

Mind the Engagement Gap: A National Study of Pupil Engagement in England's Schools

Professor John Jerrim (ImpactEd Group)

Commissioned by ImpactEd Group
and the Research Commission on
Engagement and Lead Indicators



RCELI

Research Commission on
Engagement and Lead Indicators

Foreword

In Spring 2025 one in five young people are still missing a day or more of school every fortnight in England. At a system level the contributing factors are well rehearsed, including the long-term impact of Covid19, challenges in recruitment and retention of the best teachers, increasing numbers of young people with SEND and budgetary constraints for schools. And while policy and politics will move those big levers slowly over time, our teachers, leaders and children cannot wait, their time is now.

This is why I was so honoured to accept the invitation to Chair the Research Commission on Engagement and Lead Indicators. Because it was the Commission's instinct - and thanks to this research from ImpactEd Group, TEP and Professor John Jerrim, now our understanding - that engagement of young people in their education is something that we should seek to get a measure of and unravel, as it can act as a valuable predictor for attendance, motivation and at the simplest level, enjoyment of school. Importantly, understanding the engagement of different classes, groups, cohorts and schools can serve as a lead indicator and give leaders actionable insights in a dynamic way, that enables them to shape practice and channel resources for these children today.

Together with a group of committed Trust CEOs, School Leaders and Local Authority representatives, and alongside ASCL, CST, Reach Foundation and Challenge Partners, we set out to shape a research project with ImpactEd Group and TEP to give our schools a better understanding of the role pupil engagement plays in driving positive outcomes for young people. Building on research from the USA we hypothesized that if we understood more about pupils' engagement in a more granular way, that could act as a lead indicator, or early warning signal for outcomes such as attendance, drive to succeed and attainment. And while this national data set on engagement is still in its infancy, over 80,000 pupils have now participated over two waves of data collection and the insights are both sobering and rallying. I urge you all to read this report's findings with care and consider the actions we can take in our schools now.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "S. E. John".

Dame Sue John, RCELI Chair



Note from ImpactEd Group



At ImpactEd Group our mission is to support education and purpose-driven organisation to maximise and realise their potential. At a school level that means helping leaders to understand and evaluate what works and what doesn't in their setting, to enable resources to be used most effectively to drive pupil outcomes. It is in service of this mission that we became deeply interested in the emerging international research around engagement of pupils, employees and other key stakeholders in schools and how that relates to a suite of outcomes. This interest that led us to establish and fund the Research Commission on Engagement and Lead Indicators.

Working alongside the formidable Dame Sue John, our convening partners and 22 system leaders who kindly served as Commissioners, we have reached out into the sector to build the largest dataset of its kind on engagement in the UK, with support from the TEP Platform, that enabled us to collect data from over 100,000 pupils.

In the enclosed report we synthesise the data so far to share themes back with schools, that we believe we should all be paying attention to, including:

- Understanding both the national picture of engagement, and how students experience this at a local level, using benchmarked data to serve as a lead indicator in school improvement planning.
- Seeing which cohorts of young people are most engaged with their education, and leveraging this understanding to better support students for whom motivation and agency drops away.
- Analysing and understanding which pupil groups feel most and least safe and trusting of their teachers in school.
- Surfacing the relationship between student and employee engagement and how this links to pupil attendance and employee retention.
- Presenting the correlation between engaged teachers and engaged pupils that achieve better outcomes and have a more positive experience of school.

We would like to thank all Commissioners and members of the Research Cohort for participation in this work so far and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Professor John Jerrim for his analysis of the data. As we continue to build the UK evidence base on engagement together, we hope that the early warnings, or lead indicators that are emerging, are things that we can all act on together. We are committed to continuing to build this research and welcome more schools and trusts to join us for the next phase.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jonny'.

Jonny Boddington,
Founder and Group Director,
ImpactEd Group, RCELI Commissioner

The Commissioners



Dame Sue John DBE, Commission Chair

Sue John led Lampton School to Outstanding for 18 years and was the secondary director for the London Challenge. Sue has held directorships at the Department for Education, Future Leaders, and Teaching Leaders. She was the founding Chair of the Brilliant Club and has been a Trustee for several MATs. Currently, she is a Trustee of United Learning, Chair of Trustees of the TDT, and a member of the Sutton Trust EAG and the Fair Education Alliance advisory group. Sue's work in the sector has been recognised with a DBE in 2010, fellowships, and honorary degrees.



Cara Ackroyd

Cara Ackroyd, Executive Principal at Outwood Grange Academies Trust, has worked with the Trust for 15 years, leading multiple schools in the Northwest. Starting as a Science NQT, she now oversees 28 secondary schools and has successfully led academies out of "special measures" status. In her new role, she will lead the Trust's secondary provision, with academies located from Middlesbrough in the North to Nottinghamshire in the South.



Reena Bhogal-Welsh

Reena Bhogal-Welsh is the new Director of Education and Inclusion at Liverpool City Council, responsible for improving education outcomes and overseeing statutory duties. With over 20 years of leadership experience in secondary education, she has held senior roles at Bristol City Council, University of Bolton, and various schools across the Northwest. Reena was also a member of the Future Leaders Programme and has successfully led an Outstanding Free School. Reena was a member of the Future Leaders Programme and has successfully led an Outstanding Free School.



Sarah Botchway

Sarah Botchway has a 25-year career in education, holding key leadership roles, including Headship and Associate Headteacher in London. She is currently the Director of the London South Teaching School Hub, supporting teacher recruitment and development across Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark. Her focus spans from initial teacher training to continuous professional development for educators.



Karen Bramwell OBE

Karen Bramwell is the founding CEO and Executive Principal at Forward as One Academy Trust, dedicated to providing exceptional education and leadership development for children and communities. A National Leader of Education since 2011, she has supported numerous schools and provides training for school leaders nationwide. In 2024, Karen was awarded an OBE for services to education.



Dr Herminder Channa OBE

Dr Herminder Channa OBE, Regional Director for Oasis Community Learning in the Midlands and a Lead Ofsted Inspector, has been recognized for transforming schools in disadvantaged areas. Under her leadership, Nishkam High School achieved an "outstanding" rating within 18 months, and she was later awarded an OBE for her services to education. Passionate about providing equal access to high-quality education, she continues to advocate for the betterment of society through teaching.

**Simon Corner**

Simon Corner is the Principal of Wade Deacon High School and Director of Secondary Education for Wade Deacon Trust. Under his leadership, the Trust's secondary schools have achieved high Ofsted ratings. Simon leads a DfE project to improve maths and English provision in Halton and is committed to raising aspirations across the Trust and wider region.

**Jo Coton**

Jo Coton, CEO of NET Academies Trust, has 30 years of experience in education and a strong record of rapid school improvement across a range of contexts. She has led schools out of special measures and supports schools through the DfE TSIO. Jo holds an MBA in Educational Management and has 14 years of headship experience.

**Leora Cruddas CBE**

Leora Cruddas CBE is the founding Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts – the national organisation and sector body for Multi-Academy Trusts in England. She is a teacher and has spent many years working at director level in local government. She is Visiting Professor at UCL Institute of Education. Leora was awarded a CBE in the New Year's Honours, 2022.

**Carol Dewhurst OBE**

Carol Dewhurst is the CEO of Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust, leading its growth to 20 schools with over 10,600 students. She has supported new MATs in North Yorkshire and sits on various boards, including the DfE Yorkshire and Humber Advisory Board. Carol was awarded an OBE in 2020 for her services to education.

**Tamsin Frances**

Tamsin combines her experience in primary leadership and secondary school operations to lead on operations and innovations at the Ted Wragg Trust. She is passionate about creating organisational cultures where staff feel valued and empowered to transform lives and strengthen communities. Drawing from her background in teaching, theatre, and project management, Tamsin focuses on enabling teachers to succeed for the benefit of all children.

**Rob Hardcastle**

Rob Hardcastle, CEO of Hatton Academies Trust, has 28 years of experience in education, successfully improving schools in Northamptonshire. He is the senior partner for Challenge Partners Northants Hub and facilitates for NPQ training regionally. Under his leadership, Sir Christopher Hatton Academy is and remains one of the top-performing schools in the East Midlands. In 2016, he was shortlisted for the Pearson Teaching Awards for Primary Headteacher of the Year.

**Carley Holliman**

Carley joined Eden Academy Trust in 2024 after serving as Assistant Director – Schools and Settings at Cambridgeshire County Council. With over a decade of experience as a headteacher, she is a seasoned system leader specializing in innovation, strategic planning, and school leadership consultancy. Carley also brings extensive commercial experience in programme development and school improvement services. .

**Professor John Jerrim**

John is the Director of Research at TEP and the wider ImpactEd Group and a Professor of Education and Social Statistics. John's research interests include the economics of education, access to higher education, intergenerational mobility, cross-national comparisons and educational inequalities. He has worked extensively with the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, with this research reported widely in the British media

**Laura Lewis-Williams**

Laura Lewis-Williams is Managing Director at Challenge Partners, a practitioner-led education charity dedicated to reducing educational inequality and improving life chances for all children through school and trust collaboration. Previously, she was Director of Headship and Executive Programmes at Ambition Institute and is a former Deputy Headteacher. Laura holds Masters degrees in Social and Political Sciences, and in Education and International Development.

**John Loftus**

John Loftus is Vice Principal at The Education Alliance MAT, leading achievement, assessment, and data. He has over 20 years of teaching experience, previously serving as Director of Maths and Deputy Headteacher in large secondary schools.

**Margaret Mulholland**

Margaret Mulholland, ASCL's SEND and Inclusion Specialist since 2019, is also Project Director for Whole School SEND and Nasen, leading an Education Endowment Foundation trial. With over 20 years of experience in ITT innovation, she is a leading advocate for inclusive teaching and has held senior roles at the Institute of Education and a top special school. Margaret advises the UK Government on ITT curriculum and writes a column on inclusivity for the Times Educational Supplement.

**Dame Nicola Stephenson DBE**

Dame Nicola Stephenson is CEO of Valour Multi Academy Trust, with a strong track record in school improvement. She is also a National Leader of Education and supports schools across the Northeast. As a National Executive Officer for NAHT, she advocates for education leaders in the region and works on school improvement both nationally and internationally. She has also created a network of CEOs across the Northeast to provide support and share good practice.



James Townsend

James Townsend is Executive Director at The Reach Foundation, leading the Cradle to Career Partnership. Previously, he worked as Chief Programme Officer at STiR Education, supporting education initiatives in India and East Africa, and founded the UK Youth Philanthropy Initiative. He began his career as a history teacher and holds degrees in modern history and education policy.



Kully Uppal

Kully Uppal, Summit Learning Trust's Deputy CEO, brings over 15 years of educational leadership experience, having overseen the rapid improvement of academies in the West Midlands. He will lead the Trust's secondary schools and Sixth Form college, with a focus on achieving exceptional outcomes for students. Previously, as Principal of Bristnall Hall Academy, he led the school to become the highest-performing secondary in its local authority.



Dr Josephine Valentine OBE

Josephine Valentine is CEO of Danes Educational Trust, overseeing 12 schools in Hertfordshire. Previously, she was Headteacher of St Clement Danes School for 20 years and played a key role in opening Croxley Danes School. She is an elected member of the DfE East of England Advisory Board and has been part of Challenge Partners since 2013. Awarded an OBE in 2019, she is also Chair of Trustees at The Brilliant Club and has a PhD in Oral Histopathology.



Dr Chris Wilson

Chris is the former CEO of The Brilliant Club and launched the consulting model which has developed to become ImpactEd Consulting. He is a trustee at the Delta Academies Trust and Get Further.



Andrew Young

Andrew Young is a Teacher of Social Sciences at Archbishop Holgate's School in York and Co-Director of Pathfinder Teaching School Hub. He has expertise in system leadership, SEND, and professional development, working with hundreds of staff and schools annually. Andrew also serves on national advisory boards and runs a regional group of leaders in Initial Teacher Education.

Supporting the Commission

ImpactEd Group

The Commission and Research Cohort are being funded by ImpactEd Group. ImpactEd Group supports education and purpose-driven organisations to maximise and realise their potential. The Group does this by helping its partners to be consistently impactful and operationally sustainable.



Jonathan Sobczyk Boddington, Group Director, ImpactEd Group

Jonny has held Director positions at Accenture and BCS Consulting and is the former CEO & Executive Chair of the Peter Jones Foundation. Jonny is the Co-Founder and former CEO of The Brilliant Club, Trustee and Treasurer of the Young Foundation and former advisor to the British Science Association. Jonny also serves as a Board member and Director of TEP.

The Engagement Platform (TEP)

The Engagement Platform (TEP) will be facilitating the Research Cohort. TEP has supported schools and trusts to collect, report and act on employee engagement data for two years.



Steph Hamilton, Director, TEP

Steph has led TEP since its inception, shaping the approach and design of employee engagement research and practices and is leading the technical delivery of the Research Cohort. Previously Steph was Director of School Partnerships at The Brilliant Club, a university fair access charity. Steph started her career in education as a Science teacher and middle leader in Hartlepool.



Emily Goodridge, School and Community Engagement Officer, TEP

Emily is the School and Community Engagement Officer at TEP, with 8 years of experience as a Geography teacher and head of department. Emily supports TEP's partner schools. She began her career through the Teach First programme in Grimsby. Previously, she was a Practice Development Lead at Teach First, supporting Early Career Teachers.

PLMR

PLMR is an award-winning public affairs, PR and digital marketing agency, supporting dissemination of The Commission's research findings and building participation in the research cohort.



Tiffany Beck OBE, Head of Education, PLMR

Tiffany specialises in strategic counsel, PR, public affairs, crisis communications and reputation management for education organisations around the country. Outside of PLMR, Tiff is the co-founder and Chair of Trustees of Maritime Academy Trust, a founding Trustee of Independent Governor Support (IGovS) and a former National Leader of Governance.

Background on the concept of engagement

School Engagement, at its core, refers to the commitment and enthusiasm that various stakeholders have towards their respective role with a school and its activities. Prior academic literature has divided school engagement into three components:

- Cognitive engagement. What stakeholders think and believe about their role, its importance, and their ability to influence important outcomes related to the school's goals.
- Emotional engagement. The extent of positive (and negative) reactions to colleagues, students, leaders and other stakeholders in the school. A central component is therefore interpersonal relationships, though it also incorporates enjoyment at schools.
- Behavioural engagement. This draws on the idea that stakeholders take action to support their (and their school's) goals.

Commissioned by ImpactEd Group and the Research Commission on Engagement and Lead Indicators (RCELI), this study is measuring different components of pupils cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement, with the data being collected from more than 80,000 pupils in November 2024 and March 2025. During a three-week window, pupils from across 200 schools were asked to participate in the TEP engagement census. Whilst these schools were not randomly sampled, they are nevertheless broadly representative of schools in England in terms of key observable characteristics.

In the March 2025 data collection (the main focus of this report) 142 out of the 200 schools achieved a pupil participation rate of over 75%, with more than 90% of pupils responding in half of the schools. The final pupil sample is thus very similar in terms of observable characteristics to all pupils in the school. It is also similar to the state school population as a whole. In total, 81,283 pupils completed TEP in March 2025 (see Appendix A and B for further details on response rates and attrition across waves).

As part of TEP, pupils were asked a series of questions capturing key facets of their emotional, cognitive and behavioural engagement, including:

- Value placed on education (cognitive engagement)
- Determination to succeed in education (cognitive engagement) – November 2024 only.
- Views of behaviour (cognitive engagement)
- Agency (cognitive engagement)
- Enjoyment of (and worries about) school (emotional engagement)
- Views in inclusion (emotional engagement)
- Peer relationships (emotional engagement)
- Pupil-teacher relationships (emotional engagement)
- Self-reported effort at school (behavioural engagement)

Each of these components is measured using a set of three or four questions, which pupils responded to using a 0-10 reporting scale. Key findings for each area are reported below.



Executive summary of key findings

John Jerrim, Professor of Education and Social Statistics at University College London Institute of Education and Part-Time Research Director at ImpactEd Group, has analysed the full datasets across both waves of data collection in November 2024 and March 2025, to extract a number of emerging themes:

Views of pupil behaviour

- Around a third of pupils in England award their feeling of safety at school a score of five out of ten or below.
- Secondary pupils report behaviour amongst pupils to be substantially worse than their primary school peers. One-in-seven (15%) primary school pupils do not express clear agreement with the statement “*I feel safe at school*”, compared to one-in-three (37%) secondary pupils.
- Gender differences in views of pupil behaviour are relatively modest, though with boys consistently awarding scores around 0.3 points higher than girls.
- Girls report feeling marginally safer than boys at school during primary education. However, between Year 7 and Year 9, girls increasingly feeling less safe at school than their male peers.
- Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) hold similar views of behaviour at school (including their feelings of safety) as pupils without a special educational need. Pupils with other forms of SEN support perceive behaviour to be slightly worse.
- There is a reasonably strong negative association between school’s exclusion rate and pupils’ views of behaviour (correlation = -0.52). This indicates that – at the school level – there is reasonable agreement between pupil views of behaviour and school exclusions.

Views on the value of school

- Almost a third of pupils in England to some extent question whether what they are learning at school will help them in the future.
- There are clear differences in the value primary and secondary pupils place on school. Over a third of primary pupils to some extent question whether school teaches them what they need to know, compared to just a tenth of primary pupils.
- White pupils are the least likely to agree that what they are learning at school will help them in the future. Around a third (32%) of White pupils award a score of 5 out of 10 or below in response to this statement, compared to 21% of Asian and 20% of Black pupils.
- In primary school, differences in the extent pupils believe school will be useful in their future is similar across ethnic groups. However, through secondary education, White pupils value schooling less than other ethnic groups.
- FSM pupils are slightly less likely to value what they are learning at school than their non-FSM peers (differences of around 0.2 to 0.3 scale points).



Determination to succeed at school

- Pupils in England report high levels of academic drive. Most pupils want to do well at school (average score of 8.8) and want to achieve good marks in most of their classes (average score of 8.7).
- Pupils with SEN tend to have lower levels of academic drive than pupils without such additional needs. Around a quarter of pupils with an EHCP responded to the statement *"I care about my marks in tests"* with a score of 5 out of 10 or below, compared to one-in-nine (11%) pupils without SEN.
- White pupils have lower levels of academic drive than other ethnic groups. Around one-in-six (16%) White pupils indicated a degree of ambivalence towards their marks on school test – twice the percentage of other ethnic groups.
- White pupils consistently less likely to say they care about the marks they achieve on their school tests than other ethnic groups throughout their time at school. This difference can be observed across all year groups, from Year 3s through to Year 11s.
- Girls have higher levels of academic drive than their male peers. For instance, in response to the statement *"I want to do well in school"*, girls – on average – award a score of 8.9, compared to an average of 8.6 for boys.
- FSM Pupils award scores in response to TEP's four academic drive questions that are on average around 0.3 points lower than their non-FSM peers.



Feelings of agency

- Pupils' sense of school agency is captured by questions such as *"my marks are my responsibility"* and *"I do well in school if I try hard"*. The average response of pupils to such questions is around 7 to 7.5 out of 10, with around a fifth of pupils awarding a score of five or below.
- Primary school pupils are more likely to believe that hard work at school will lead to success than pupils in secondary school. Pupils in secondary schools respond to the statement *"I do well in school if I try hard"* with an average score of 7.2, compared to 8.8 amongst those in primary school.
- There is no difference in the sense of school agency amongst boys and girls.
- Pupils that are eligible for FSM respond to the school agency questions with scores that are – on average – around 0.3 points lower than their non-FSM peers.
- Almost a third (31%) White secondary pupils respond to the statement *"my marks are my responsibility"* with a score below six out of ten. This compares to around 25% amongst other ethnic groups.

Enjoyment of school

- Many pupils in England do not look forward to going in to school. On average, pupils respond to the statement *"I feel happy to go to school in the morning"* with a score of around 4.6 out of ten.
- There is a particularly big decline in school enjoyment scores between pupils in Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8. The average school enjoyment score falls from around 6 amongst pupils in Year 6 to 3.8 to pupils in Year 7 and to 3.2 amongst those in Year 8.
- Boys and girls provide similar responses – on average – to questions capturing the extent that they look forward to going to school.
- Girls are, however, more likely to express worry about school than boys. The average score girls award to the statement *"I don't worry about the next day after school"* is 5.6, compared to an average score of 6.6 for their male peers.
- Within primary school, boys and girls are equally likely to report worrying about school. A gender gap then emerges during secondary education, with average scores awarded by girls in response to the statement *"I don't worry about the next day after school"* being almost 1.5 points lower than for boys.
- Pupils with an EHCP feel happier about going to school than those without special educational needs. They report an average score of five in response to the question *"I feel happy to go to school in the morning"*, compared to an average score of 4.6 amongst those without additional needs, and 4.3 amongst those receiving SEN support.
- White pupils are less likely to report enjoying school than other ethnic groups. They, for instance, respond with an average score of 3.1 in response to the statement *"I look forward to going to school on Monday"*, compared to average scores of 4.4 for Black and 3.8 for Asian pupils. This is being driven by the difference amongst secondary pupils.
- FSM pupils are less likely to enjoy school than their non-FSM peers. For instance, FSM pupils responded to the statement *"I feel happy to go to school in the morning"* with an average score of 4.3 out of 10; 0.4 points lower than pupils not eligible for FSM. This difference grows to 0.7 points amongst secondary pupils.



Inclusion

- Secondary pupils hold much more negative views of inclusivity than primary pupils. For instance, nearly two-thirds (66%) of secondary pupils awarded a score below six when asked whether “*people at school treat everyone the same*”, compared to almost a third (31%) of primary pupils.
- Black pupils view their school to be less inclusive than pupils of other ethnicities. When asked whether “*People at school treat me the same as everyone else*”, Black secondary pupils responded with an average score of 4.7 out of 10, compared to an average of 5.6 amongst Asian pupils, and 5.8 amongst Indian pupils.
- There is no evidence that pupils feel a greater sense of inclusion when there are more pupils of the same ethnicity within their school.
- Girls provide more positive responses with respect to diversity and inclusion in primary school. This reverses in the secondary school sample, where boys provide more positive responses than girls.
- Pupils that are eligible for FSM believe their school to be less inclusive than pupils not eligible for FSM, though differences are generally small (around 0.3 scale points for each statement). The FSM gap grows to around 0.5 scale points to most of the diversity and inclusion questions amongst the secondary school sample.



Pupil-teacher relationships

- Pupils in England on average rate the extent they can trust teachers, like teachers and feel they have an adult in the school they can talk to at just above six out of 10. Their response as to whether they respect teachers is somewhat higher (7.7 out of 10).
- There are sizeable differences in pupil perceptions of pupil-teacher relations across the primary and secondary sectors. When asked whether they trust their teachers, only 11% of primary pupils responded with a score of 5 or below, compared to 46% of secondary pupils.
- Boys are more likely than girls to report trusting teachers at their school. Girls are, however, more likely to say that they respect school staff.
- Boys and girls in primary school overwhelmingly say that they trust teachers at their school. A gender gap then emerges during secondary school.
- Black pupils are less likely to report trusting teachers at their school (average score of 5.2 compared to 5.7 for White pupils in secondary school) and less likely to feel there is an adult that they can talk to (average score of 5.1 versus 5.5 for White pupils in secondary school).
- Pupils with an EHCP report having a better relationship with staff at their school than pupils with less intensive SEN support and those without special needs.
- FSM Pupils report having worse relationships with teachers than their non-FSM peers, particularly among secondary pupils.

