitar and picked up languages he wanted to learn.

He's very sociable, he seems to know everyone. When we are out, he will wave at people and say hi and then tell me oh mum that was so and so.

The area we live in has a bad name so she is given more opportunities in clubs and in school – trips like Blackpool. She is always up for new opportunities.

What our children enjoy

Parents highlighted a wider range of activities that their children enjoy:

He is happiest in his room at home, usually by himself. He seems more comfortable when he is in the house – he also likes being out with his pals.

My daughter is happiest at home, she is already like a teenager, just likes being at home in her room.

He is happiest on the football pitch or when he is doing his own thing – on his

He likes football.

He enjoys swimming.

He likes the outdoors.

Happiest when playing X box.

[My child] is happiest when she is singing or dancing and being around people she feels comfortable with

She mainly enjoys expressive arts but also has an interest in History. Music is one of the biggest things for her.

Football, gaming, gymnastics, being outdoors, nature, gardening.

Happiest when playing and writing music – and gaming.

Happiest when out and about with friends, at school, at clubs, at dancing

They like to learn music history and current affairs...If he is interested in a topic, he will research all about it, but struggles if not interested.

Learning at home

Parents highlight a range of learning activities that their children enjoy at home:

He likes helping when I'm cooking...wants to know how he can help around the house.

Music, singing and dancing at home with mum and sisters.

Cooking together at home

Board games.

What helps with learning:

What helps is having a good relationship with the person and he is comfortable with them. That really helps as he will be calmer and more likely to take part.

He learns best when he enjoys what he is doing.

She can be herself at home and gets on well with her siblings which helps her to feel in a safe environment to do anything she wants there.

They love one to one time, attention, patience, understanding their needs and no judgement.

Being supportive and not judging helps them learn.

I study and he often joins in with me. He finds studying topics of no interest difficult...time constraints and understanding can also be a hurdle, as well as out of school activities.

At home, she helps to cook, watches and learns. She will always ask us if she is unsure of anything or wants to learn. She likes to learn from her family.

Some parents notice that their children struggle with focus and engagement, particularly with anything that doesn't immediately appeal:

She likes learning about things she has interest in: make-up, skin care, clothes and general fashion.

Anything else, it's like she just doesn't get it.

It's difficult to say what he likes to learn about because I find that he is very hard to engage and focus on an interest. Sometimes that's football. The one thing that can help is trying out recipes that he comes across.

He struggles to concentrate on anything. He can struggle with daily tasks and not want to do these. She won't do any learning at home, I think more because of the understanding of the work than anything else. She gets frustrated.

What gets in the way of learning at home:

His lack of concentration gets in the way – often he struggles to focus and just wants to move on to something else – that makes it hard.

Doesn't get on with sibling so they don't often interact.

Arguing with his sibling is one key thing that doesn't help him at times.

Who he is spending time with in and out of school has a big influence and it impacts on his language and attitudes towards me, other family members and other adults.

Lack of space and noise can get in the way of their learning.

They are easily distracted if not interested.

Sometimes she won't listen to parents about homework – if we try to help her in a different way from the way she has been taught in school. It's hard when the questions she asks are beyond our knowledge – we try to use internet or ask other family.

He feels school is for study and home is not.

Some parents express frustration with the responsibilities for learning at home that they feel they are being asked to carry:

I feel that I am getting no support from the school. I'm doing the schoolwork as well as all the other things I have to do in my day. It's challenging to give the right support – I am not a teacher.

It's shocking. [My child is] not in school – doesn't leave the house, inside all the time.

I'm not a teacher and I struggle with dyslexia [like my child] so I'm not able to help.

Learning in school

Parents worry that their children are not thriving in school:

He doesn't say much positive at all really about being in school.

I am really worried about how he is going to handle high school.

[My children] are happiest when not in school.

My secondary children don't want to talk about it at all and, if they do, it is always negative.

After Covid, one child was excited to go back to school. The other two felt calmer and more content at home. They did not want to go back.

The experience of Covid was mostly positive – he was happy at home.

Others say their children are positive about their school experiences:

He doesn't not want to go to school. He gets up and goes to school without any persuasion. But currently he is only in for a couple of hours a day and I want that to increase.

My primary child tells me everything and speaks highly of their school.

Friends group helps him get through the day by keeping him calm. They study together and all like quiet spaces.

He usually listens to music while studying.

She managed to come to high school and make loads of new friends.

She is good at asking for help if she is struggling and will ask guidance teachers for help.

She enjoys learning if she likes the subject teacher.

Boys in her class who misbehave take the teachers' attention so those who aren't being disruptive don't get the time they need from teachers.

Some parents say they feel let down by the school's response to issues that arise

I was told that a PSA was supporting him in P6, but he was never in school. I would receive a call from school nearly every day to pick him up due to some incident or something, so I think that support did not last long...I feel so let down in the full primary school experience.

I worry about [my child] when I drop them off at school. My worries are around how they are being treated. They have developmental delays and struggle a lot ..I have been telling the school [for years] and nothing has been done...I honestly don't have one good thing to say about the school. I feel he was never given a chance and that he would always get the blame even if it was not his fault. My instinct as a parent is that he just struggles with general learning, even though the school don't see that and put it down to him just being naughty and behavioural issues. I feel he has not had any positive experiences.

It feels like the curriculum is aimed at one type of learning but there are actually many different types of learners in the classroom.

The staff in school are not willing to learn about my children and their needs— they are just a problem. Overall, it seems like there are too many people in too small a space who are basically being told to sit down, shut up and get on with your work.

No work is given by the school and [my child has] no access to schoolwork]

Others highlight the additional challenges they have to manage when their child is not in school.

Challenges relating to school are dealing with the constant phone calls and managing childcare when he is not in school – and the knock-on effects of this.

While he is not in school and on a part time timetable, that puts real pressure on me and the family in relation to childcare – managing to supervise him at home and not being on the streets.

Some parents feel their children are still feeling the impact of learning loss in Covid:

Covid really did affect his learning as he missed so much. He was given an iPad by school during Covid, but it was hard to engage with it.

100% Covid had a big impact. Trying to get him back in a normal routine has been and continues to be really hard. Learning was hard in Covid as there wasn't a lot of support. I think this is why he wants to be in the house a lot of the time.

100% Covid had a big impact and being at home with no learning at all had a huge impact...he lost confidence in himself even more than before.

Covid was hard on them. She still talks about it and what it was like but doesn't seem badly impacted. P6/7 was harder on her from missing out on work, but everything is fine now.

What helps with learning in school...

Positive relationships with teachers and peers:

Good relationships with staff can really help and allow him to feel able to do the work.

A good relationship with staff makes all the difference.

There are some teachers that [my child] has built up a really trusting relationship with – and that helps her learn.

She managed to come to high school and make loads of new friends.

She is good at asking for help if she is struggling and will ask guidance teachers for help.

She enjoys learning if she likes the subject teacher.

Friends group helps him get through the day by keeping him calm. They study together and all like quiet spaces.

1:1 / small group support:

In the past, he has worked much better in school with 1:1 support...It feels like there isn't enough staff to support him at times.

The biggest thing that would help him in school is to have more staff generally or more staff to support him 1:1. Schools are stretched to manage with the staff team that they have.

One to one work or smaller groups.

PSA supports with attending school.

Smaller groups in classes – [my child] found school easier in later years. Having more time with teachers in smaller groups to build better relationships and trust.

A willingness / patience from teachers to tailor support to the needs of each child:

There are some teachers who don't seem able or willing to help [my child] understand things in a simple step-by-step way and this is difficult for her.

I feel the school has not supported him.

Having things broken down into very very simple instructions from first principles. Some teachers are able to do this in a way that helps, others are not.

Supportive staff and people who are willing to get to understand my child.

People who listen and don't judge – patience and someone who doesn't scream all the time.

Teachers who have patience and understand.