Peer relationships

- On average, pupils in England rate the extent they trust other children at their school at 5.4 out of 10, with close to half (51%) responding with a score below six.
- Girls are less likely to say that they trust other children in their school than boys (average scores of 5.1 versus 5.6), but are more likely to say that they respect their peers (mean scores of 7.6 versus 7.2).
- During primary school, there is little difference between genders in the extent that they trust other children. Trust of peers declines for both genders during secondary school, though by a much greater extent amongst girls.
- Girls in Years 9 rate their average trust of other pupils in their school as 4.3 out of 10 (compared to 5.2 out of 10 amongst boys).
- Pupils that are eligible for FSM are less likely to like and trust other children in their school than their peers from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, particularly amongst secondary pupils.
- Black pupils are less likely to report that they trust other children than pupils from other ethnic groups.



Self-reported effort at school

- On average, pupils report their effort at school (e.g. whether they pay attention during lessons; do their best in their schoolwork) at around 7 out of ten.
- In secondary school, White pupils report putting the least effort into their schoolwork, followed by Black children, with Asian and Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils scoring highest.
- During Years 9 and 10, the self-reported effort amongst White pupils is around half a point lower than Asian, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils.
- FSM pupils put in less effort at school (across various dimensions) than their more socio-economically advantaged peers. The biggest difference is for handing homework in on time (mean score of FSM pupils of 5.3, compared to 6.7 for pupils not eligible for FSM).
- Girls to some extent report putting more effort into their schooling than boys, though most differences are relatively modest.
- Disadvantaged, white boys are the least likely to say they try their best with their schoolwork (average score of 6.4), while not disadvantaged Black girls, Asian girls and Asian boys are the most likely to say they try their best at school (average scores above 7.5).

Change in engagement between Autumn and Spring terms

- Across all dimensions with comparable data, average school engagement scores fell between the Autumn and Spring terms.
- The average agency score fell by around 0.4 points, with a 0.35-point decline in self-reported effort and diversity and inclusion.
- Smaller falls were observed in terms of pupil views of behaviour (0.15-point decline) and headline engagement (0.2-point decline).
- For some measures, this fall is almost entirely due to the decline in engagement amongst Year 7 pupils.
- Headline engagement scores fell from 7.7 to 6.3 out of ten amongst Year 7 pupils between November 2024 and March 2025. Amongst all other year groups, average headline engagement scores were broadly stable.
- All secondary school year groups saw average agency scores decline between the Autumn and Spring terms. There was minimal decline in Agency scores amongst primary pupils.
- Between Autumn and Spring terms, average headline engagement scores fell by more amongst EAL pupils and those eligible for Free School Meals.
- Black and Bangladeshi secondary pupils saw the greatest declines in their headline engagement scores across the two terms.



The link between employee and pupil engagement

- In schools where teachers are more engaged in their work, their pupils are more engaged in their studies. The correlation coefficient sits around 0.6, indicating a reasonably strong association.
- Part of this association is due to the differences in school engagement that occurs across the primary and secondary sectors.
- After controlling for a set of pupil and school characteristics, the association between staff and pupil levels of engagement is reduced. There does however continue to be a moderate positive relationship, with the correlation standing around 0.4.

The link between pupil engagement and attendance

- There is a strong link between headline engagement scores and attendance amongst secondary pupils.
- Secondary pupils in the top 25% of headline engagement scores in November 2024 are 10 percentage points less likely to be persistently absent from school than pupils in the bottom 25% of headline engagement scores.
- The link between engagement and attendance amongst primary pupils is weaker.
- Primary pupils with the lowest engagement scores are three percentage points less likely to be persistently absent from school than their peers with moderate to high levels of engagement.
- Amongst secondary pupils, higher engagement scores are also associated with a lower risk of being late for school, over and above their link to attendance.
- Differences between persistently absent and non-persistently absent pupils are greatest for headline engagement scores and levels of self-reported effort. Differences are smaller with respect to pupils' sense of agency, peer relations and views on behaviour.



Mind the Engagement Gap: A National Study of Pupil Engagement in England's Schools

Professor John Jerrim (ImpactEd Group)

1. Introduction

Engagement, in its broadest sense, refers to the level of commitment, involvement, and emotional investment an individual has towards an activity, organisation, or community. It encompasses how deeply people feel connected, how actively they participate, and how much they invest themselves in their roles and relationships.

1.1 Defining engagement in educational contexts

Engagement in educational settings is multi-faceted, encompassing not just pupils but also employees, parents, families, and a broader array of stakeholders such as school governors and community partners. Our methodology defines engagement in the school setting, and then explores the significance of measuring and reporting the engagement levels across these groups, recognising its impact on pupil outcomes, school effectiveness, employee turnover, and community integration.

School engagement, at its core, refers to the commitment and enthusiasm that various stakeholders have towards their respective role with a school and its activities. Prior research has divided engagement into three components (Fredricks et al., 2011):

- **Cognitive engagement.** This is defined as what stakeholders think and believe about their role, its importance, and their ability to influence important outcomes related to the school's goals. It includes how important they believe their role is to obtaining a future outcome, for example, whether a pupil thinks that studying hard will enable them to get a better job, and their ability to influence these outcomes. Cognitive engagement also incorporates the extent that stakeholders have the drive and motivation to work towards these goals.
- **Emotional engagement.** This focuses on the extent of positive (and negative) reactions to colleagues, students, leaders and other stakeholders in the school. A central component is therefore interpersonal relationships. It also encompasses stakeholders' enjoyment in their role. Positive emotional engagement is presumed to create ties to the institution and a willingness to work towards its goals.
- **Behavioural engagement.** This draws on the idea that stakeholders take action to support their (and their school's) goals. These actions are considered crucial for achieving positive outcomes.

1.2 Why there is a need for a new measure of school engagement

There already exists several standardised instruments attempting to capture engagement amongst certain stakeholders in the education sector. These however have notable limitations, including:

- Focusing only on pupil engagement, and not integrating this with engagement amongst other stakeholders (teachers, parents, governors),
- Have been developed and validated outside of the UK (mainly in the United States),
- Only modest evidence on the psychometric properties of the instrument, particularly for outcomes relevant in England (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025a),
- Some instruments do not – in our view – adequately cover some key components of engagement.

1.3 Importance of multi-stakeholder engagement

The importance of considering various stakeholder groups in engagement strategies is twofold. First, it acknowledges that the educational outcomes of pupils are not solely dependent on their individual efforts but are significantly influenced by the environment created by all stakeholders' collective contributions. Second, it allows for a holistic approach to school improvement that includes and goes beyond academic achievement to encompass emotional support, community integration, and resource allocation.

1.4 The TEP theory of engagement

Figure 1 presents our theory of engagement, that can be applied to different stakeholders across the education system (pupils, parents, teachers, governors).

This broadly builds on existing theoretical frameworks of engagement, though with some important differences.

Like previous measures, we divide engagement into three components – cognitive, emotional and behavioural. Our conceptualisation of these domains of engagement are as follows:

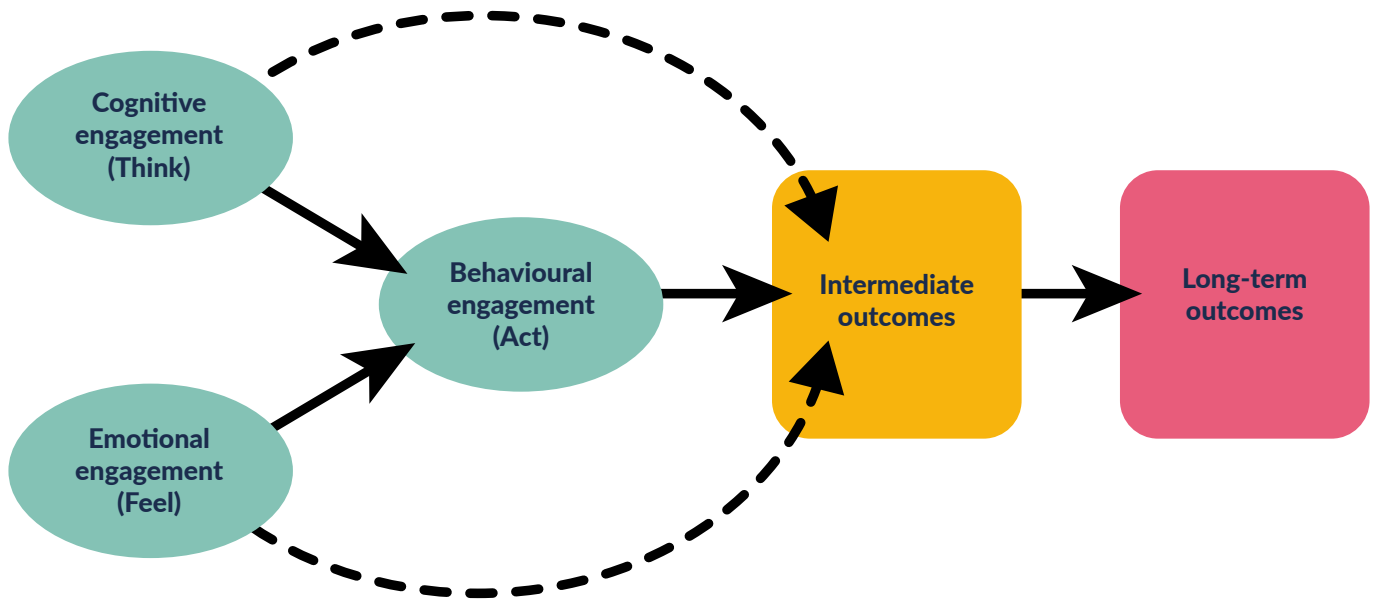
- **Cognitive engagement:** What a stakeholder thinks. For instance, a cognitively engaged pupil will think that doing well at school is important for their later outcomes. They will also believe that they have the capacity to influence these outcomes – that they are the masters of their own fate. They will consequently be driven and determined to succeed. The level of pupils' cognitive engagement may vary across subjects.
- **Emotional engagement:** What a stakeholder feels about their role/situation regarding school. For instance, an emotionally engaged pupil will have a strong sense of belonging within school, have positive relationships with other pupils, and have positive, mutually respectful relationships with staff. Emotionally engaged pupils will enjoy school, and not be overly worried about their schoolwork.
- **Behavioural engagement:** The action a stakeholder takes in their role. For instance, a behaviourally engaged pupil will ensure they consistently attend school, on-time and well-prepared. They will concentrate in lessons, work hard to achieve their goals and complete their homework on time to a high standard. They will adhere to classroom rules, demonstrate persistence when challenged and actively participate in class.

Our theory of engagement can thus be summarised in three key words:

- **Think (cognitive).**
- **Feel (emotional).**
- **Act (behavioural).**

Note that we explicitly see behavioural engagement (what an individual does) as a direct outcome of cognitive and emotional engagement (what an individual thinks and feels). See Figure 1 for a visual representation of these hypothesised relationships.

Figure 1.1. Overarching model of school engagement.



1.5 The role of the engagement drivers and why they matter

Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement for students is measured using four drivers: views on behaviour, value placed on education, agency and drive. These drivers may be measured with regards to engagement in school overall, or with respect to particular subjects/tasks. Within our question set, we are choosing to measure engagement in school overall, over diving into individual subjects for practical purposes.

The importance a stakeholder attached to school, or their role can be measured via questions such as *“what I’m learning at school will be important in my future”* (pupils) and *“what my child is learning at school will be important in their future”* (parents). This is important to measure because cognitive engagement is linked to higher grades; for example, in England, Year 9 pupils who believe what they learn in school to be worthwhile obtain higher GCSE grades (Jerrim, 2024).

Agency refers to the extent that stakeholders believe their actions lead to outcomes. For instance, a parent with high levels of agency will believe it is within their gift to get their child to attend school, be well behaved during lessons and obtain better grades. This is important to measure because higher levels of agency has been linked to higher levels of productivity; for example, prior research has shown that employees with higher levels of agency tend to be more motivated and productive in their jobs (Ng et al., 2006).

Drive refers to the extent that one is willing to push themselves to reach ambitious goals, and thus for a given stakeholder to succeed in their role. This is important to measure because higher levels of drive have been linked to better attainment levels; for example, prior research conducted in England has demonstrated how Year 11 pupils with higher levels of academic drive go onto obtain substantially better GCSE grades than their peers who low levels of drive (Jerrim et al. 2020). Likewise, it has been shown that, when parents hold high academic standards/expectations for their children, school outcomes are improved (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). Ambition and drive amongst employees have also been linked to higher levels of job performance amongst staff (Hirschi & Spurk, 2021).

Emotional engagement

Cognitive engagement of pupils is measured using four drivers: relationships with peers, relationships with teachers, views on inclusion and enjoyment of role.

Relationship with peers refers to how well stakeholders get along with other individuals who hold a similar role within the school community. It can be measured via questions such as *“I trust other children at this school”* (pupils) and *“I feel supported by my colleagues”* (employees). This is important because of the relationship between peer relationships and a number of other school outcomes; for example, when staff’s relationship with their colleagues deteriorates, they are more likely to plan to leave their job (Jerrim & Sims, 2024). Other academic research has highlighted how pupil relationships with their school peers is related to a range of outcomes, including their attendance and behaviour at school, as well as their mental health (Korpershoek et al., 2019).

Research has suggested that the quality of pupil-teacher relationships is related to the development of young people’s socio-emotional skills and the amount of knowledge they absorb in the classroom (Coristine, 2021). Positive teacher-pupil relationships foster a supportive and nurturing learning environment where pupils feel valued and understood (Emslander et al., 2024). When pupil-teacher relationships are stronger, pupils are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards school and learning (Huan et al., 2010). If students report strong, positive relationships with their teachers, it suggests that the school’s efforts to promote a respectful and collaborative classroom environment are successful. Conversely, if pupils’ express dissatisfaction with these relationships, it may indicate a need for professional development or changes in pupil management strategies to improve teacher-pupil interactions.

A strong sense of inclusion is fundamental to pupils educational engagement. When pupils feel included, they are more likely to participate actively in class, form positive relationships with peers and teachers, and engage fully with the school community (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025b). Understanding pupils’ sense of inclusion can help educators understand whether the student-body feel marginalised or excluded (Jansen et al., 2014). Pupils’ sense of inclusion at school is also likely to be an important driver of their level of attendance – a key measure of behavioural engagement (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025b).

Enjoyment of role captures the extent stakeholders enjoy the part they play within the school community. For pupils, this reflects whether they feel happy and relaxed about going to school each day, while for teachers it refers to how much they enjoy what should be the main part of their job – teaching. This is important to measure, as enjoyment levels have been linked to attainment, attendance and career success; for example, research has shown that pupils who are happier at school are more likely to attend and may achieve better school grades (Kirkcaldy et al, 2004). For other stakeholders – e.g. teachers and governors – being happier in one’s role has been linked to career success (Walsh et al., 2018).

Behavioural engagement

Behavioural engagement refers to the concrete actions that the stakeholder undertakes to succeed in their role. For instance, pupils who believe school is important (cognitive engagement) will be more likely to focus during lessons and work to the best of their abilities. Self-reported measures of behavioural engagement can be complemented with objective indicators as well. For instance, a behaviourally engaged pupil will have low levels of unauthorised absence and few recorded behaviour points.

2. TEP Data

2.1 Sample characteristics

The data presented in this report were collected in November 2024 and March 2025. Throughout the report, wherever possible, we presented data from the latest (March 2025) data collection. During a three-week window, pupils were asked to participate in TEP. Whilst these schools were not randomly sampled, they are nevertheless broadly representative of schools in England in terms of key observable characteristics (see Appendix A for a detailed discussion of this issue). Overall participation rates are high, with 74% of pupils taking part. In a small number of schools, pupil participation rates were very low driving this figure downwards. In fact, 142 out of the 200 schools achieved a pupil participation rate of over 75%, with more than 90% of pupils responding in half of the schools. The final pupil sample is thus very similar in terms of observable characteristics to all pupils in the school. It is also similar to state school population as a whole. Further details on this matter are presented in Appendix A.

Table 2.1. Sample sizes by demographic characteristics.

Variable	Group	Sample size
FSM	FSM	55,427
	Not FSM	22,070
	Missing	3,786
EAL	Not EAL	50,227
	EAL	13,822
	Missing	17,234
SEN	No SEN	65,290
	Support / monitoring	11,202
	EHCP	2,174
	Other	2,617
Gender	Male	39,737
	Female	39,304
	Missing	2,242
Ethnicity	White	56,167
	Asian	9,016
	Other / Missing	7,440
	Mixed	4,362
	Black	4,298
Total	All participating pupils	81,283

In total, 81,283 pupils completed TEP in March 2025 (see Appendix B for details on response rates across waves). Tables 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate how this compares across some of the key sub-groups we consider in our analysis. Note that some demographic information has only been shared by a subset of schools, reported as missing data within the tables above and below.

Table 2.2. Sample sizes by school year group.

Variable	Group	Sample size
Year group	Year 3	4,351
	Year 4	4,378
	Year 5	4,387
	Year 6	4,532
	Year 7	13,160
	Year 8	13,011
	Year 9	12,521
	Year 10	11,059
	Year 11	9,380
	Year 12	2,480
	Year 13	1,973
	Year 14	51
Total	All participating pupils	81,283

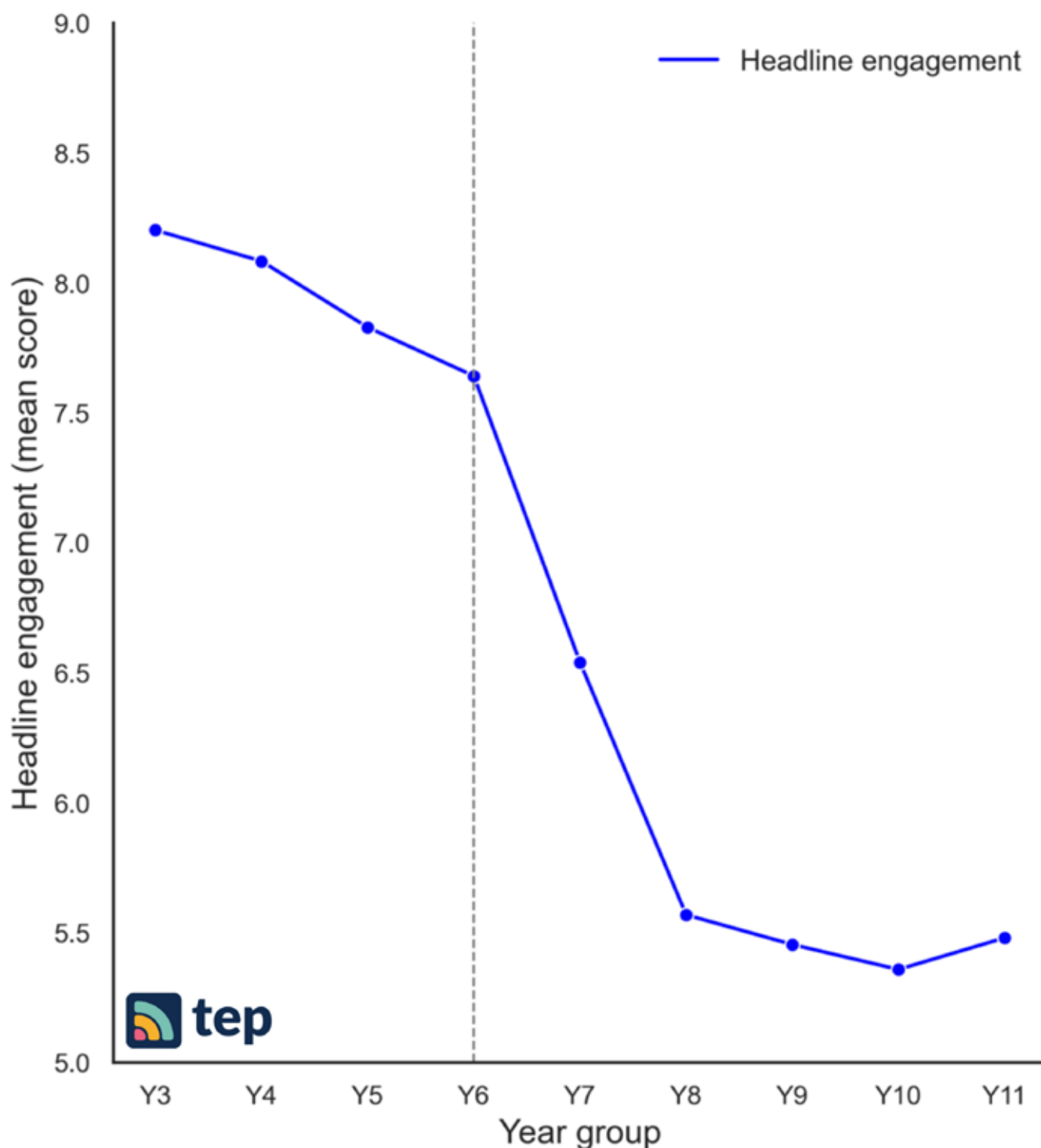
2.2 Measurement of pupil engagement

As part of TEP, pupils were asked to respond to a series of questions capturing key facets of their emotional, cognitive and behavioural engagement. This includes:

- Value placed on education (cognitive engagement)
- Determination to succeed in education (cognitive engagement) – November 2024 only.
- Views of behaviour (cognitive engagement)
- Agency (cognitive engagement)
- Enjoyment of (and worries about) school (emotional engagement)
- Views in inclusion (emotional engagement)
- Peer relationships (emotional engagement)
- Pupil-teacher relationships (emotional engagement)
- Self-reported effort at school (behavioural engagement)

Each of these components is measured using a set of three or four questions, which pupils responded to using a 0-10 reporting scale. The specific wording of the questions is presented below within the relevant section below. A further three questions were also asked capturing pupils overall engagement/endorsement of their school (e.g. “*overall, how satisfied are you attending this school?*”). Figure 2.1 illustrates how responses to these three questions differ across pupils in different school year groups. Details on the psychometric properties of the scale are due to be published in an academic working paper later this year.

Figure 2.1 Average headline engagement scores by school year group.



Throughout this report we present a series of descriptive statistics reporting the average (mean) score to selected questions along the TEP 0-10 reporting scale. At times, we also report the percentage of pupils responding with a score of five or below. Although the selection of this cut-off along the scale is in some sense arbitrary, we believe it is not unreasonable to infer that pupils do not fully endorse the statement (and are, at best, providing a somewhat ambivalent response) when they are awarding a response of – at most – 5 out of 10.

2.3 Caveats and limitations

There are some important caveats readers should keep in mind when interpreting the results reported in this publication. Perhaps the most important is that, currently, pupils have only been surveyed at two points in time. This means that we are currently only able to investigate changes in individual pupil reports over a relatively short period of time (four months).

It is, however, possible to explore differences in responses across pupils in different school year groups (i.e. different cohorts of pupils). When such comparisons are made, any differences in responses across pupils in different year groups could be due to changes in children's school engagement (on average) as they progress through school, or due to differences across cohorts (including demographic compositions). This is a particular challenge when interpreting differences between primary and secondary year groups (and any apparent change that may seem to occur between Year 6 and Year 7) given that our sample of primary and secondary school differs. Likewise, the precise wording of some questions differed across primary and secondary school pupils. Thus, while we believe that differences across year groups within school phase are likely to reflect genuine increases/decreases as children progress through school, changes at the transition point (i.e. between Year 6 and Year 7) are harder to interpret with inferences requiring greater care.

A similar challenge emerges when considering engagement levels amongst pupils in post-16 education within our sample of schools (and how this changes in comparison with Year 11 pupils). It is likely that – after completing their GCSEs – pupils with the lowest levels of engagement will leave the school to study or work elsewhere. This will likely lead to an increase in average engagement scores amongst post-16 (Year 12/13) pupils, relative to their secondary school (Year 7-11) counterparts. It will require panel data – where the same pupils are followed from Year 11 into Year 12 and 13 – to fully understand how the engagement of pupils changes once they transition into post-16 education.

3. Views on behaviour

Summary

- Using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale, around a third of pupils in England award their feeling of safety at school a score of five or below.
- Secondary pupils report behaviour to be substantially worse than their primary school peers. One-in-seven (15%) primary pupils do not express clear agreement with the statement "I feel safe at school", compared to one-in-three (37%) secondary pupils.
- Gender differences in views of pupil behaviour are relatively modest, though with boys consistently awarding scores around 0.3 points higher than girls.
- Girls report feeling marginally safer than boys at school during primary education. However, between Year 7 and Year 9, girls increasingly feeling less safe at school than their male peers.
- Pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) hold similar views of behaviour at school (including their feelings of safety) as pupils without a special educational need. Pupils with other forms of SEN support perceive behaviour to be slightly worse.
- There is a reasonably strong negative association between school's exclusion rate and pupils' views of behaviour (correlation = -0.52). This indicates that – at the school level – there is reasonable agreement between pupil views of behaviour and school exclusions.

Gathering pupils' views on behaviour is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it gives pupil a voice in their educational environment, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. When pupils feel heard, they are more likely to engage positively with school policies and initiatives (Sellman, 2009). Secondly, pupils often have unique insights into the dynamics of classroom behaviour that adults in the school might overlook (Gollner et al., 2021). Their feedback can highlight specific issues, such as bullying or ineffective disciplinary measures, that need addressing. Thirdly, understanding pupils' perspectives on behaviour helps educators tailor interventions more effectively. By identifying common concerns and areas of dissatisfaction, schools can implement targeted strategies to improve the overall learning environment. Additionally, involving pupils in discussions about behaviour promotes a culture of mutual respect and collaboration (Santos et al., 2024). It encourages pupils to reflect on their actions and understand the impact of their behaviour on others, which is essential for developing social and emotional skills (Santos et al., 2024). Finally, regular surveys can track changes in behaviour over time. This continuous feedback loop ensures that behaviour management strategies remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of schools. Understanding pupil views on behaviour is hence integral to understanding their school engagement, providing direct insights into how students perceive their learning environment and their role within it.

As part of TEP, pupils responded to the following four questions regarding their views on pupil behaviour in the school, using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale:

- Pupils in this school are well behaved.
- Pupils in my lessons are well behaved.
- Pupils behave well in the corridors.
- I feel safe at school.

Table 3.1 begins by presenting the average score pupils gave in response to each of these four questions, along with the percent of pupils that did not express agreement with the statement (awarding a score of five or below). While most pupils feel safe at school (mean score of 6.8), around a third of pupils awarded a score below the mid-point of the 0-10 scale. This suggests that a non-trivial proportion of pupils in England do not feel particularly safe when they are at school.

The other three questions focus more specifically on the issue of pupil behaviour – in lessons, in the hallways and when at school in general. Pupils, on average, response to these questions with a score of around five out of ten, indicating that around half of pupils England’s schools do not believe that the student-body is particularly well-behaved.

Table 3.1. Average scores in response to the questions on pupil behaviour.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
Pupils in this school are well behaved.	5.0	58%
Pupils in my lessons are well behaved.	5.4	51%
Pupils behave well in the corridors.	4.6	63%
I feel safe at school.	6.8	31%

Responses to these questions are broken down by school phase (primary, secondary, post-16) in Table 3.2. This reveals a sizeable difference across pupils in primary and secondary schools, with average scores in the former around two-points higher than in the latter. For instance, only one-in-seven (13%) primary school pupils award a score of five or below in response to the statement “I feel safe at school”, compared to one-in-three (37%) of secondary pupils. Together, this highlights how pupil concerns about behaviour – and their safety at school – are much more prevalent in the secondary school sector.

Table 3.2. Differences in views of pupil behaviour by school phase.

Question	1. Primary	2. Secondary	3. Post 16
Pupils in this school are well behaved.	6.6	4.7	6.3
Pupils in my lessons are well behaved.	6.6	5.1	8.0
Pupils behave well in the corridors.	6.2	4.2	5.9
I feel safe at school..	8.4	6.5	8.1

Figure 3.1 turns to differences in views of pupil behaviour between boys and girls. Differences are relatively modest, though with boys consistently responding with higher average scores than their female peers. Take feelings of safety at school, for example. Boys, on average, respond with a score of 7 out of 10, which is 0.4 points higher than the average score for girls. Put another way, 34% of girls do not clearly express feeling safe at school (award a score of 5 or below), compared to 28% of boys.

Figure 3.1. Differences in views of pupil behaviour across genders.

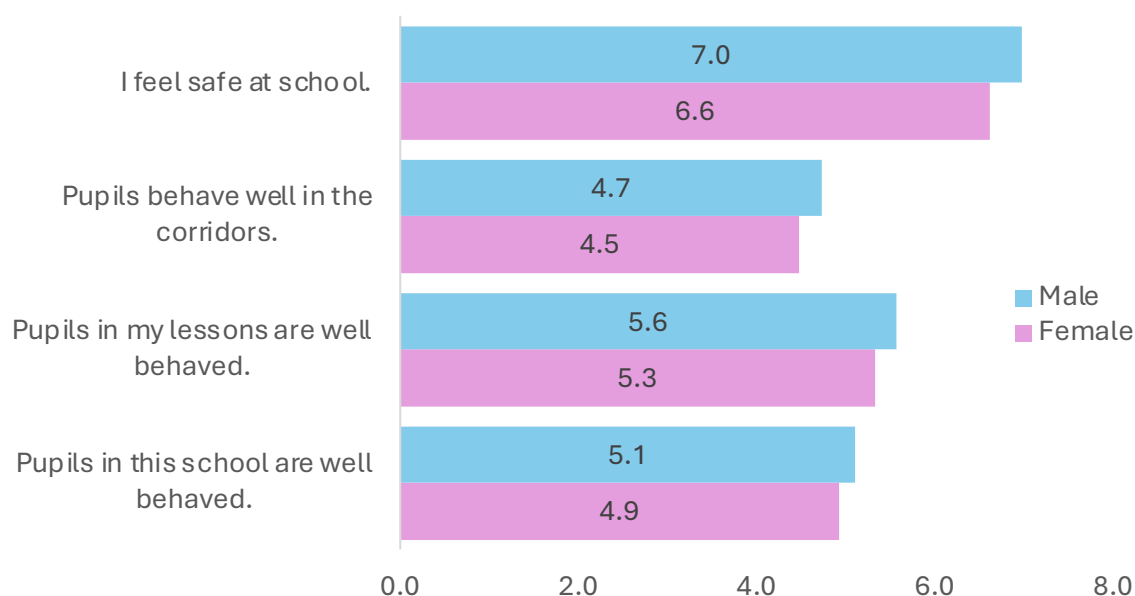
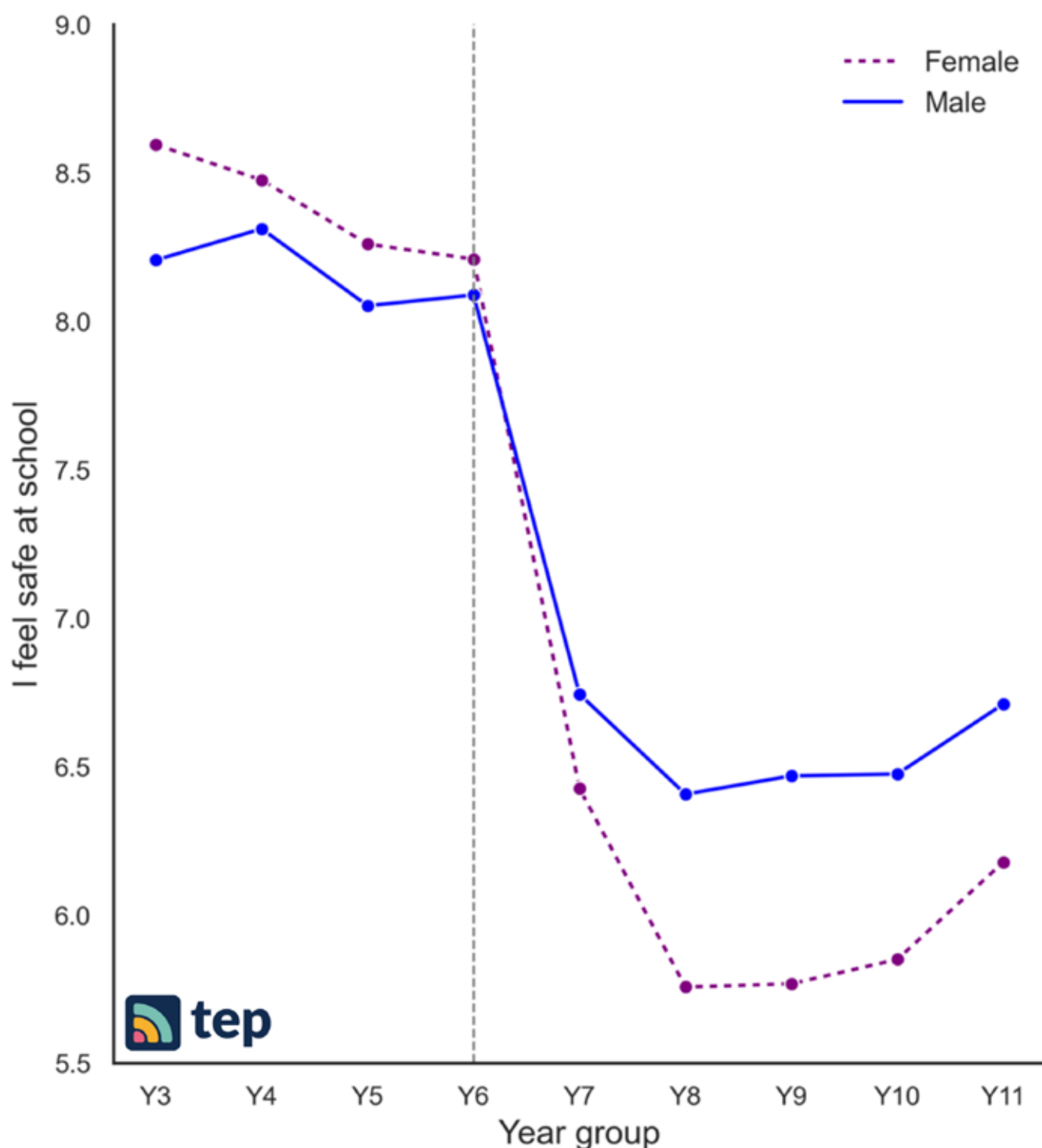


Figure 3.2 takes this part of our analysis a step further by considering how gender differences in pupils' perceptions of safety at school vary by school year group. In primary school, girls report feeling marginally safer than boys. There is then a clear drop for both groups amongst the secondary sample. However, the gender gap increases in later years of secondary school, with girls increasingly feeling less safe at school than boys between Year 7 and at least Year 9 (after which the gender gap is maintained). This suggests that, while both genders feel equally safe at secondary school at the start of Year 7, girls become increasingly concerned about their safety at school as they progress through Key Stage 3.

Figure 3.2. Gender differences in response to the statement “*I feel safe at school*” by school year group.



In Table 3.3 we further investigate this finding by examining the change in the same pupils reports of school safety between November 2024 and March 2025 (figures may differ slightly from those reported above due to differences in the analytic sample). On the whole, they support the findings presented in Figure 3.2 above. There are clear falls in pupils feelings of school safety during Years 7 and 8. Moreover – at least in Year 7 – the fall is greater for girls than boys. The gender difference is modest (-0.77 decline for girls compared to -0.59 for boys), though this is as would be expected when looking over just a four-month period. It continues to support that Year 7 is a key period when childrens’ feelings of safety at school declines, particularly for girls.

Table 3.3. Change in responses to the statement “I feel safe at school” by gender and school year group. November 2024 to March 2025.

Female				Male		
Year Group	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change
7	7.21	6.44	-0.77	7.40	6.81	-0.59
8	6.17	5.83	-0.34	6.71	6.41	-0.30
9	5.89	5.79	-0.09	6.55	6.51	-0.04
10	5.91	5.84	-0.06	6.60	6.55	-0.05
11	6.18	6.13	-0.06	6.81	6.68	-0.14

Notes: Sample restricted to pupils with data available at both timepoints. Figures may differ to above due to differences in the analytic sample.

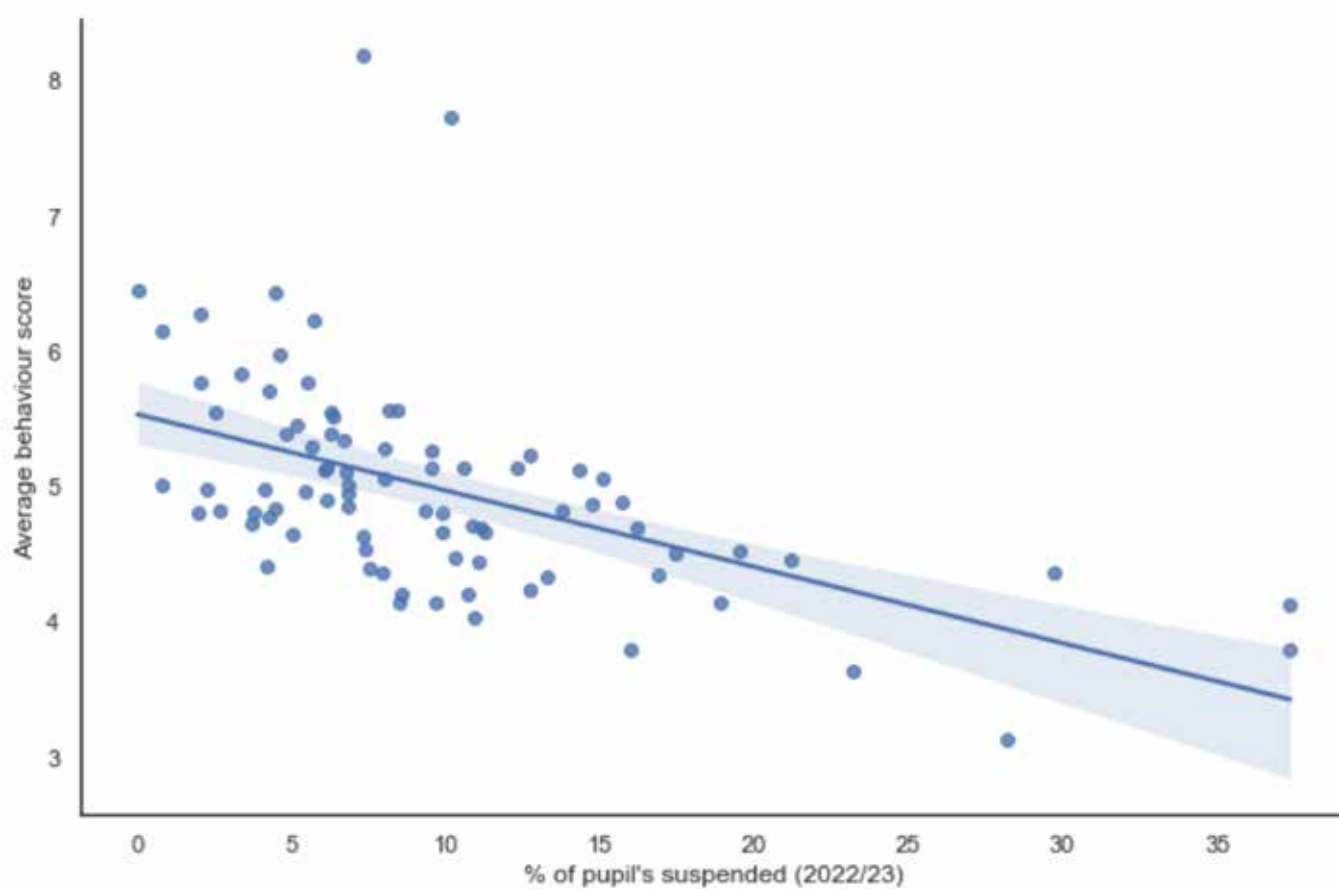
Next, we turn to differences in pupils’ views of behaviour according to whether they have special educational needs (SEN). It is notable how pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) hold similar views regarding safety at school as their peers without a special educational need. Yet the average scores amongst those in receipt of other SEN support or monitoring tend to be somewhat lower. The average response of this group to the statement “Pupils in my lessons are well behaved” is around half a point lower than amongst pupils without a special need (5.1 versus 5.5 on TEP’s 0-10 reporting scale). Hence, while children with an EHCP view behaviour at their school to be similar to pupils without special educational needs, pupils with SEN without this level of support tend to view behaviour at their school to be slightly worse. These results can be found in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Differences in views of pupil behaviour by whether the pupil has special educational needs.

Question	1. No SEN	2. SEN support / monitoring	3. EHCP
Pupils in this school are well behaved.	5.0	4.8	5.1
Pupils in my lessons are well behaved.	5.5	5.1	5.4
Pupils behave well in the corridors.	4.6	4.4	4.8
I feel safe at school.	6.8	6.5	6.8

To conclude, we explore the school-level correlation between historical rates of school exclusions and pupils’ views on behaviour/safety at the school. In other words, do pupils’ view behaviour to be worse in schools that have historically had higher levels of pupil exclusions? Figure 3.3 suggests that this is indeed the case. There is a reasonably strong negative association, with the Pearson correlation standing around (-0.52). This indicates that – at the school level – there is reasonable agreement between pupil views of behaviour and an independent objective measure of a key behavioural outcome.

Figure 3.3. The school-level correlation between the exclusion rate and pupil perceptions of behaviour.



Notes: Secondary schools only. Correlation equals -0.52 (this changes to -0.66 when primary pupils are included as well). Each data point refers to one school in the sample. Regression line is plotted with its confidence interval.

4. Views on the value of school

Summary

- Almost a third of pupils in England to some extent question whether what they are learning at school will help them in the future.
- There are clear differences in the value primary and secondary pupils place on school. Over a third of primary pupils to some extent question whether school teaches them what they need to know, compared to just a tenth of primary pupils.
- White pupils are the least likely to agree that what they are learning at school will help them in the future. Around a third (32%) of White pupils award a score of 5 out of 10 or below in response to this statement, compared to 21% of Asian and 20% of Black pupils.
- In primary school, differences in the extent pupils believe school will be useful in their future is similar across ethnic groups. However, through secondary education, White pupils value schooling less than other ethnic groups.
- FSM pupils are slightly less likely to value what they are learning at school than their non-FSM peers (differences of around 0.2 scale points in primary and 0.4 scale points in secondary).

Asking pupils questions about the value they place on education is essential to measuring their school engagement for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insight into their motivation and attitudes towards learning (Brophy, 1999). Understanding how much value pupils place on their education can help educators identify those who may be unmotivated, disengaged or at risk of underachievement. This information is crucial for developing targeted interventions that can reignite a passion for learning and improve academic outcomes (Wigfield & Wentzel, 2007). Secondly, asking pupils about the value they place on education can reveal the effectiveness of the school's efforts to promote a positive learning culture. When pupils express high regard for their education, it may indicate that school's initiatives to promote the importance of education are succeeding. Conversely, if pupils do not value their education, it may signal a need for a review and adjustment of current strategies. Finally, when pupils see a clear connection between their efforts and their long-term goals, they are more likely to stay motivated and committed to their studies.

As part of TEP, pupils responded to the following four questions capturing the value that pupils place upon their education and schooling, using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale:

- School teaches me lots of useful things.
- What I learn at school will help me in the future.
- Doing well at school helps you get a good job when you grow up.
- School teaches me what I need to know.

Table 4.1 presents the average response pupils provided to these statements, along with the percent of pupils that awarded a score of five or below. The average score awarded to the statement *"Doing well at school helps you get a good job when you grow up"* stands around 7.6 out of ten, while agreement with the statement *"School teaches me what I need to know"* is around one scale point lower. Consequently, around a third of pupils in England to some extent question whether what they are learning at school will help them in the future and are teaching them the things that they need to know.

Table 4.1. Average scores in response to the questions on the value of school.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
School teaches me lots of useful things.	6.6	34%
What I learn at school will help me in the future.	6.9	30%
Doing well at school helps you get a good job when you grow up.	7.6	20%
School teaches me what I need to know.	6.7	33%

There are, however, clear differences in the views expressed by pupils in primary and secondary schools – as illustrated in Figure 4.1 below. Take the statement “*school teaches me what I need to know*”, for example. Primary school pupils express a high level of agreement with this statement, awarding on average a score of 8.6 out of 10 (and just 10% responding with a score of 5 or below). The average response given by secondary pupils is almost two and a half points lower, standing at 6.0 on TEP’s 0-10 reporting scale (with over a third – 40% - awarding a score of 5 or below). These results hence point towards a substantial drop in pupils’ views on the value of school between the primary and secondary phases.

Figure 4.1. Differences in pupil views of the value of school by phase.

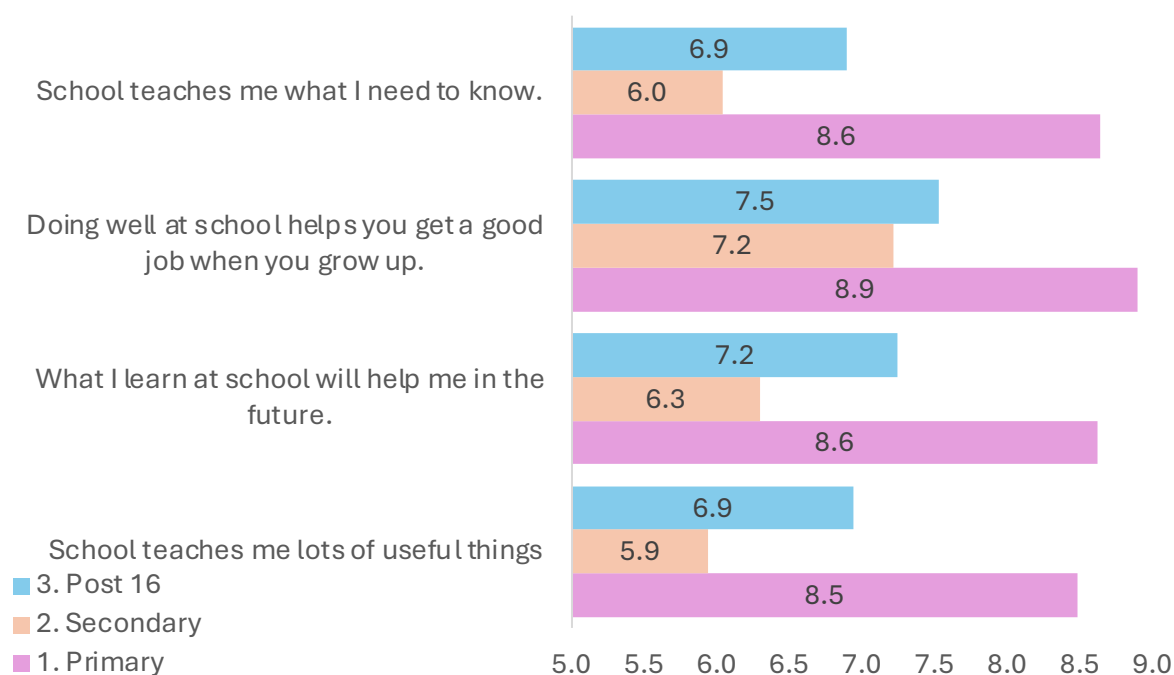


Figure 4.2 next turns to differences across ethnic groups in the extent that pupils value their education. This focuses on responses to the statement “*what I learn at school will help me in the future*”. Pupils of White ethnicity are the least likely to express agreement with this statement, with an average score of 6.7 and around a third (32%) awarding a score of 5 or below. The average score for other ethnic groups is notably higher. For instance, pupils of Asian ethnicity award an average score of 7.5, with 21% awarding a score of five or below.