It feels like some teachers really want to get to know the kids individually and build that relationship, but others are just focusing on getting through everything on the curriculum.

Children being offered options and choices (including the option to take a break) and a range of engaging learning styles

Dance and PE are highlights of the week. This is something that K was given a choice about and feels that she has been consulted on and has been able to do what she wants to do.

Fun activities; fun ways to learn

[My child] needs to be able to leave a situation that she can't cope with in order to be able to regulate herself emotionally, for example with anger or giddiness but this is not always possible in a school context.

Consistency

Stable structure, consistency, boundaries.

Lots of changes in teachers is disruptive to learning

Teacher turnover is high – more consistency would be helpful

What gets in the way of learning in school...

A vicious circle of disruptive behaviour resulting in children being isolated or sent home, leading to further difficulties

He feels he can't do right for doing wrong. I only hear some of the story from him. I feel that the school give way to him...I think he knows certain actions will lead to consequences such as being out of class and he chooses to behave that way. It's frustrating that the go-to school response from school was to phone a parent.

His timetable being reduced due to his behaviours. I feel his behaviours were because he struggled with the learning and he was not getting the support for this...He makes excuses to leave the class...but this is because he becomes frustrated with not being able to manage the work.

In his old school, he often got left alone in a room with an iPad – that wasn't good enough.

In P6 he was not allowed to be in the outdoors for playtime and lunchtime – this was because they were worried about him getting in some fights.

Boys in her class who misbehave take the teachers' attention so those who aren't being disruptive don't get the time they need from teachers.

A negative pattern of communication between school and parents

The school just call me for the smallest thing...why could they not put something in place for him, like giving him a safe space to go where he could try and calm down.

Schools need to listen to parents and not ignore them. They know their own children.

Better communication from the school – I only have a call from them when he has done something wrong. Nothing has been said we he has been good or achieved something....The school has always been quick to assume the worst.

I feel if school sent regular homework or even informed me of what they were learning in school it would help me to help [my son]. I have never had any correspondence from the school regarding this.

Forever getting phone calls home that are always negative never positive. Phone calls to say my child is not in school, but he's sitting in his maths class – the school don't even know what is going on.

Distractions

Noisy rooms create distractions.

If he doesn't have access to quiet time then he struggles to focus in class.

Change that would help

A fresh start

I'm hoping that the move to high school will be a fresh start and a chance to start again. He is a known pupil at his school and that could influence the way they respond to him.

I wish I had changed his old school sooner. I think his experience there wasn't helpful for him.

A referral to a different school to get help with literacy and support with learning

More individually tailored and relational support to meet needs

I wish the school saw him as an individual and supported him as an individual, really trying to know what his needs are and what would help him.

Being given some time to build a relationship with a PSA or even given some time to stay in school so that he can get some sort of education.

I think more support would help and not him trying to manage situations by taking himself out of class or being sent to the Head Teacher's office. When I hear that he is capable and is on target for achieving, it is frustrating that he often isn't in class. I feel if there was more support in class or out of class, he would achieve more.

I think she needs things broken down for her to understand them. I know this is because of her autism. There has to be more support in place for people like [my child] and additional support needs children. She was given a visual timetable and then it was taken away from her – a teacher thought she didn't use it or need it....School needs to be more inclusive and think about ways to support children who mask their problems."

More support. All the teachers to work together Everyone to be singing from the same hymn sheet – but the school have not interest in doing this.

Strong relationships with consistent teachers who have got to know her individually.

Children with additional support needs getting more support – even more so when they have come from a special school into mainstream. Things should have been in place. Staff should be aware of the child's needs and staff should have been there to support.

More regular communication with parents about coursework and progress with this

More understanding of the coursework – he doesn't always understand explanations so I have to work out the alternative explanation.

The school could give more homework. Also more home updates – monthly? Like mini report cards just to keep parents updated.

Training and peer-peer support for teachers to share good practice

Learning from teachers that are doing things well and spreading that knowledge to others.

Retrain the staff...about social skills, basic empathy and kindness – just how to be nice really and support children with ASN.