Figure 4.2. Ethnic group differences in response to the question “*What I learn at school will help me in the future*” .

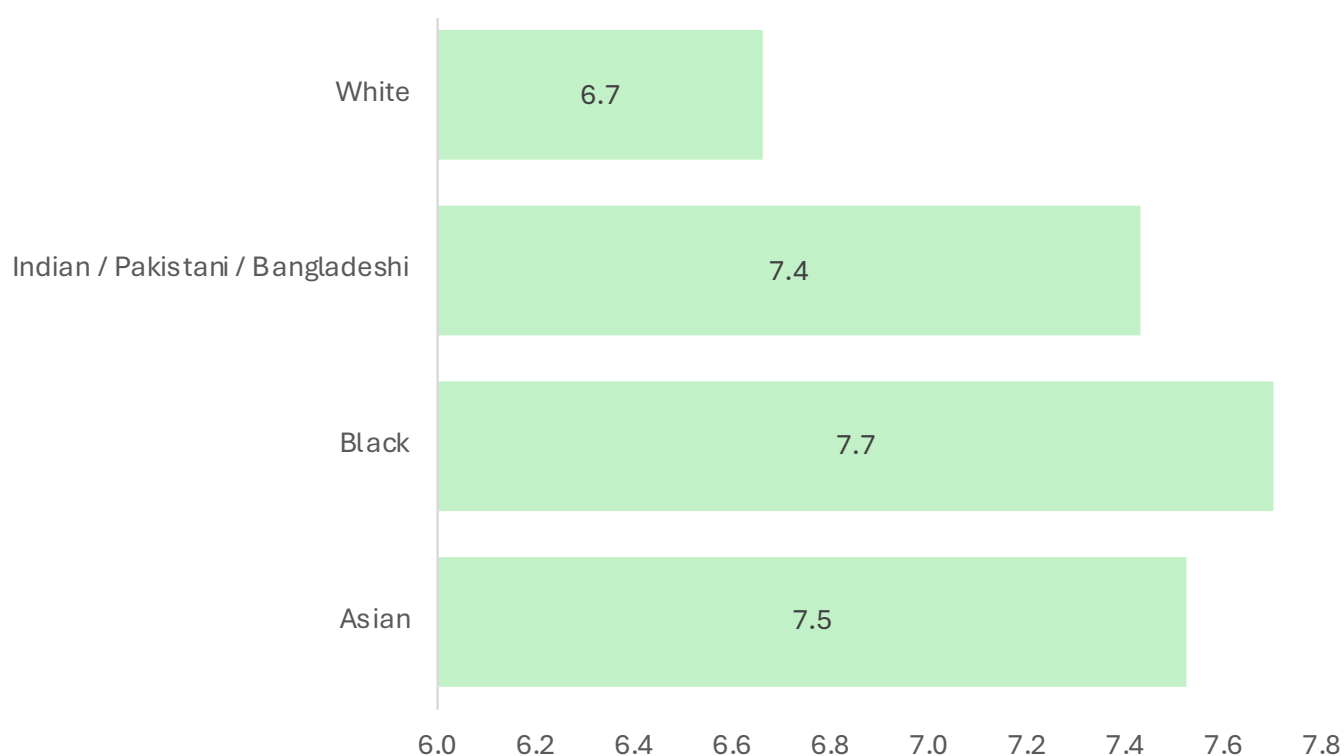
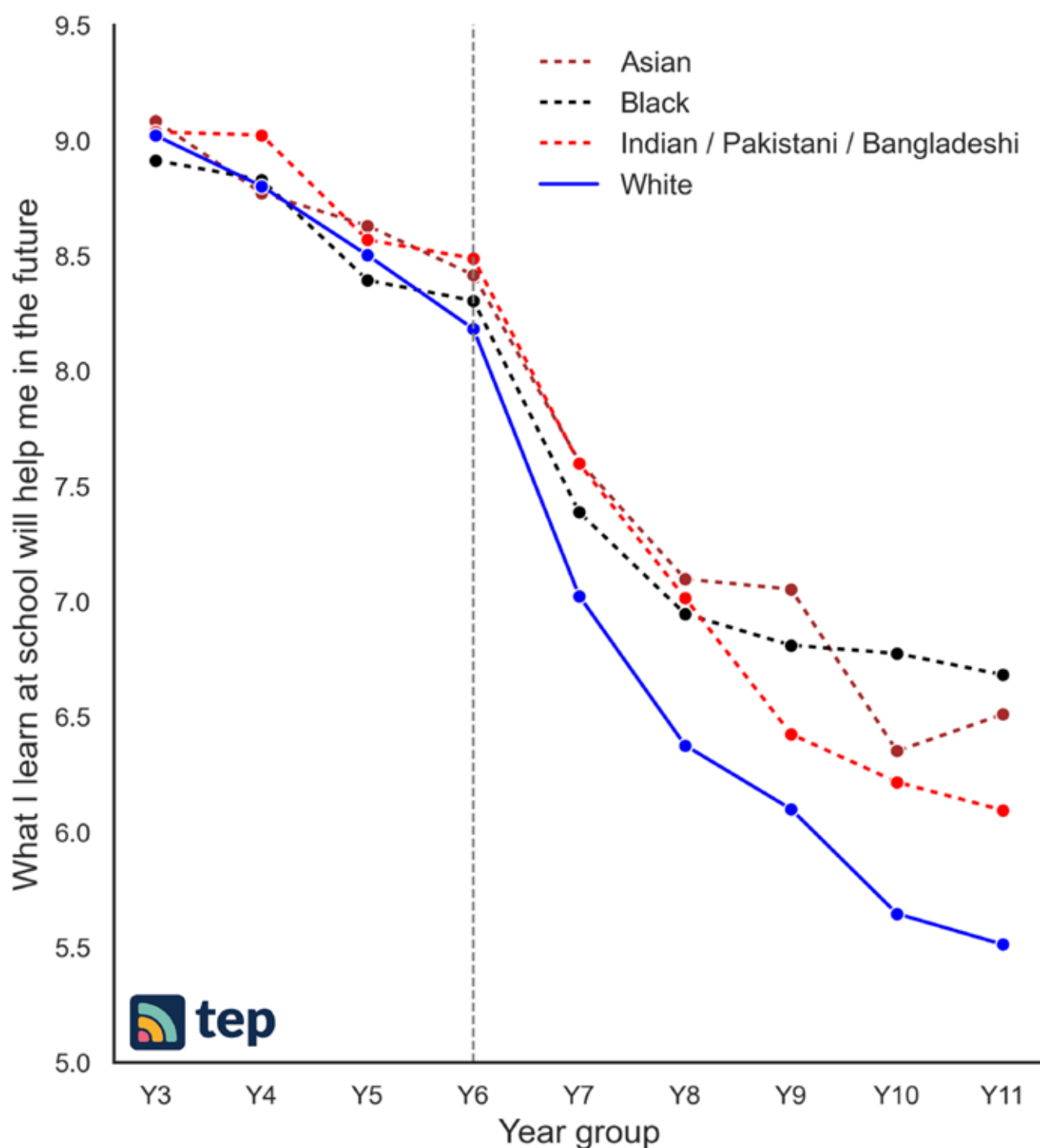


Figure 4.3 explores differences across ethnic groups in response to the question “What I learn at school will help me in the future” by school year group. In primary school, there is little difference across ethnic groups. However, through secondary education, White pupils value schooling less than other ethnic groups. For instance, up until Year 7, the responses of White and Black pupils appear relatively similar. But, from Year 8 onwards, the decline in White pupils’ views of the value of schooling for their future is sharper than the decline amongst their Black peers.

Figure 4.3. Differences across ethnic groups in response to the question “What I learn at school will help me in the future” by school year group.



In Table 4.2 we turn to differences in responses by FSM eligibility. While differences are relatively small, there is some evidence of an FSM gap in the value pupils place on what they learn at school. In response to each statement, the average score awarded by pupils eligible for FSM are around 0.2 to 0.3 points lower on TEP's 0-10 reporting scale.

Table 4.2. Differences in pupil views of the value of school by FSM eligibility.

Question	Not FSM eligible	FSM eligible
School teaches me lots of useful things	6.6	6.4
What I learn at school will help me in the future.	6.9	6.8
Doing well at school helps you get a good job when you grow up.	7.7	7.4
School teaches me what I need to know.	6.7	6.5

5. Determination to succeed at school (“drive”)

Summary

- Pupils in England report high levels of academic drive. Most pupils want to do well at school (average score of 8.8) and want to achieve good marks in most of their classes (average score of 8.7).
- Pupils with SEN tend to have lower levels of academic drive than pupils without such additional needs. Around a quarter of pupils with an EHCP responded to the statement “I care about my marks in tests” with a score of 5 out of 10 or below, compared to one-in-nine (11%) pupils without SEN.
- White pupils have lower levels of academic drive than other ethnic groups. Around one-in-six (16%) White pupils indicated a degree of ambivalence towards their marks on school test – twice the percentage of other ethnic groups.
- White pupils consistently less likely to say they care about the marks they achieve on their school tests than other ethnic groups throughout their time at school. This difference can be observed across all year groups, from Year 3s through to Year 11s.
- Girls have higher levels of academic drive than their male peers. For instance, in response to the statement “I want to do well in school”, girls – on average – award a score of 8.9, compared to an average of 8.6 for boys.
- FSM Pupils award scores in response to TEP’s four academic drive questions that are on average around 0.3 points lower than their non-FSM peers.

Questions measuring children’s drive, or their determination to succeed at school, helps to build understanding of their level of ambition and perseverance, and has been found to correlated with performance in England’s national examinations (Jerrim et al., 2020). Understanding pupils’ drive can highlight those who may require support in developing the motivation that is likely needed for them to reach their full potential. This information may allow educators to implement targeted strategies that encourage pupils’ resilience and determination to succeed, fostering a culture where effort at school is valued. Moreover, understanding the factors that influence pupils’ drive can reveal underlying issues that may be affecting their determination. For example, external pressures, lack of support at home, or negative school experiences can all impact a student’s drive to succeed (Ishida & Sekiyama, 2024). By identifying these challenges, schools may be able to provide the necessary resources and interventions to help pupils overcome obstacles and maintain their motivation at school.

Within TEP, pupils responded to four questions capturing their academic “drive” (determination to succeed at school). These were:

- I want good marks in most of my classes.
- I work very hard in my class.
- I want to do well in school.
- I care about my marks in tests.

Note that this chapter in our analysis is based on data collected in November 2024 (these questions were not repeated in the March 2025 data collection).

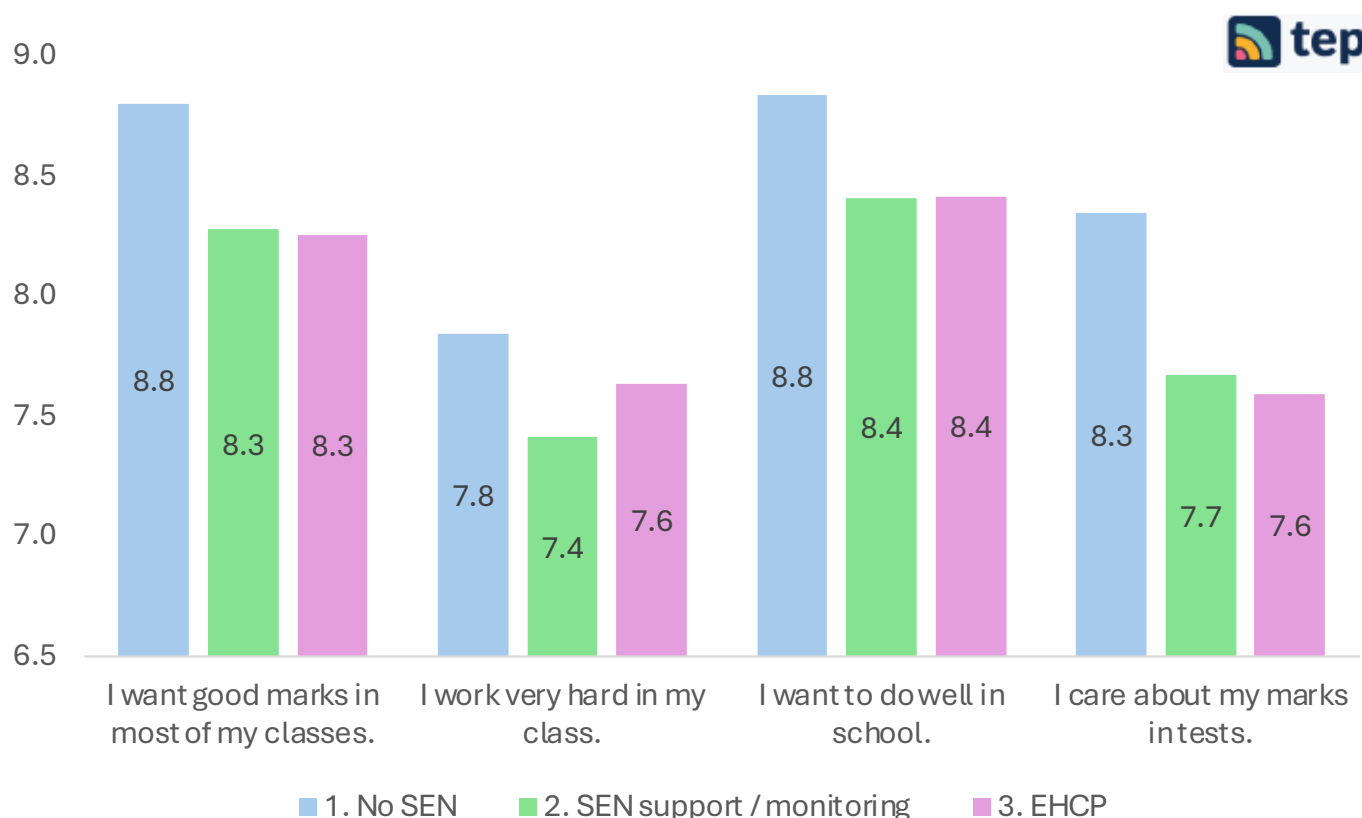
The average response to each statement using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale can be found in Table 5.1. This is accompanied by the percent of pupils that responded to each statement with a score of five or below. Overall, pupils in England tend to report high levels of drive to succeed. Most pupils want to do well at school (average score of 8.8) and want to achieve good marks in most of their classes (average score of 8.7). The average score in response to whether they work hard in their classes is, however, around one scale point lower (7.8), with around one-in-six (15%) awarding a score no higher than five out of ten.

Table 5.1. Average scores in response to the questions on pupils' drive to succeed.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
I want good marks in most of my classes.	8.7	8%
I work very hard in my class.	7.8	15%
I want to do well in school.	8.8	8%
I care about my marks in tests.	8.2	13%

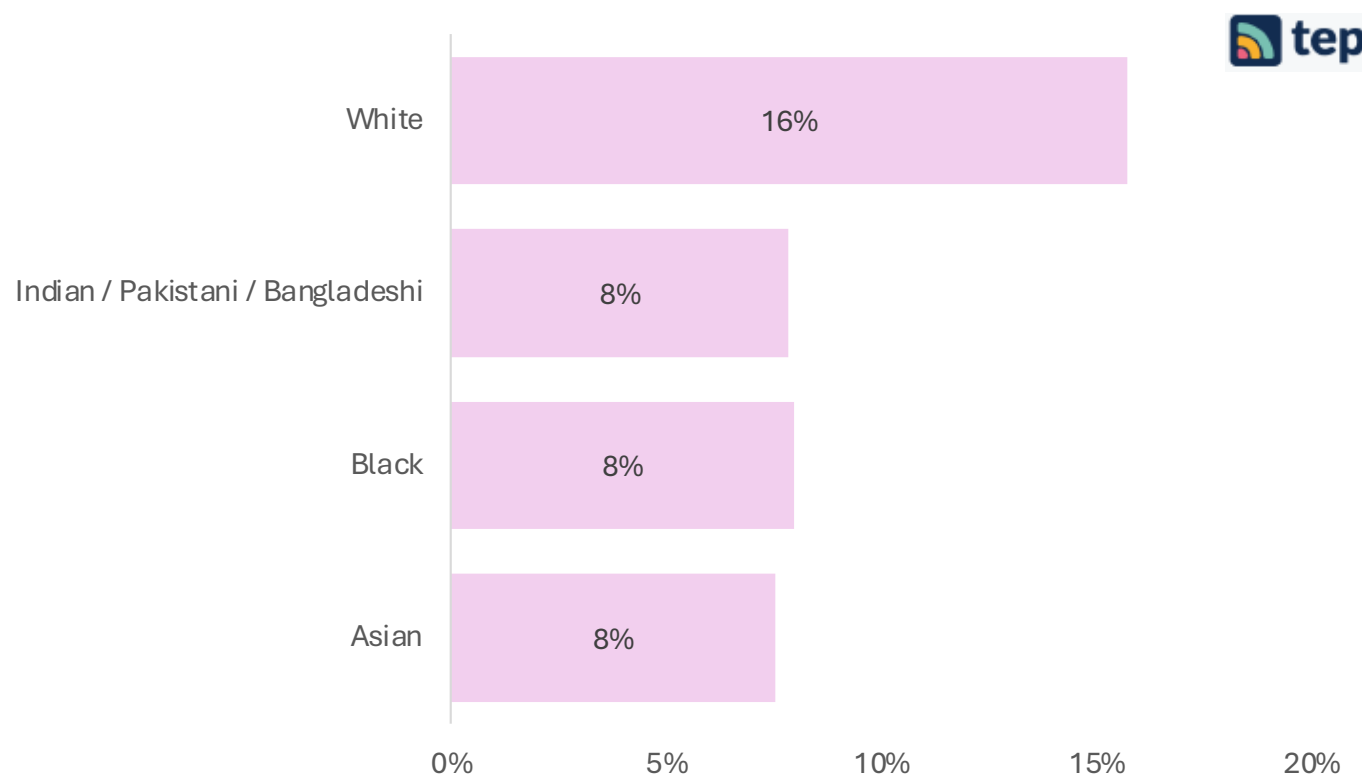
In Figure 5.1, we explore how differences in response to these statements differ across pupils with and without special educational needs. These results indicate that pupils with SEN tend to have lower levels of academic drive. This is most apparent in response to the statement "*I care about my marks in tests*". Pupils with a special need respond with an average score of around 7.6 out of 10 in response to this statement, with around a quarter (24%) of those with an EHCP assigning a score below six out of ten. This compares to an average score of 8.3 awarded by pupils within SEN, with just one-in-nine (11%) of this group indicating ambivalence towards the marks they obtain in tests. Similar, albeit smaller, differences can be observed in response to the three other statements as well.

Figure 5.1. Differences in pupils' drive to succeed according to whether the pupil has special educational needs.



Analogous results for differences across ethnic groups can be found in Figure 5.2. This presents the percent of pupils that responded with a score of five or below in response to the statement “*I care about marks on my test*”. White pupils are not only the least likely to question the value of school (see previous section), but they are also the least likely to care about the marks they achieve. Figure 5.2 illustrates how around one-in-six (16%) White pupils scored how much they care about the marks they obtain below six out of ten, double the figure of each of the other ethnic groups. Similar results are obtained with respect to the other three questions asked. Together, this points towards White pupils having lower levels of academic drive than other ethnic groups.

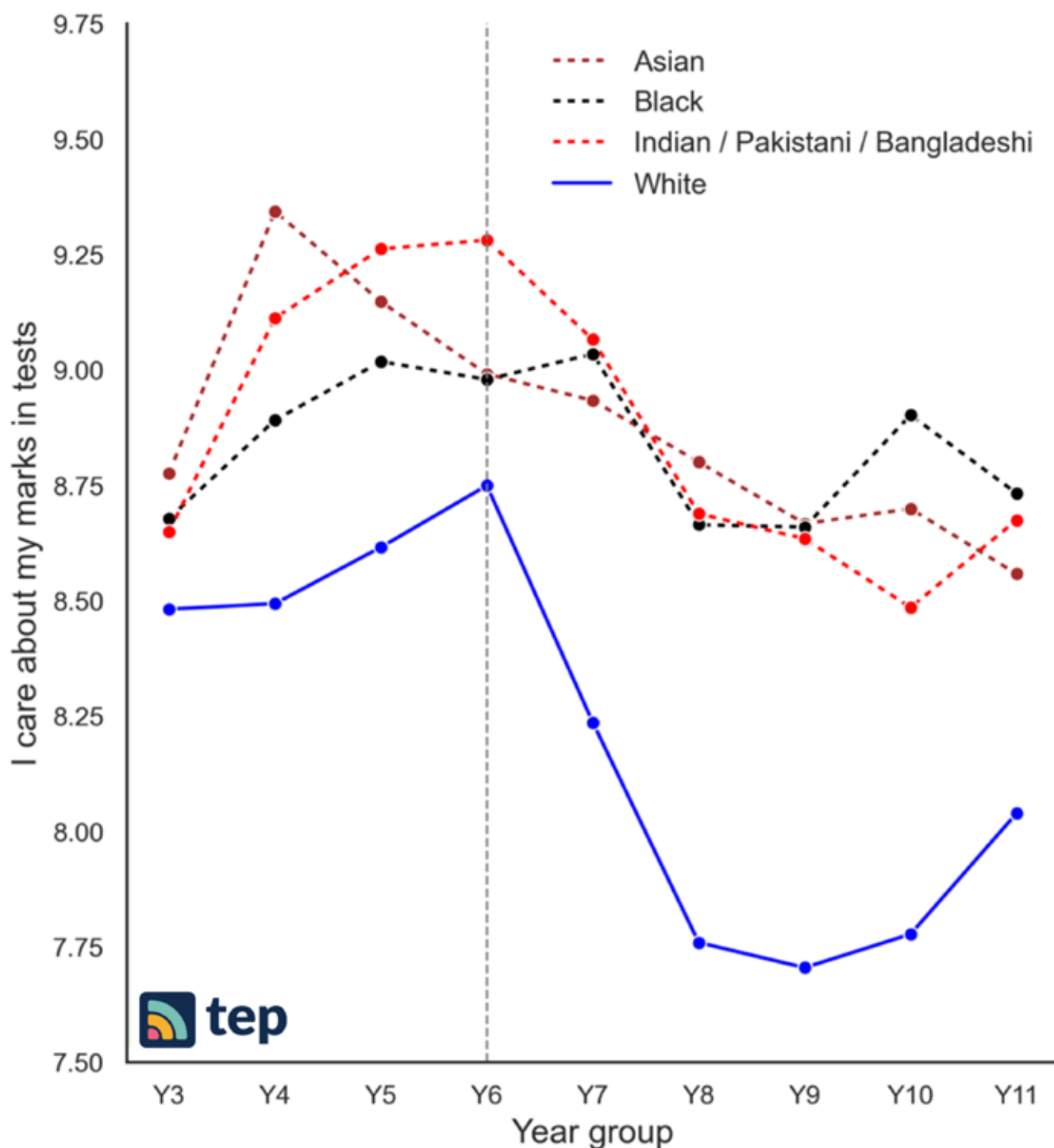
Figure 5.2. The percent of pupils that do not agree with the statement “*I care about marks on my test*” by ethnic group.



Notes: Figures refer to the percent of pupils reporting a score of between 0 and 5.