More active and creative learning opportunities

More things to do – more learning opportunities.

Movement breaks – this can be done in a creative way, giving them some jobs to do. They won't even know but they are learning like that too.

More opportunities for kids to express themselves freely

He built confidence in horse-riding in Equilearn which was amazing...he managed it well.

Focus more on what he likes doing – rather than the subjects he needs.

Learning in Youth Work

Parents see youth workers as advocates for their children

[My child] is in P6 and you were the first person she was given support from. I think this is what she needs. Having someone to talk to.

[Youth workers] never give up on [my children]. They are someone they can rely on to listen.

Parents value the positive relationships that youth workers build with young people (in school and in the community)

He built a good relationship with [the youth worker]

At [the youth group] the staff respect them, they encourage them, they don't judge them or shout and scream at them. That's why they want to be there and are different people when they are there too, because it is good vibes only.

She can be herself [in the youth work setting] because she feels safe there and likes everyone there. Youth workers are fun and kind and they do fun things with them, but they make sure they are learning too.

[The youth workers] talk to him, build relationship, provide consistency of sessions.

He has a good relationship with the youth workers. Their consistency helps to build his confidence.

Youth workers are fun and kind and they do fun things with them, but they make sure they are learning too.

[Youth workers] treat them all the same. They are all part of a team.

Youth workers are fun and kind and they do fun things with them, but they make sure they are learning too.

He has been brought up with youth work. Getting to know people first to interact with them takes a while. [Youth workers] can give more time to his needs. He has built good relationships over time with [youth work staff]. Youth work offers more flexibility than school.

Parents are pleased to see their children accessing new opportunities for learning through youth work.

[At youth groups] he's getting involved and doing activities that he wouldn't do if he were at home.

[Youth group] provides performance opportunities, including performing to 300 people at Royston Wardieburn Burns Night. Having regular positive experiences of performing in front of others has massively increased her confidence, both in music and generally in her life.

He has started volunteering in a youth group, giving him a focus in life and helping him in course choices and college.

My child has enjoyed all of their youth clubs and school, all her experiences and opportunities she's gained from these have been very valuable.

Parents notice that their children respond well to the approach and the learning environment

It's a more relaxed atmosphere.

There is more choice.

He gets to do things he enjoys.

He enjoys [the youth clubs]

It's more relaxed not being in school and there is less pressure on having to manage certain tasks or boundaries.

[Youth workers] let them learn through activities they actually enjoy – and by listening to them and their opinions.

They are learning life skills but they are actually enjoying it and they don't feel pressured – they want to be there and they want to learn.

[My child] is learning and developing really well in [youth groups]. It works well because it is an emotionally safe environment where she experiences positive feedback [about her progress].

Youth workers are good at keeping her engaged and entertained.

He is interested in the activities and the club taking place.

She goes to [two youth work clubs] – friends go to the clubs too which encourages her to go. Trips and activities that take her interest also help.

She enjoys learning about things she's interested in – that's how she stays engaged.

Youth clubs are more fun learning and more choice-based, whereas school is a set curriculum. Not many similarities.

Some parents notice that their children build skills to support improved readiness to learn in school

[Youth work] helps with social skills which hopefully then helps him manage better in school and have more of a desire to be there.

Managing a youth group well hopefully helps him to manage in school better. The more socially active he is, the easier it should be to manage in school"

It gets him interacting with other people.

Being part of [youth work] activities helps her build relationships which is good for her confidence in and out of school.

Parents value the opportunities that youth work offers for individual and small group support for learning

I think he gets attention from [the youth worker] and 1:1 attention seems to be the one thing that really works for him.

He works well in smaller groups with [the youth worker]

She is free to express herself in a smaller group of people who she feels safe with.

What doesn't work so well...

Depending on the dynamics of his peers it can work really well – or I know it can be difficult when he is with a couple of others from his class.

If there are fallouts with friends it sometimes stops her from going to clubs – that happened more in primary.

Cancelling groups and not letting people know

I'm not sure about the educational learning.