We explore how responses to this statement (“*I care about my marks in tests*”) varies across pupils in different school year groups in Figure 5.3. There are two key points to note. First, White pupils consistently provide less positive responses to this question than other ethnic groups throughout their time at school. This can be observed for all year groups from Year 3s through to Year 11s. Second, for White pupils, there is a particularly sharp drop in average scores between Year 6 and Year 8. We remind readers, however, that we cannot rule out the possibility that the sharp decline between Year 6 and 7 (in particular) is being driven by differences across the primary and secondary school samples.

Figure 5.3. Differences across ethnic groups in response to the question “*I care about my marks in tests*” by school year group



We have also explored differences in academic drive across genders and by eligibility for FSM. These illustrate how girls have higher levels of academic drive than their male peers. For instance, in response to the statement “*I want to do well in school*”, girls – on average – award a score of 8.9, compared to an average of 8.6 for boys. Evidence also emerges of an FSM gap in academic drive; pupils who are eligible for FSM award scores that are on average around 0.3 points lower than their non-FSM peers.

6. Feelings of agency

Summary

- Pupils' sense of school agency is captured by questions such as *"my marks are my responsibility"* and *"I do well in school if I try hard"*. The average response of pupils to such questions is around 7 to 7.5 out of 10, with around a fifth of pupils awarding a score of five or below.
- Primary school pupils are more likely to believe that hard work at school will lead to success than pupils in secondary school. Pupils in secondary schools respond to the statement *"I do well in school if I try hard"* with an average score of 7.2, compared to 8.8 amongst those in primary school.
- There is no difference in the sense of school agency amongst boys and girls.
- Pupils that are eligible for FSM respond to the school agency questions with scores that are – on average – around 0.3 points lower than their non-FSM peers.
- Almost a third (31%) White secondary pupils respond to the statement *"my marks are my responsibility"* with a score below six out of ten. This compares to around 25% amongst other ethnic groups.

Pupils sense of agency refers to the extent to which they feel they have control and influence over their school outcomes. Having a strong sense of agency is closely linked to higher levels of motivation and forms a key component of school engagement (Code, 2020). When pupils believe they can influence their academic success, they are more likely to take initiative, set goals, and persist through challenges (Schoon, 2018). Understanding pupils' sense of agency can help educators identify those who may feel that they lack control over their educational outcomes, potentially leading to targeted interventions designed to boost their confidence and help them to develop a *"growth mindset"* (Burgoyne et al., 2018). Assessing pupils' sense of agency may also provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the school's teaching methods and support systems. If pupils feel they have control over their learning, it may indicate that the school environment is conducive to fostering independence and self-efficacy. Conversely, if pupils feel they lack agency, it may indicate a need for additional support to help them to take ownership of their learning and development.

Within TEP, pupils are asked the following questions capturing their sense of school agency, reported using TEP's 0-10 scale:

- My marks are my responsibility.
- I do well in school if I try hard.
- If I try my best, I get good marks.
- If I study more, I get better marks.

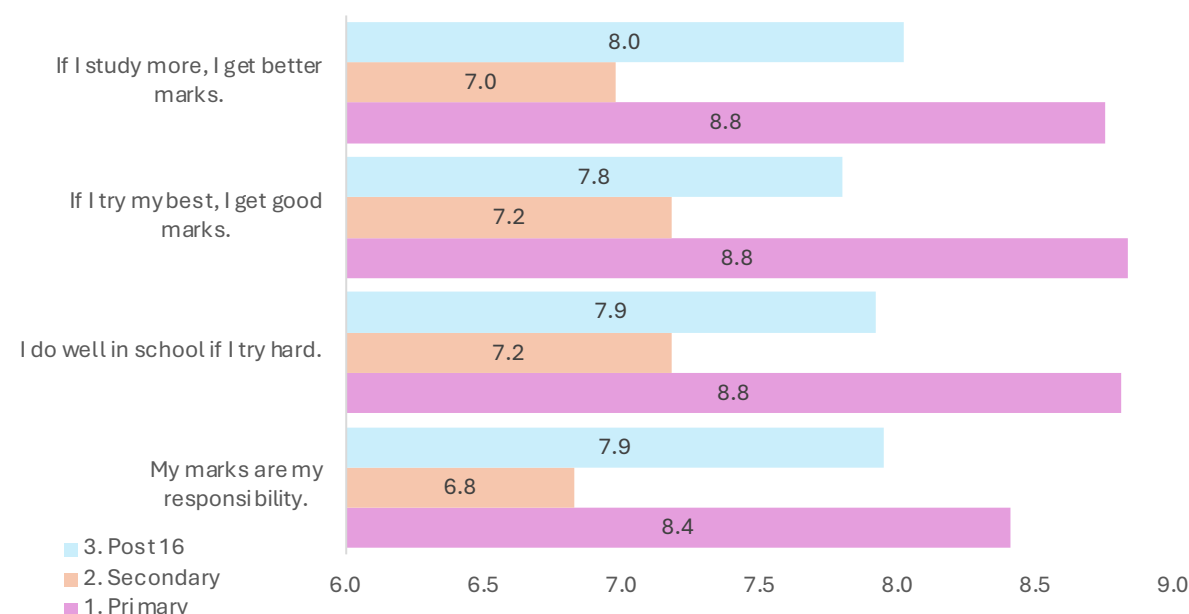
Responses to these four statements are presented in Table 6.1, accompanied by the percent of pupils that awarded a score of five or below. The average score for each is similar, sitting around 7.5 out of ten. Likewise, around a fifth of respondents assigned a score below six to each of the questions asked.

Table 6.1. Average scores in response to the questions on pupils' feelings of agency.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
My marks are my responsibility.	7.2	25%
I do well in school if I try hard.	7.6	20%
If I try my best, I get good marks.	7.6	20%
If I study more, I get better marks.	7.4	22%

Figure 6.1 reveals that there are important differences in responses across pupils in different school phases. Primary school pupils are more likely to believe that hard work at school will lead to success. Take the statement “*I do well in school if I try hard*”. The average response of primary school pupils to this statement is 8.8 out of ten, with only a minority (8%) award a score of five or below. The analogous figures amongst secondary school pupils are an average score of 7.2 (1.6 points lower), with around a quarter (24%) responding with a score below the mid-point of the scale. The responses of pupils in post-16 education then fall in-between the two, though with the increase in comparison to secondary pupils potentially related to the characteristics of those who remain in the sample of schools after sitting their GCSEs.

Figure 6.1. Differences in pupils' sense to agency by school phase.



In additional analyses we find almost no difference between boys and girls in their sense of agency at school. There are, however, some small differences by FSM eligibility – as illustrated in Table 6.2. Specifically, in response to each statement, FSM pupils award scores around 0.3 points lower on the 0-10 scale than their non-FSM peers. Pupils with a Special Educational Need – particularly those without an EHCP plan – also tend to have a lower sense of agency than their peers without SEN.

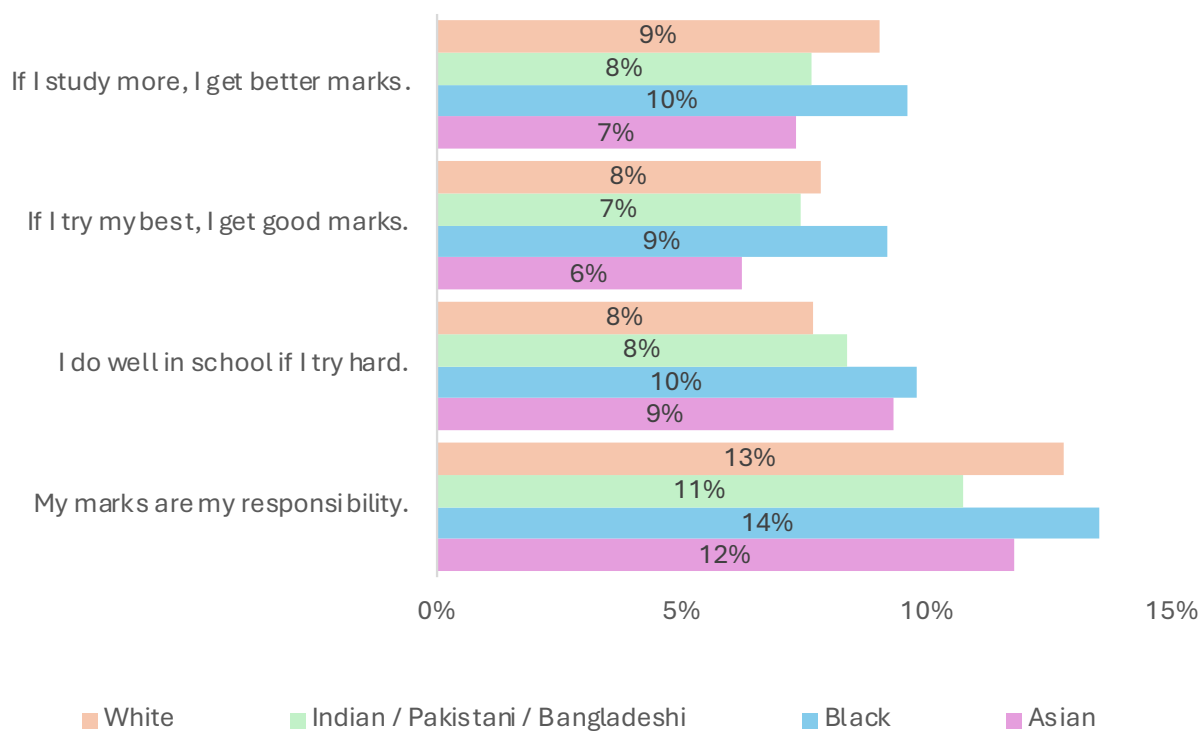
Table 6.2. Differences in pupils' sense of agency by FSM eligibility.

Question	Not FSM eligible	FSM eligible
My marks are my responsibility.	7.3	7.0
I do well in school if I try hard.	7.7	7.3
If I try my best, I get good marks.	7.7	7.4
If I study more, I get better marks.	7.5	7.2

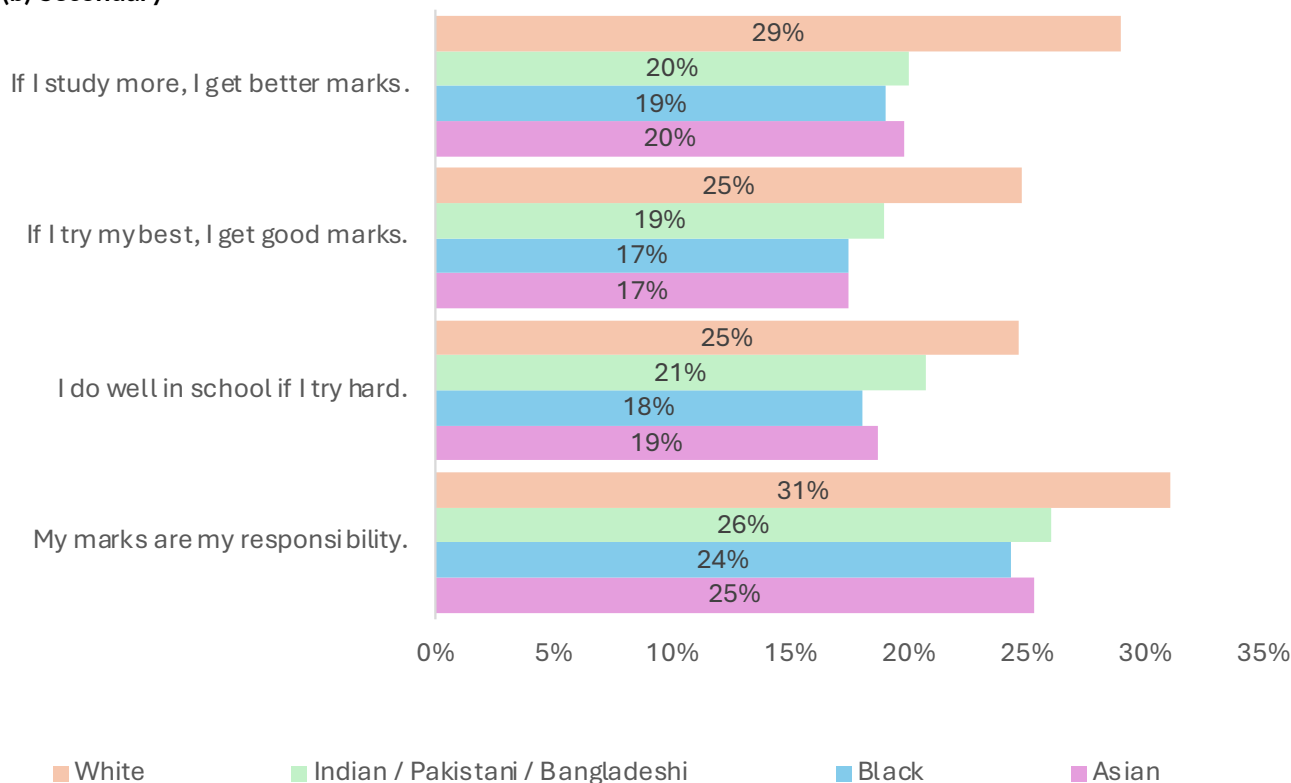
There are also clear differences in pupils' sense of agency across ethnic groups, as illustrated in Figure 6.2. The graphs show the percentage of responders who gave low scores of 0-5 in the agency related questions by ethnicity. While the picture is more mixed at primary age, a significantly higher percentage of white pupils are represented in these lowest scoring responses by secondary school.

Figure 6.2. The percent of pupils that lack a sense of agency by ethnic group.

(a) Primary



(b) Secondary



7. Enjoyment of school

Summary

- Many pupils in England do not look forward to going in to school. On average, pupils respond to the statement *“I feel happy to go to school in the morning”* with a score of around 4.6 out of ten.
- There is a particularly big decline in school enjoyment scores between pupils in Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8. The average school enjoyment score falls from around six amongst pupils in Year 6 to 3.8 to pupils in Year 7 and to 3.2 amongst those in Year 8.
- Boys and girls provide similar responses – on average – to questions capturing the extent that they look forward to going to school.
- Girls are, however, more likely to express worry about school than boys. The average score girls award to the statement *“I don’t worry about the next day after school”* is 5.6, compared to an average score of 6.6 for their male peers.
- Within primary school, boys and girls are equally likely to report worrying about school. A gender gap then emerges and grows during secondary education, with average scores awarded by girls in response to the statement *“I don’t worry about the next day after school”* being almost 1.5 points lower than for boys.
- Pupils with an EHCP feel happier about going to school than those without special educational needs. They report an average score of five in response to the question *“I feel happy to go to school in the morning”*, compared to an average score of 4.6 amongst those without additional needs, and 4.3 amongst those receiving SEN support.
- White pupils are less likely to report enjoying school than other ethnic groups. They, for instance, respond with an average score of 3.1 in response to the statement *“I look forward to going to school on Monday”*, compared to average scores of 4.4 for Black and 3.8 for Asian pupils. This is being driven by the difference amongst secondary pupils.
- FSM pupils are less likely to enjoy school than their non-FSM peers. For instance, FSM pupils responded to the statement *“I feel happy to go to school in the morning”* with an average score of 4.3 out of 10; 0.4 points lower than pupils not eligible for FSM. This difference grows to 0.7 points amongst secondary pupils.

Enjoyment is a key indicator of overall well-being and satisfaction with the school experience (Løhre et al., 2010). When pupils enjoy school, they are more likely to attend regularly, participate actively in class, and engage in their learning (Lumby, 2011) potentially boosting their educational achievement (Cadman et al., 2021). Understanding pupils’ levels of enjoyment can help educators identify areas where the school environment may need improvement to make learning more enjoyable and fulfilling. When pupils report high levels of enjoyment, it may suggest that the school’s efforts to create a positive and stimulating learning environment are successful. Conversely, if pupils express lack enjoyment, it may indicate a need for changes in instructional practices, classroom management, or the overall school climate to better meet students’ needs. By identifying the activities, subjects, or teaching styles that students find most enjoyable, schools can tailor their approaches to maximise these positive experiences and create a more dynamic and engaging educational environment. It has also been suggested that enjoyment of school from an early age (age 6) is independently associated with stronger performance in England’s GCSE examinations taken at age 16 (Morris et al., 2021).

Pupils are asked three questions as part of TEP that capture their enjoyment of school. These are:

- I usually feel happy about going to school.
- I look forward to going to school on Monday.
- I enjoy being in school.

A further two questions are also asked capturing the extent that pupils worry about school:

- I feel calm about the next day after school.
- I don't feel worried about going to school in the morning.

Average pupil responses to these statements – accompanied by the percent responding with a score of five or below – are presented in Table 7.1. Overall, pupils in England do not respond favourably to any of the four statements asked. The average response to the question “*I feel happy to go to school in the morning*” is 4.6 out of ten, with 61% of pupils awarding a score below six. Responses with respect the final two questions – focusing on whether pupils worry about going to school – garnered somewhat more favourable responses. Yet even here, almost half of pupils (47%) responded to the statement “*I feel calm about the next day after school*” with a score below six out of ten.

Table 7.1. Pupils responses to questions on their happiness about going to school.

(a) Enjoyment

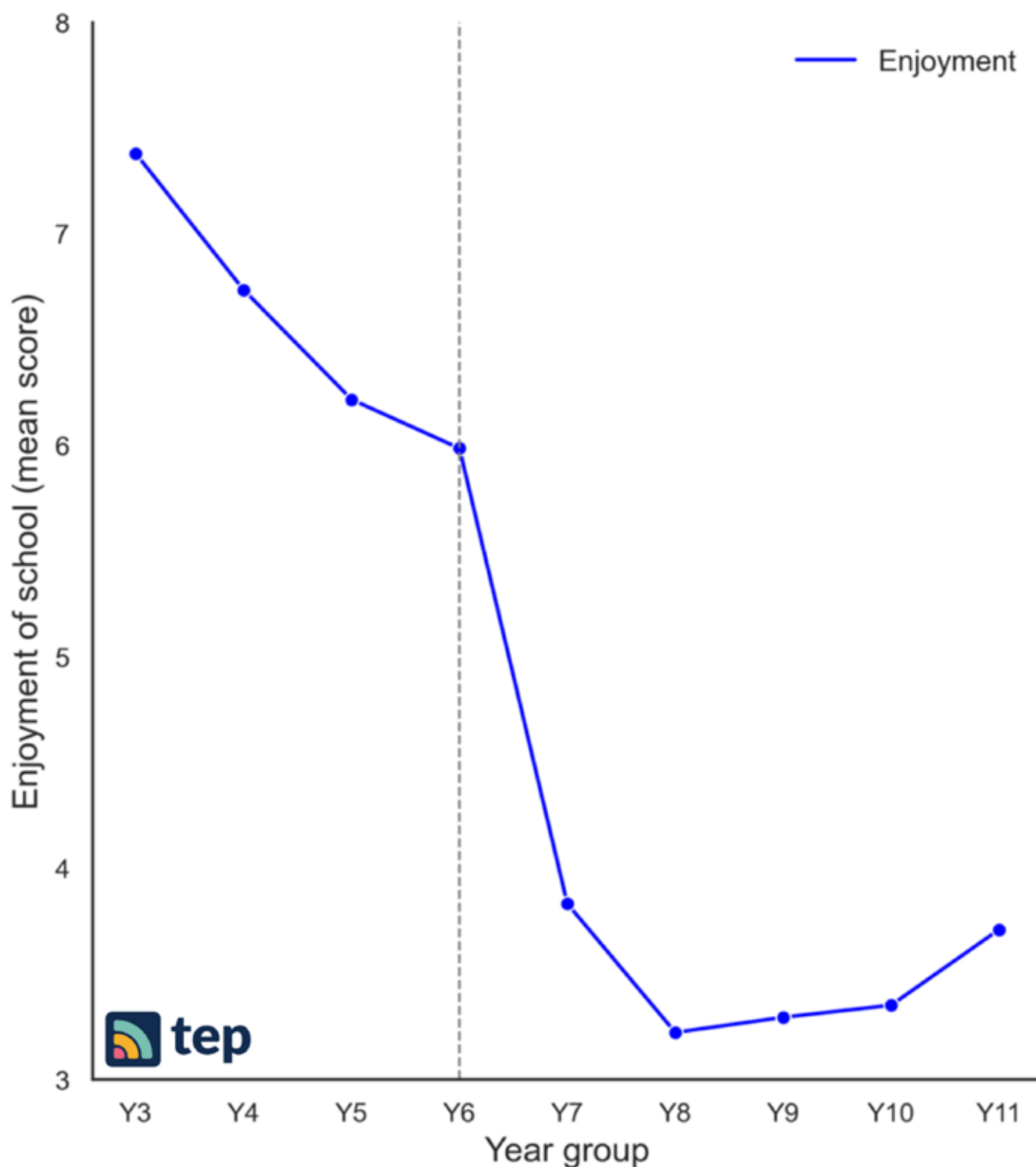
Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
I feel happy to go to school in the morning.	4.6	61%
I look forward to going to school on Monday.	3.4	73%
I enjoy being in school.	4.9	57%

(b) Worry

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
I feel calm about the next day after school.	5.7	47%
I don't feel worried about going to school in the morning.	6.1	41%

Figure 7.1 proceeds to examine how responses to these questions varies across pupils in different school year groups. The results refer to the average response pupils gave to the school enjoyment questions. There is a steady decline in the average score amongst primary school pupils. There is then a sharp decline amongst pupils in Year 7 and Year 8, after which average levels of school enjoyment never recover. While the data are cross-sectional – and do not capture the views of the same pupils over time – these results point towards Year 7 being a key point when pupils' enjoyment of school suffers a substantial decline.

Figure 7.1. Change in enjoyment of school by year group.

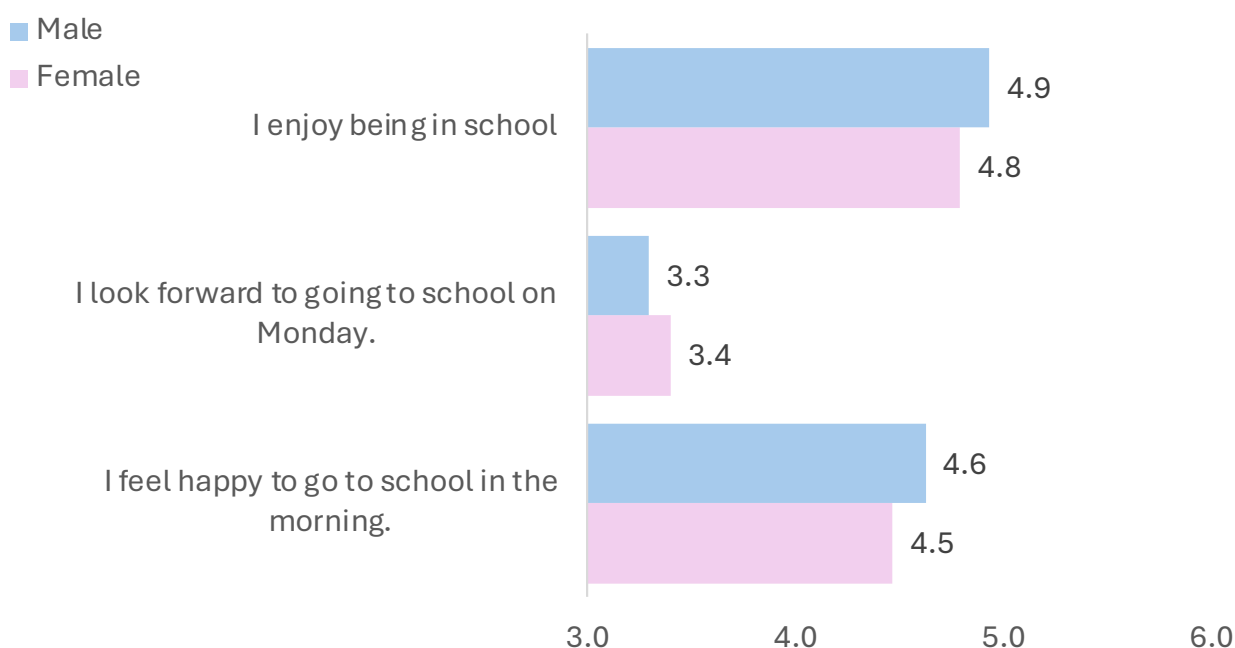


One possible explanation for the findings reported in Figure 7.1 – particularly the sizeable drop in school enjoyment between Year 6 and Year 7 – is that the sample of participating primary and secondary school differs. To probe this issue further we have run a regression model controlling for differences in demographic characteristics between pupils in different year groups. Controlling for potential differences in demographic composition makes very little difference to the results – we continue to observe substantial differences in average responses between Year 6, 7 and 8 pupils. This indicates that potential differences in the demographic characteristics of our primary and secondary school samples are unlikely to explain the results presented in Figure 7.1 above.

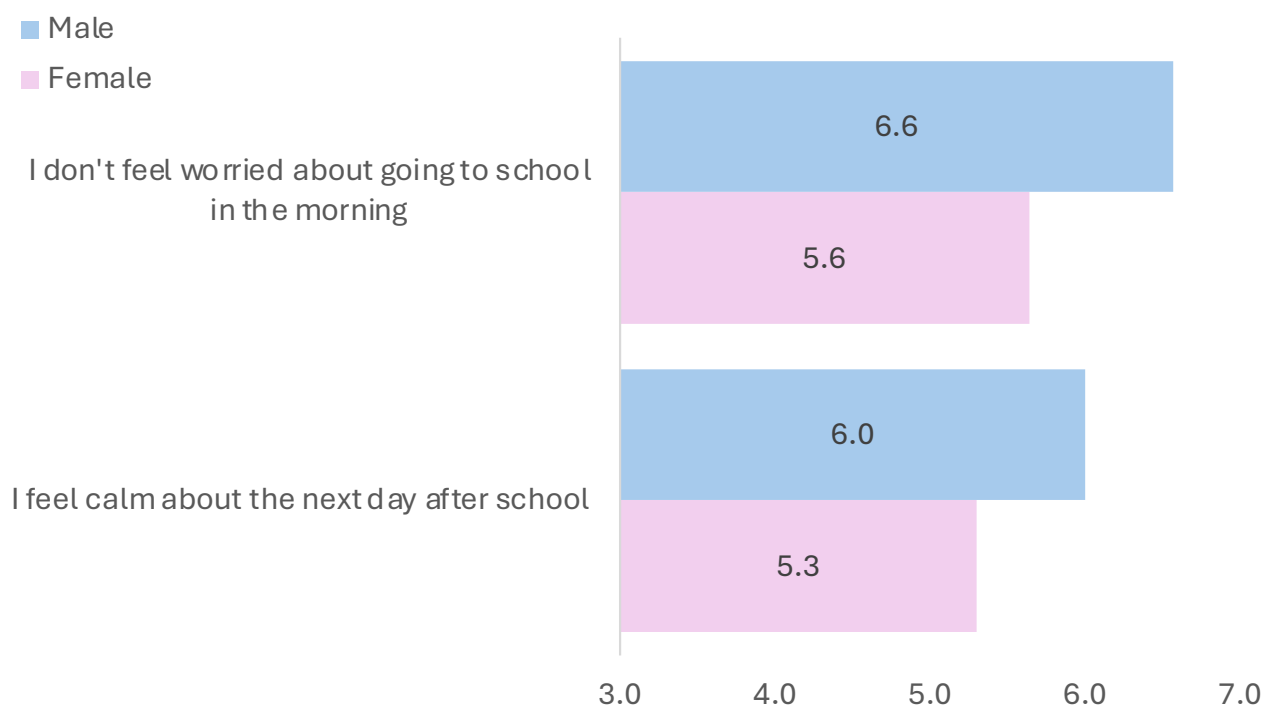
Figure 7.2 turns to gender differences in pupils' responses. With respect to the questions asking pupils about whether they are happy (or look forward) to going to school, differences between boys and girls are relatively small. For instance, for both boys and girls, the average response to the statement "*I look forward to going to school on Monday*" was close to 3.5. The gender gap is however more notable when pupils are asked about their worries attending school in panel (b), with girls clearly expressing more anxiety than boys. Take the statement "*I feel calm about the next day after school*". The average response given by girls is around a point lower than the response given by boys (5.3 versus 6.0). Equally, almost half of girls (53%) responded to this statement with a score of five or below, compared to 42% of boys.

Figure 7.2. Gender differences in children's enjoyment of and worries about school.

(a) Enjoyment

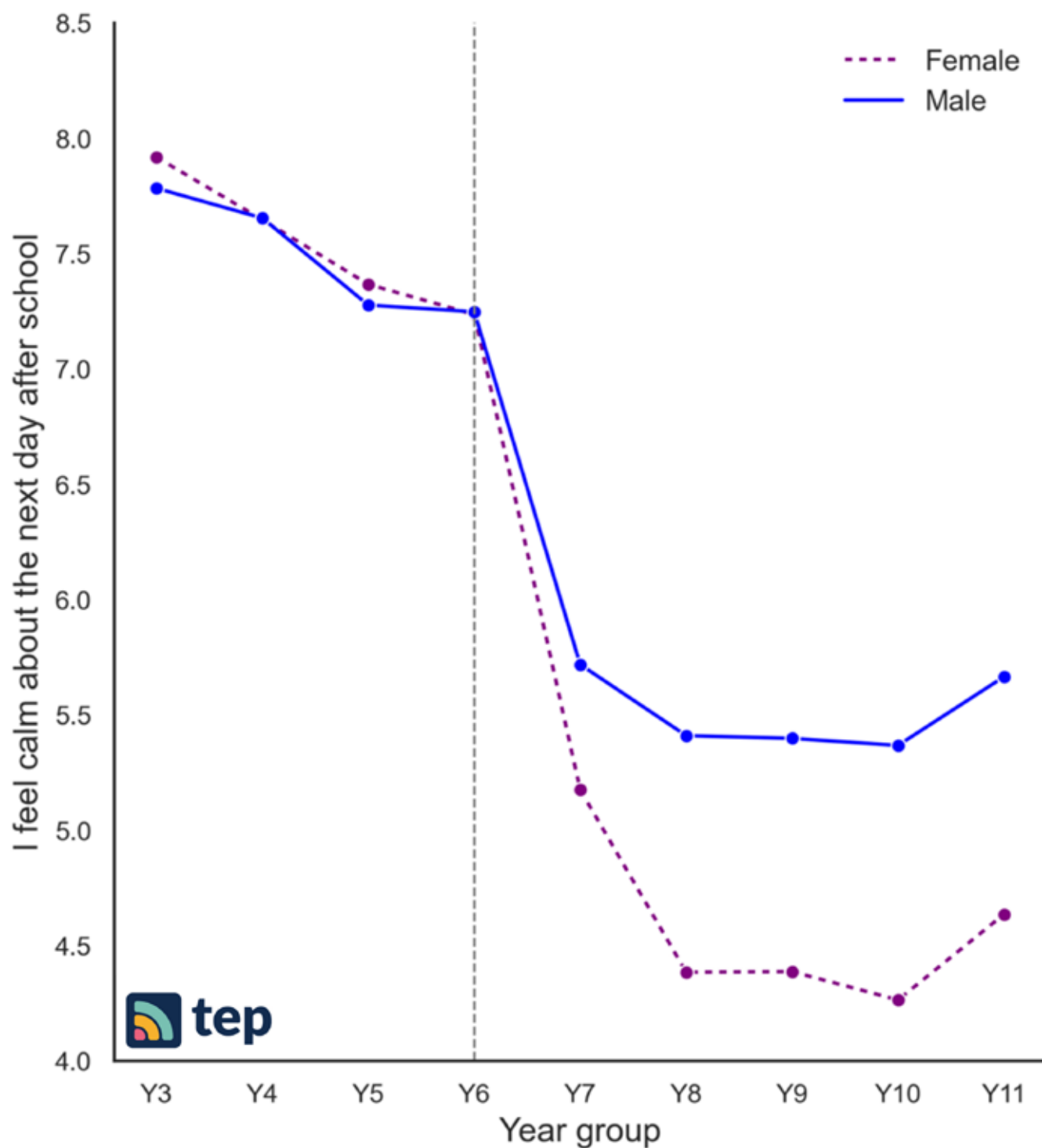


(b) Worries



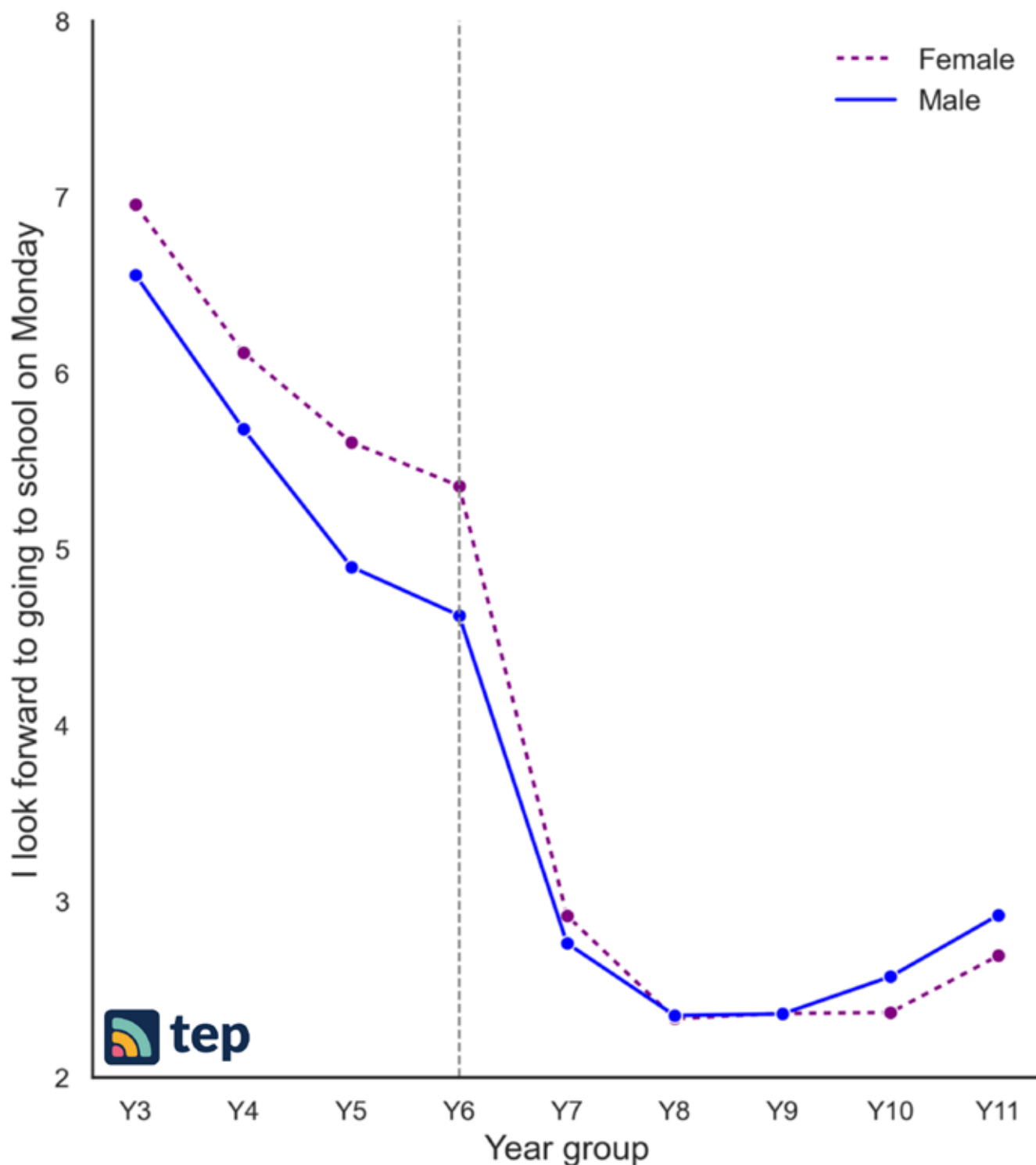
In Figure 7.3 we explore how gender differences in the extent pupils worry about going to school vary across those in different school year groups. Within primary school, the average scores reported by boys and girls are virtually identical. A gap then starts to emerge amongst pupils in Year 7, which then goes on to widen amongst pupils in Year 8 and Year 9. Hence, towards the end of secondary school (Year 10/11) the average scores awarded by girls in response to the statement “I don’t worry about the next day after school” are around a point lower then for their male peers.

Figure 7.3. Gender differences in pupils’ worry about school by year group.



It is noteworthy that this pattern of an increasing gender difference only emerges for the two questions asking pupils about the extent they worry about school. For this purpose, Figure 7.4 can be used as a point of comparison. This presents analogous results for boys and girls in response to the statement “*I look forward to going to school on Monday*”. Here, the lines for boys and girls run broadly parallel (or at least do not display such clear divergence over time). This indicates that is something specific regarding anxiety about school that increasingly impacts girls in older school year groups (relative to boys).

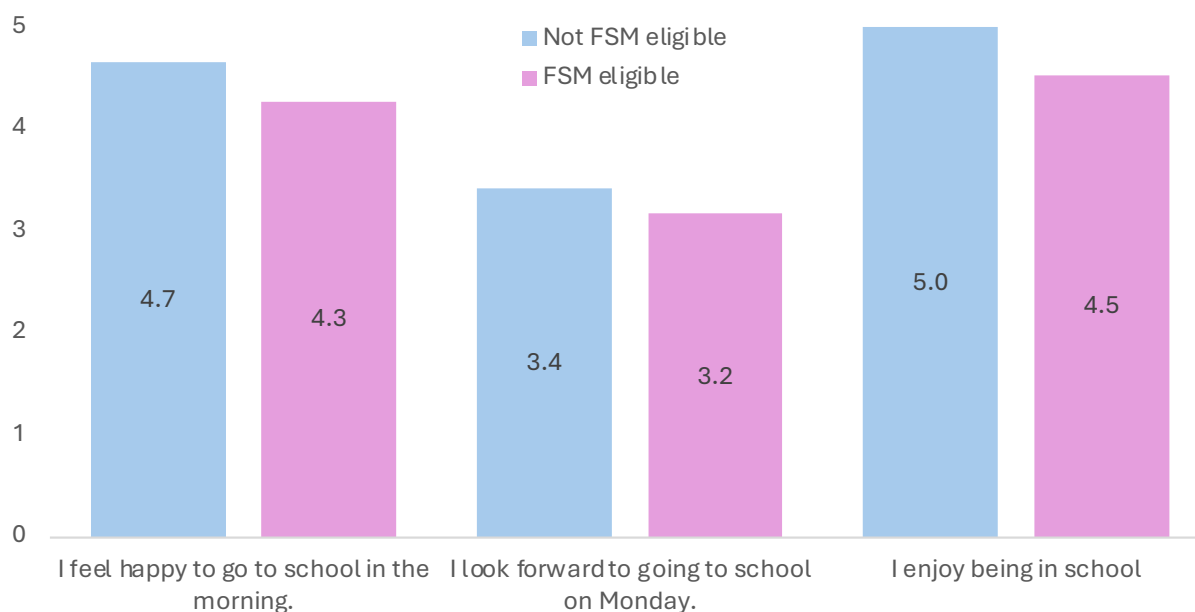
Figure 7.4. Gender differences in the extent pupils look forward to going to school by year group.



There are also differences in pupil responses according to their eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM), though these are more modest in terms of magnitude. These results are presented in Figure 7.5. The average response that FSM pupils gave in response to the statement “*I feel happy to go to school in the morning*” was 4.3 out of 10; 0.4 points lower than pupils not eligible for FSM. Differences of a similar magnitude can be observed in response to the other three questions as well.

Figure 7.5. Differences in children’s enjoyment of school by FSM eligibility.

(a) Enjoyment



(b) Worries

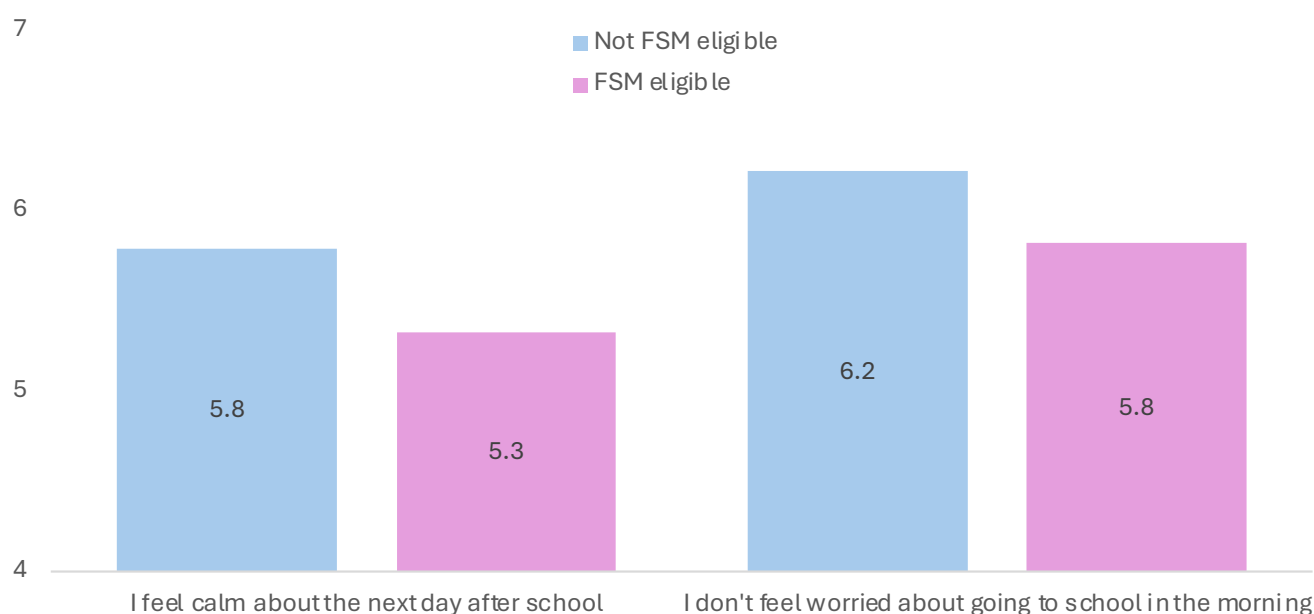
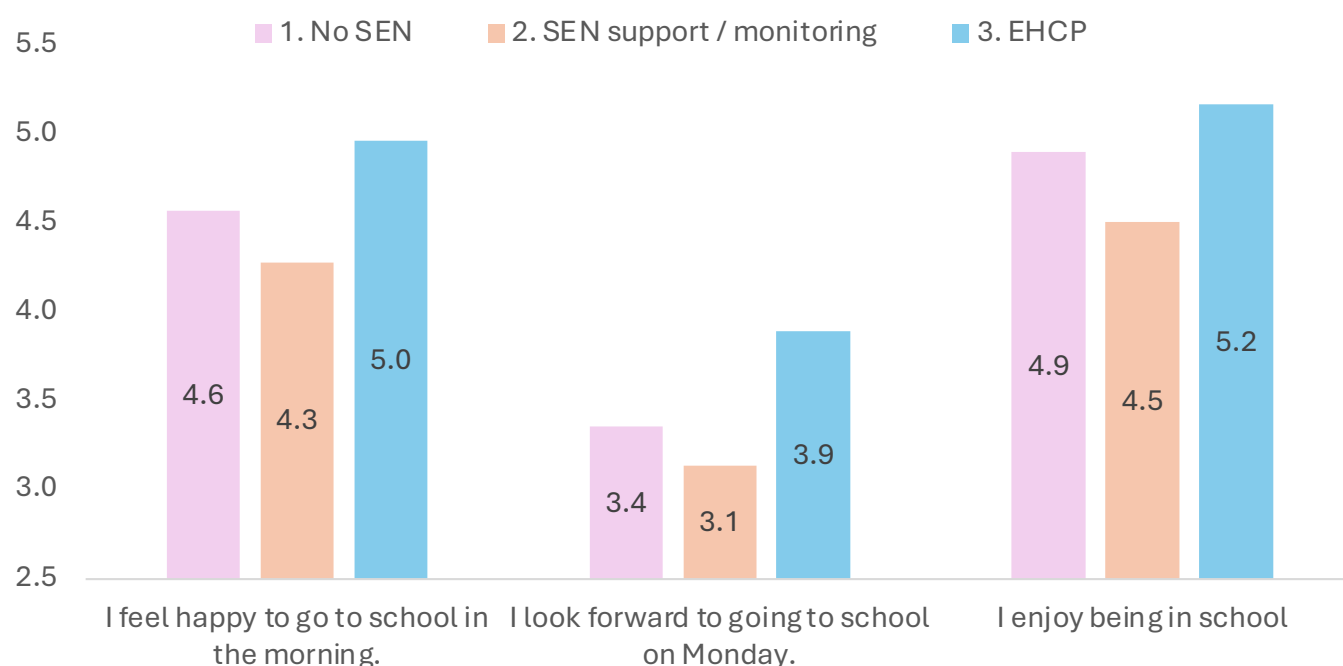


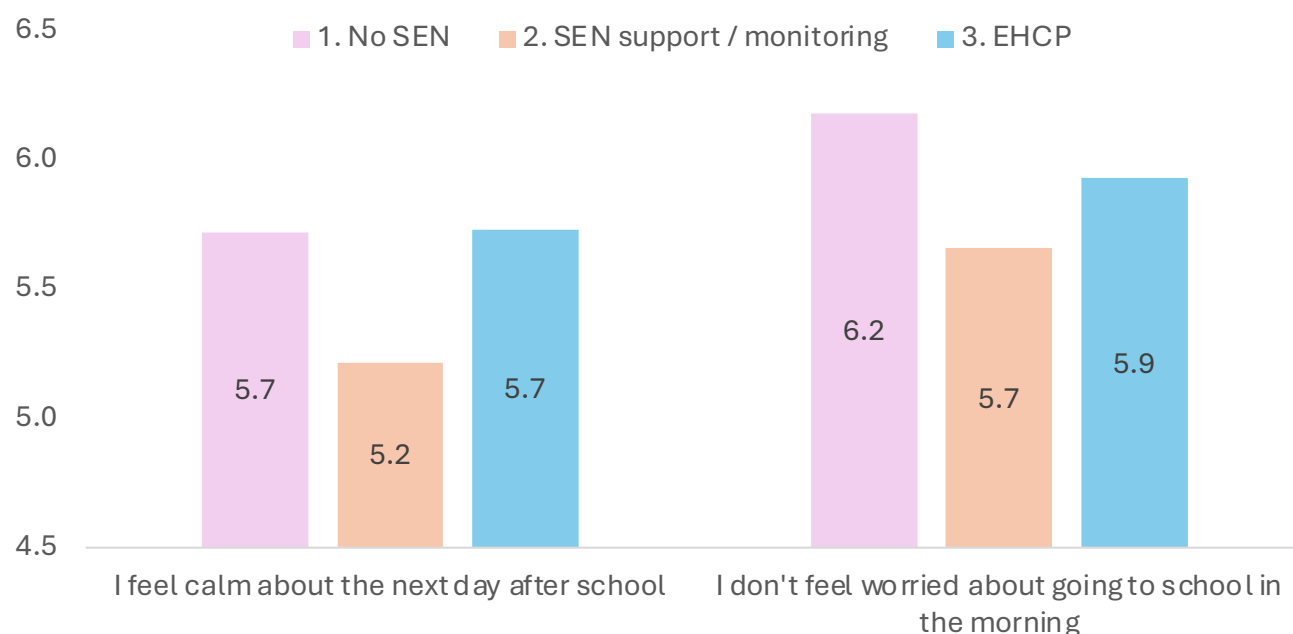
Figure 7.6 presents equivalent results, exploring differences according to whether pupils have special educational needs. Pupils with an EHCP feel happier about going to school than those without special educational needs. They report an average score of 5.0 in response to the question “*I feel happy to go to school in the morning*”, compared to an average score of 4.6 amongst those without additional needs, and 4.3 amongst those receiving SEN support. Differences in the two questions asking pupils about whether they worry about going to school are less clear, though those receiving SEN support tend to report feeling slightly more worried than pupils without SEN and those with an EHCP.

Figure 7.6. Differences in children’s enjoyment of school according to whether the pupil has special educational needs.

(a) Enjoyment

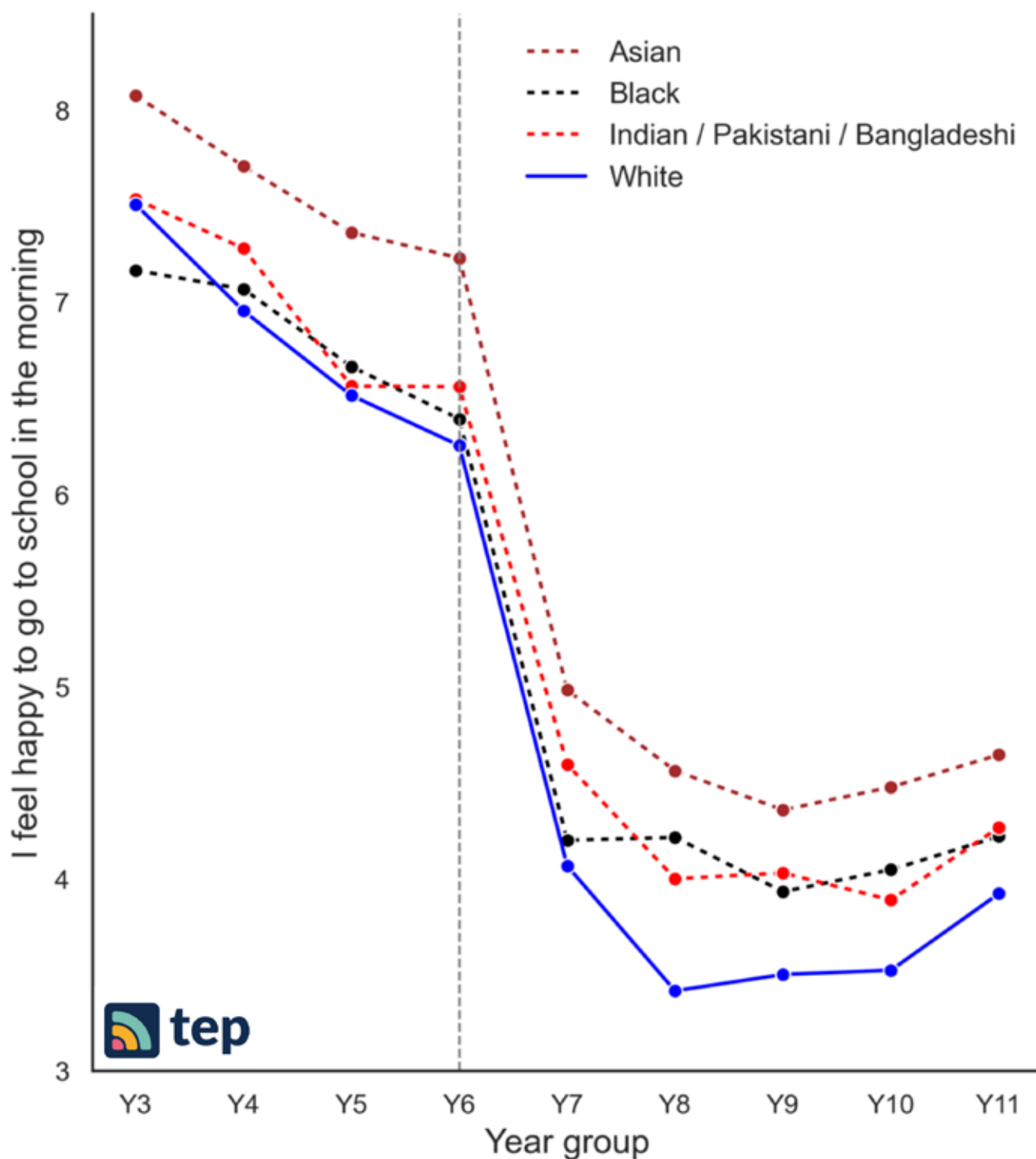


(b) Worries



White pupils are less likely to report enjoying school than other ethnic groups (see Figure 7.7). This is particularly true regarding the statements capturing whether they feel happy – or look forward – to going to school. The difference between White pupils and other ethnic groups in secondary school is particularly clear. In contrast, in primary school, the clearest difference is between Asian pupils and the other three ethnic groups.

Figure 7.7. Differences in children's enjoyment of school by ethnicity.



8. Inclusion

Summary

- Secondary pupils hold much more negative views of inclusivity than primary pupils. For instance, nearly two-thirds (66%) of secondary pupils awarding a score below six when asked whether “*people at school treat everyone the same*”, compared to almost a third (31%) of primary pupils.
- Black pupils view their school to be less inclusive than pupils of other ethnicities. When asked whether “*People at school treat me the same as everyone else*”, Black secondary pupils responded with an average score of 4.7 out of 10, compared to an average of 5.6 amongst Asian pupils, and 5.8 amongst Indian pupils.
- There is no evidence that pupils feel a greater sense of inclusion when there are more pupils of the same ethnicity within their school.
- Girls provide more positive responses with respect to diversity and inclusion in primary school. This reverses in the secondary school sample, where boys provide more positive responses than girls.
- Pupils that are eligible for FSM believe their school to be less inclusive than pupils not eligible for FSM, though differences are generally small (around 0.3 scale points for each statement). The FSM gap grows to around 0.5 scale points to most questions amongst the secondary school sample.

A strong sense of inclusion is fundamental to pupils’ well-being and educational engagement. When pupils feel included, they are more likely to participate actively in class, form positive relationships with peers and teachers, and engage fully with the school community (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025b). Understanding pupils’ sense of inclusion can help educators identify those who may feel marginalised or excluded (Jansen et al., 2014), allowing for targeted interventions to create a more welcoming and supportive environment. Pupils’ sense of inclusion at school is also likely to be an important driver of their level of attendance (Education Endowment Foundation, 2025b).

Assessing pupils’ sense of inclusion may therefore provide valuable insights into the school’s culture and climate. If students report feeling included, it suggests that the school’s efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion are effective. Conversely, if pupils express feelings of exclusion, it may indicate a need for changes in policies, practices, or support systems to ensure that all students feel valued and respected. This information is essential for creating a school environment where every student can thrive.

Within TEP, pupils are asked to respond to the following set of questions capturing their perspectives on inclusivity at their school:

- Everyone at school gets help to do well.
- People at school treat everyone the same.
- People at school treat me the same as everyone else.
- I am accepted for who I am at school.

Around a third of pupils respond with a score of five or below when asked whether “*Everyone at school gets help to do well*” and “*I am accepted for who I am at school*”. This increases to more than half of respondents (57%) when asked whether people at the school treat everyone the same (average score of 4.9).

Table 8.1. Average responses provided to the TEP inclusion questions.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
Everyone at school gets help to do well.	6.4	38%
People at school treat everyone the same.	4.9	57%
People at school treat me the same as everyone else.	5.7	47%
I am accepted for who I am at school.	6.7	34%

Responses to these statements differ significantly across primary and secondary pupils (see Table 8.2). For instance, secondary school pupils award average scores three points lower in response to the statement “*Everyone at school gets help to do well*” than their primary school peers (5.7 versus 8.5). Similarly sizeable differences emerge across the other statements, with almost two-thirds (66%) of secondary pupils awarding a score below six when asked whether “*people at school treat everyone the same*”.

Table 8.2. Differences in pupil’s views of inclusivity by school phase.

Question	1. Primary	2. Secondary	3. Post 16
Everyone at school gets help to do well.	8.5	5.7	7.0
People at school treat everyone the same.	6.9	4.2	6.2
People at school treat me the same as everyone else.	7.1	5.2	7.1
I am accepted for who I am at school.	8.4	6.1	7.7

Table 8.3 investigates average scores for each question across detailed ethnic groups. Results are presented in panel (a) for primary schools and panel (b) for secondary schools. Within the primary sample, Indian pupils report the highest average inclusion scores, standing at 8.2 out of 10. At the other end of the distribution sits Bangladeshi, Black and Mixed-race pupils, with average inclusion scores around 7.4 out of 10. It is also interesting to note how – amongst primary pupils – the inclusion scores reported by White British pupils are comparatively high, standing at 7.9 out of 10. There is hence evidence that – amongst primary school pupils – White-British pupils report comparatively high inclusion scores.

The analogous results for secondary pupils are reported in panel (b). Indian pupils again respond with the highest average inclusion scores (around 6 out of 10), closely followed by Chinese and Asian pupils. On the other hand, Black pupils tend to report the lowest average inclusion scores, standing at an average of 5.1 out of 10. The responses of Black pupils to the statement “*people at school treat me the same as everyone else*” is particularly low. White British pupils then have the second lowest average inclusion scores, with a mean of 5.3 out of 10.

Table 8.3. Average responses provided to the TEP inclusion questions.

(a) Primary

	Everyone at school gets help to do well.	People at school treat everyone the same.	People at school treat me the same as everyone else.	I am accepted for who I am at school.	Average inclusion score
Indian	6.5	5.1	5.8	6.8	6.0
Chinese	6.4	5.1	5.7	6.4	5.9
Asian	6.1	4.9	5.6	6.7	5.8
Pakistani	5.8	4.5	5.4	6.4	5.5
Other	5.8	4.4	5.3	6.3	5.5
White Other	5.8	4.3	5.3	6.2	5.4
Mixed	5.7	4.2	5.2	6.2	5.3
Bangladeshi	5.5	4.3	5.1	6.3	5.3
White British	5.7	4.2	5.1	6.1	5.3
Black	5.8	4.0	4.7	5.9	5.1

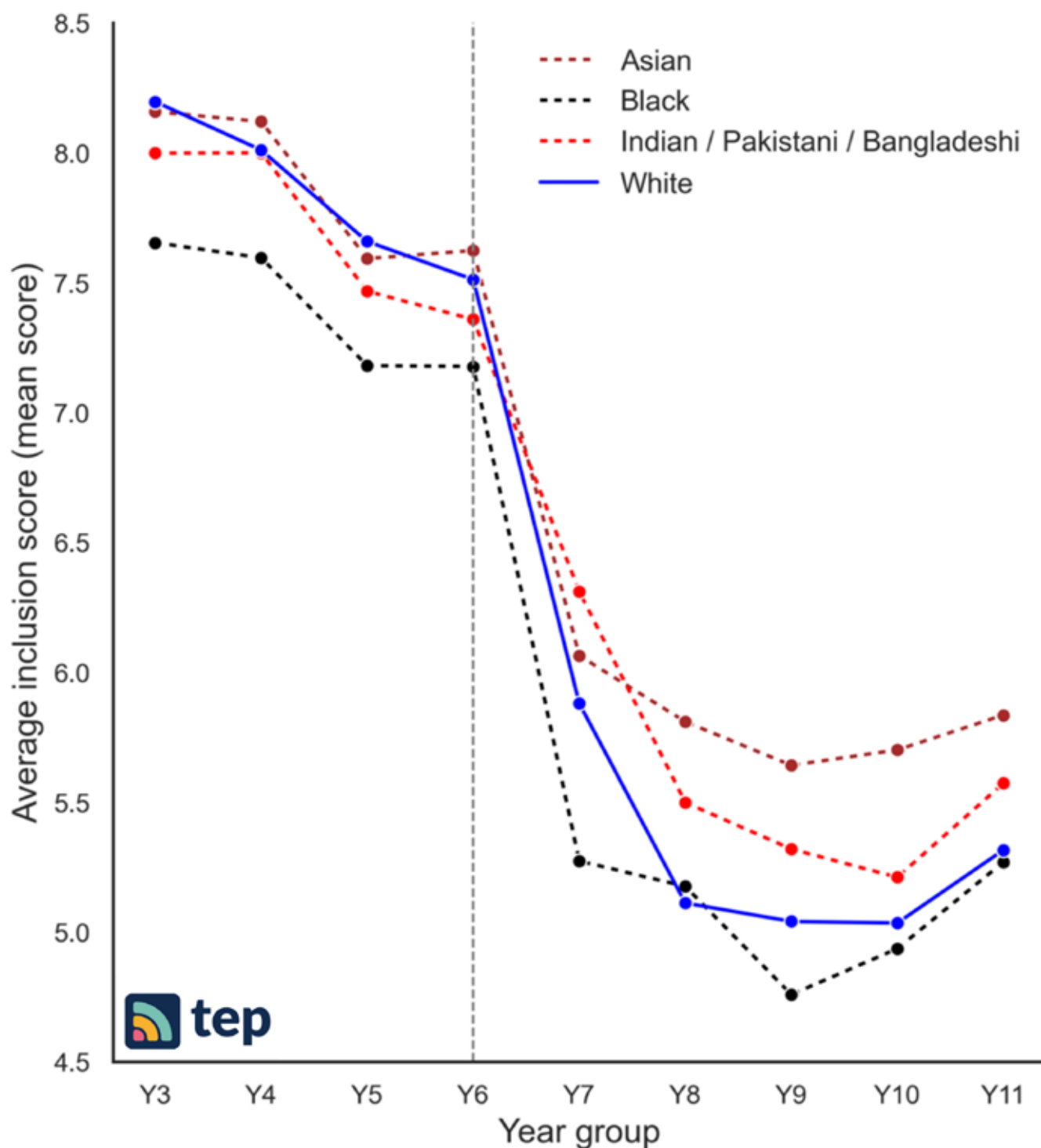
(b) Secondary

	Everyone at school gets help to do well.	People at school treat everyone the same.	People at school treat me the same as everyone else.	I am accepted for who I am at school.	Average inclusion score
Indian	8.8	7.5	7.7	8.8	8.2
White British	8.6	7.1	7.3	8.4	7.9
Asian	8.5	7.0	7.3	8.5	7.8
Other	8.6	7.1	7.2	8.4	7.8
Chinese	8.4	6.8	7.4	8.4	7.7
White Other	8.3	6.7	6.9	8.3	7.5
Pakistani	8.3	6.7	6.9	8.2	7.5
Bangladeshi	8.1	6.6	6.8	8.1	7.4
Black	8.3	6.4	6.7	8.2	7.4
Mixed	8.2	6.4	6.7	8.1	7.4

Notes: Figures refer to the average response provided by pupils of each ethnic group using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale. Green/red shading refers to higher/lower average scores.

These findings are now brought together in Figure 8.1 where we consider ethnic group differences across pupils in different school year groups. Figures in this graph refer to the average response pupils provided across the four inclusivity questions. Interestingly, in our sample of primary schools, White-British pupils provide similar responses (on average) to Asian pupils. Both groups report higher scores (in primary school) than their Black peers (though sample sizes within specific year groups are relatively small). In secondary school, however, White-British pupils generally tend to respond to the inclusivity questions less positively than pupils of Asian ethnicity.

Figure 8.1. Feelings of school inclusion. Differences across selected ethnicities by school year group.



Notes: Figures refer to average response to the four inclusion question. Asian combines Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Asian and Indian to ensure sufficient sample size. Thin grey line indicates the last year of primary school.

There are some interesting differences in responses to the different statements across genders, as reported in Table 8.4 below. In particular, girls provide slightly more positive responses in primary school, but then boys provide more positive responses during secondary school. Take the statement “*people at school treat me the same as everyone else*”. In primary school, the average response for girls is 0.3 points higher than for boys (7.3 versus 7.0). But – in secondary school – boys award a higher score than girls (5.4 versus 5.0). Similar results emerge with respect to the other statements as well.

Table 8.4. Gender differences in pupils’ sense of inclusivity at their school.

(a) Primary

Question	Female	Male
Everyone at school gets help to do well.	8.6	8.4
People at school treat everyone the same.	7.1	6.8
People at school treat me the same as everyone else.	7.3	7.0
I am accepted for who I am at school.	8.4	8.3

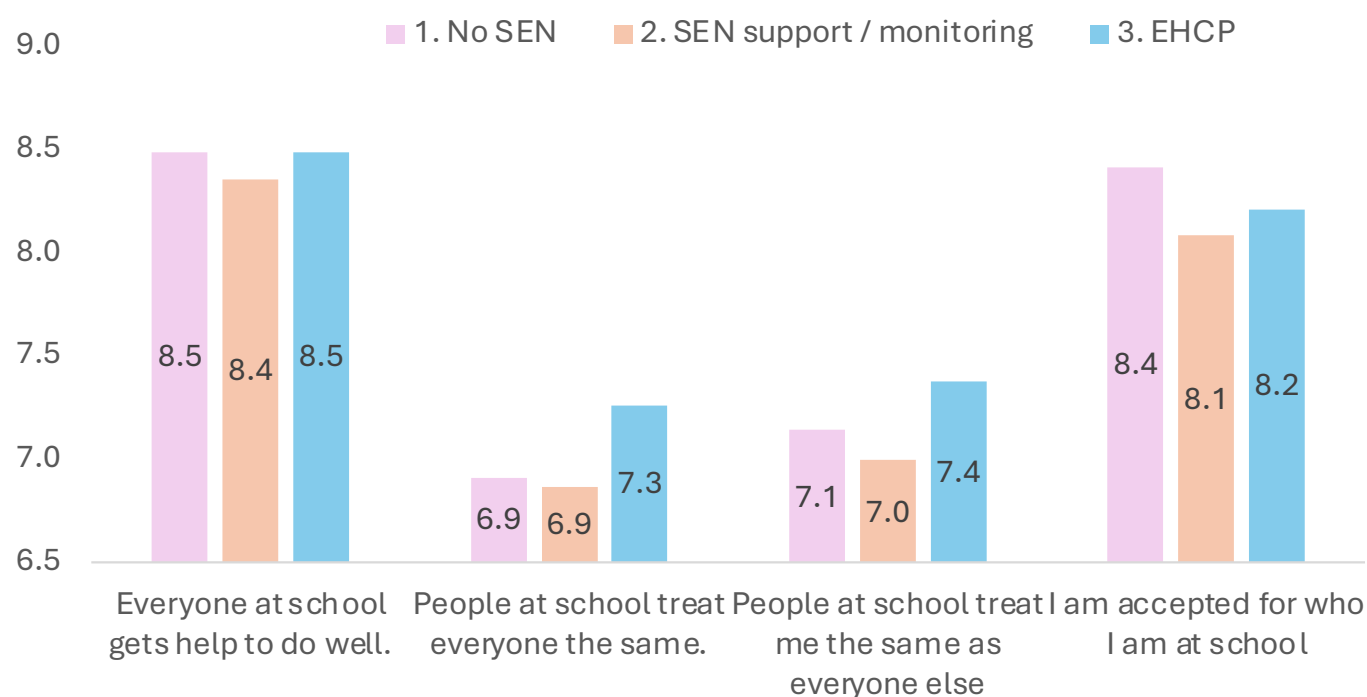
(b) Secondary

Question	Female	Male
Everyone at school gets help to do well.	5.5	5.9
People at school treat everyone the same.	4.0	4.5
People at school treat me the same as everyone else.	5.0	5.4
I am accepted for who I am at school.	5.9	6.4

Figure 8.2 turns to differences in views of inclusivity according to whether pupils have special educational needs. For some statements, pupils with an EHCP provide more positive responses than those without special educational needs. Take the statement “*people at school treat everyone the same*”. The average response amongst secondary pupils with an EHCP is 4.7 out of 10, compared to 4.2 for pupils without a special educational need.

Figure 8.2. Differences in pupils' sense of inclusivity at school according to whether the pupil has special educational needs.

(a) Primary



(a) Secondary

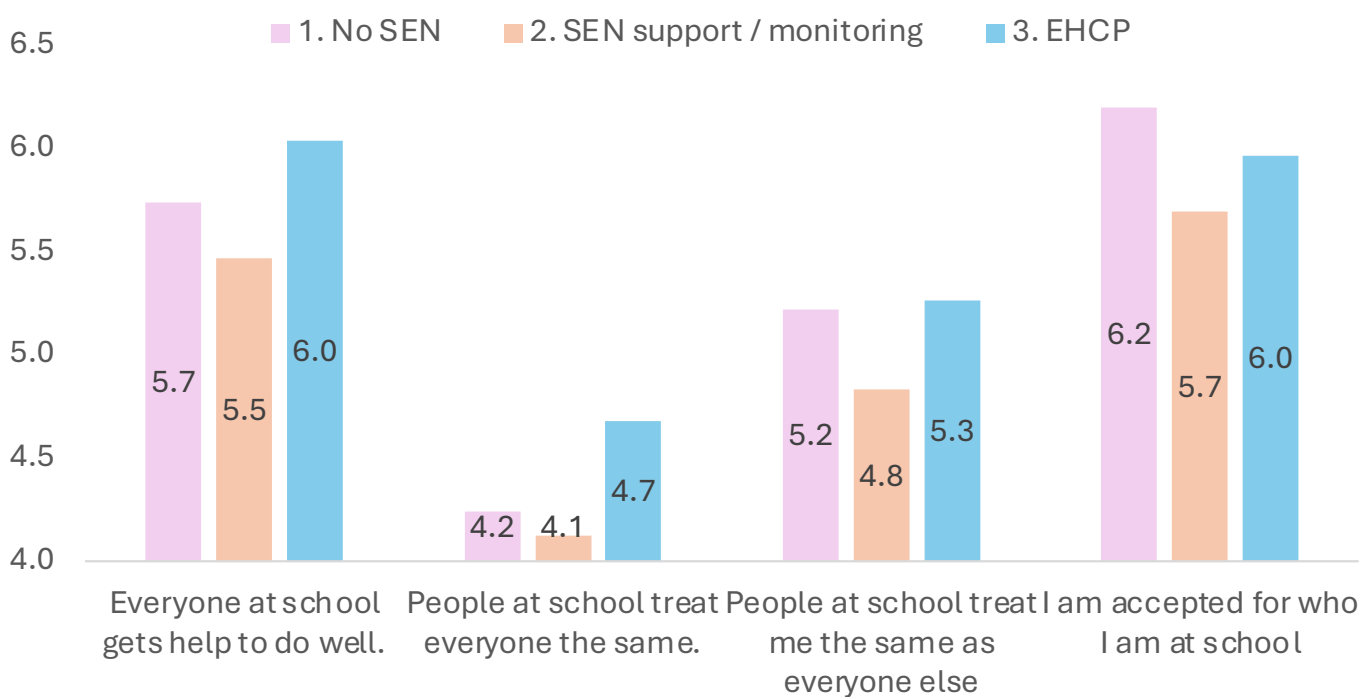
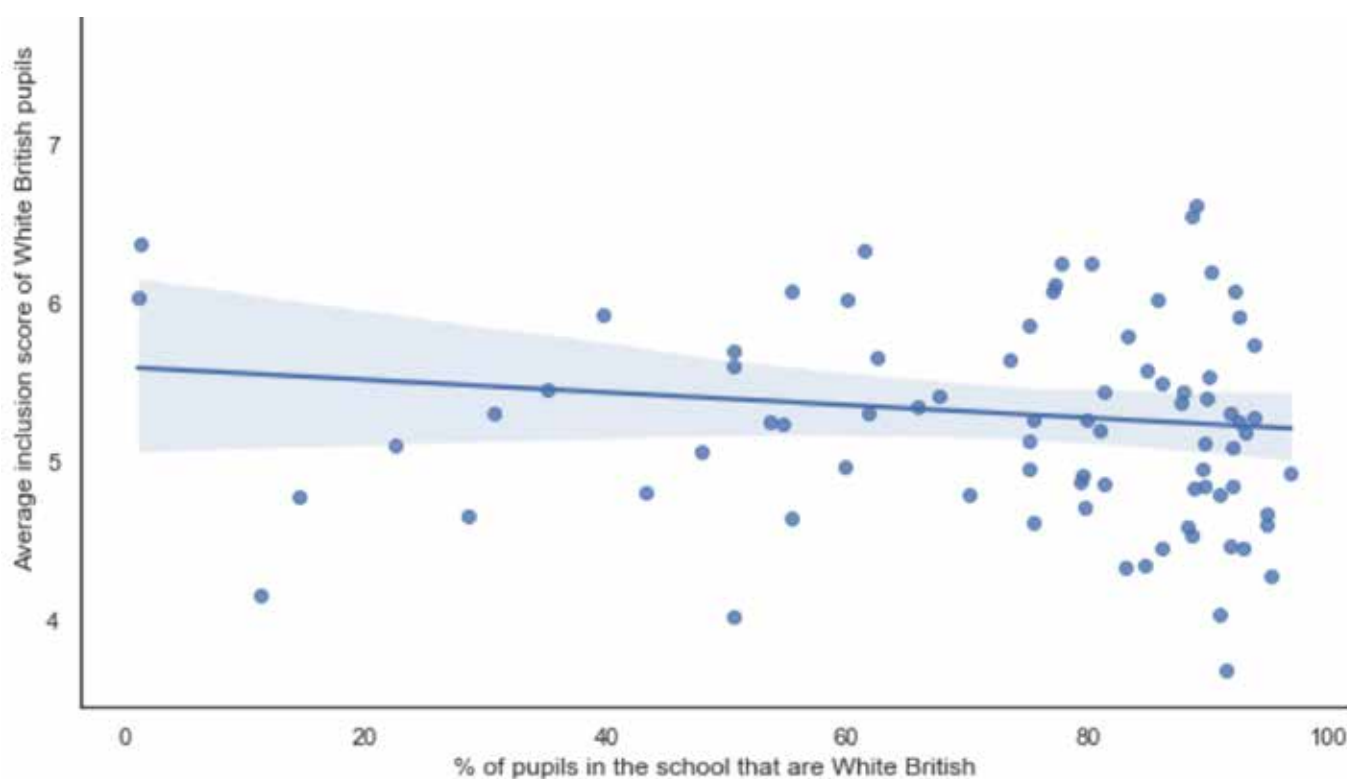


Figure 8.3 concludes by investigating the correlation between the percentage of pupils of a given ethnicity within a school and the average inclusion scores reported by that ethnic group. In other words, do pupils feel a greater sense of inclusion when there are more pupils of the same ethnicity within their school? Panel (a) presents the results for White British pupils and panel (b) for Black pupils. This analysis is based on the responses provided by secondary pupils.

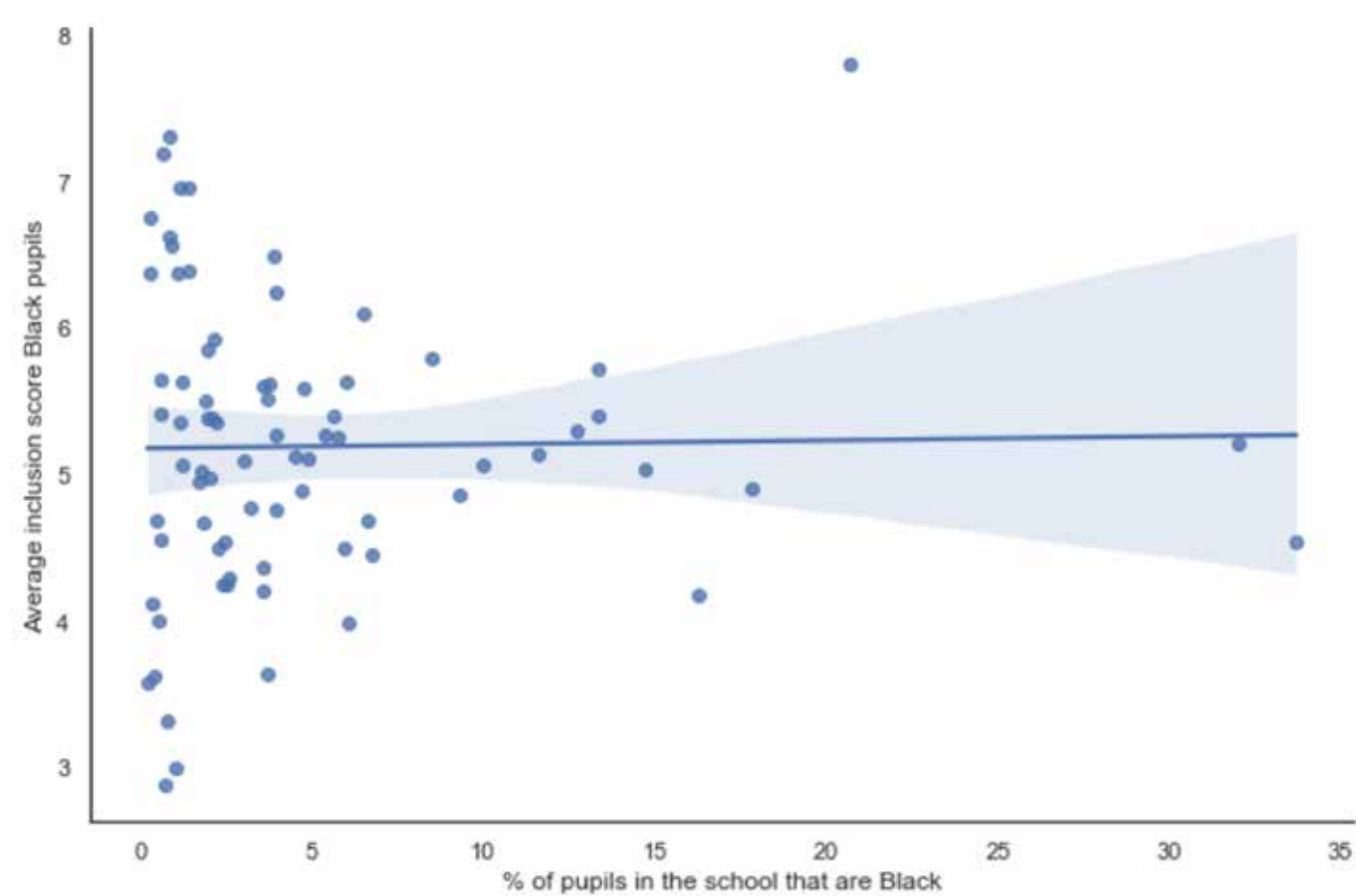
For both Black and White British pupils, a null result emerges. In both panels, there is a near-zero correlation between the percent of pupils belonging to the respective ethnic group within the school, and that groups average inclusion scores. Visually, this is represented by the flat regression lines presented across the two plots.

Figure 8.3. The school-level association between the average inclusion score reported proportion of the ethnic group in the school.

(a) White British



(b) Black



Notes: Analysis based on data from secondary school pupils in Years 7 to 11. Pearson correlation = -0.12 in panel (a) and 0.02 in panel (b).

9. Pupil-Teacher relationships

Summary

- Pupils in England on average rate the extent they can trust teachers, like teachers and feel they have an adult in the school they can talk to at just above six out of 10. Their response as to whether they respect teachers is somewhat higher (7.7 out of 10).
- There are sizeable differences in pupil perceptions of pupil-teacher relations across the primary and secondary sectors. When asked whether they trust their teachers, only 11% of primary pupils responded with a score of 5 or below, compared to 46% of secondary pupils.
- Boys are more likely than girls to report trusting teachers at their school. Girls are, however, more likely to say that they respect school staff.
- Boys and girls in primary school overwhelmingly say that they trust teachers at their school. A gender gap then emerges during secondary school.
- Black pupils are less likely to report trusting teachers at their school (average score of 5.2 compared to 5.7 for White pupils in secondary school) and less likely to feel there is an adult that they can talk to (average score of 5.1 versus 5.5 for White pupils in secondary school).
- Pupils with an EHCP report having a better relationship with staff at their school than pupils with less intensive SEN support and those without special needs.
- FSM Pupils report having worse relationships with teachers than their non-FSM peers, particularly amongst secondary pupils.

Research has suggested that the quality of pupil-teacher relationships is related to the development of young people's socio-emotional skills and the amount of knowledge they absorb in the classroom (Coristine, 2021). Positive teacher-pupil relationships foster a supportive and nurturing learning environment where pupils feel valued and understood (Emslander et al., 2024). When pupil-teacher relationships are stronger, pupils are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards school and learning (Huan et al., 2010). If students report strong, positive relationships with their teachers, it suggests that the school's efforts to promote a respectful and collaborative classroom environment are successful. Conversely, if pupils' express dissatisfaction with these relationships, it may indicate a need for professional development or changes in pupil management strategies to improve teacher-pupil interactions. By measuring pupil-teacher relationships over time, schools may be able to identify areas where additional support may be needed. For example, pupils who feel disconnected from their teachers may be at risk of disengagement or academic difficulties (Kang et al., 2023). By capturing this data, schools can implement targeted interventions to strengthen these relationships and ensure that all students feel supported and connected.

Within TEP, pupils are asked four questions designed to capture their perceptions of the quality of their relationships with staff at their school. These are:

- I trust the teachers at school.
- I like the teachers at school.
- I can talk to a teacher or adult at this school if I am worried.
- I respect the teachers at school.

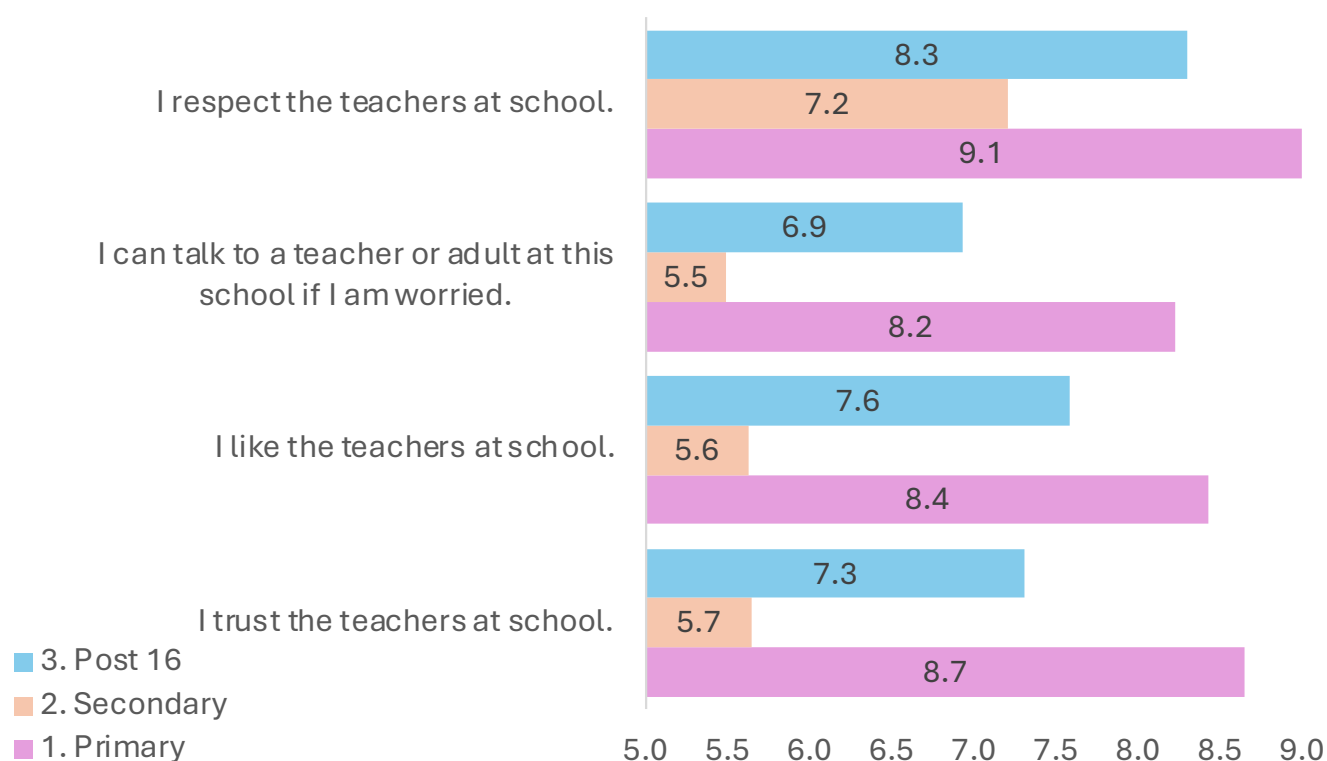
The average response pupils provided to each statement – accompanied by the percent reporting a score of five or below – can be found in Table 9.1. On average, responses to the first three statements were very similar, with mean scores just below 6.5. This includes the extent that pupils trust teachers, like teachers and feel they have an adult in the school they can talk to. Responses to the statement asking pupils whether they respect teachers is notably higher, with a mean score of 7.7 out of 10.

Table 9.1. Average responses provided to the TEP teacher-pupil relationship questions.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
I trust the teachers at school.	6.4	37%
I like the teachers at school.	6.3	37%
I can talk to a teacher or adult at this school if I am worried.	6.2	40%
I respect the teachers at school.	7.7	20%

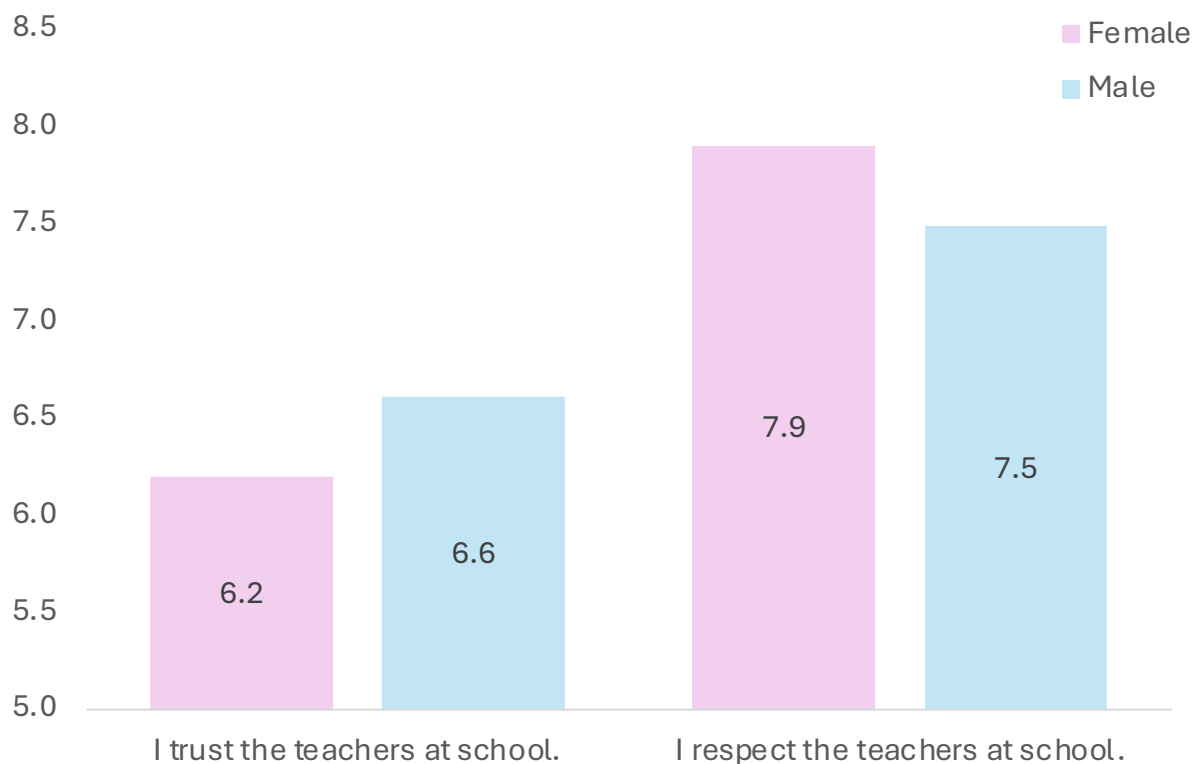
Figure 9.1 breaks these results down by school phase. There are again clear differences between pupils in the primary and secondary sectors. Perhaps the clearest example is with regard to the statement of whether pupils trust teachers at their school. Primary school pupils provide overwhelmingly positive responses to this question; the mean score is 8.7 out of 10 with only 11% of pupils responding with a score of five or below. Secondary pupils, in contrast, do not trust their teachers to the same extent. They report an average score of 5.7 (three points lower than their primary school peers), with 46% reporting a figure of five or below. Similar patterns are observed with respect to the other questions asked. The evidence from TEP hence suggests that while pupil-teacher relationships appear strong in the primary sector, there may be some weaknesses within secondary education.

Figure 9.1. Differences in views of pupil-teacher relationships across school phases.



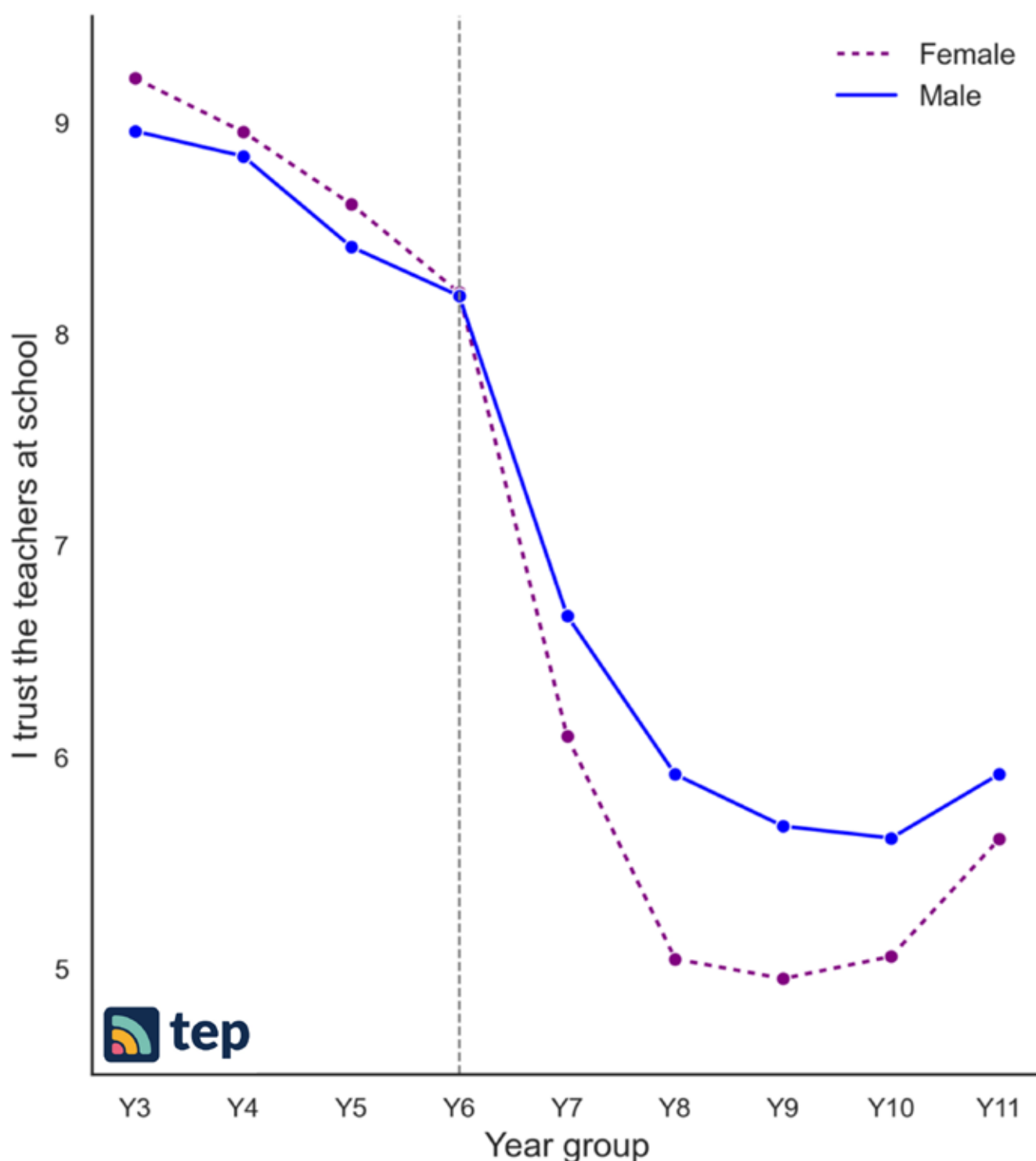
There are also some interesting differences in pupils' responses by gender, as illustrated in Figure 9.2 below. The bars on the left present the average score reported by boys and girls in response to the statement "*I trust teachers at school*". Boys tend to provide a more positive response to this statement, reporting an average score 0.2 points higher than girls (6.6 versus 6.2). Interestingly, however, responses to the statement "*I respect teachers at school*" show the opposite pattern – girls (mean score 7.9) provide more favourable responses than boys (mean score 7.5).

Figure 9.2. Gender differences in views of pupil-teacher relations.



In Figure 9.3 we bring together the two key findings presented above, illustrating how boys and girls responses to the statement “I trust the teachers at school” vary across school year groups. Boys and girls in primary school provide very similar – and overwhelmingly positive – responses, although these do decline slightly in older compared to younger year groups. The gender difference becomes most apparent in secondary school, however, as responses of girls in older age groups fall more rapidly than the responses of boys. Year 9 is when the gap is at its greatest, where the average score awarded by girls (around 5) is a point below the average score awarded by girls (around 6).

Figure 9.3. Gender differences in the extent they trust teachers by year group.



In Table 9.2 we further investigate this finding by examining the change in the same pupils' reports of their trust in teachers between November 2024 and March 2025 (figures may differ from those reported above due to differences in the analytic sample). For both genders, there are clear declines in (particularly) Year 7 and – to some extent – Year 8. It is during the Autumn and Spring terms of Year 8 where the gender gap seems to grow at its fastest, where there is a bigger decline for girls (-0.48) than for boys (-0.36).

Table 9.2. Change in responses to the statement “I trust the teachers at school” by gender and school year group. November 2024 to March 2025.

Year Group	Male			Female		
	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change
7	7.59	6.72	-0.87	7.06	6.14	-0.91
8	6.34	5.98	-0.36	5.58	5.10	-0.48
9	5.97	5.77	-0.20	5.12	5.02	-0.11
10	5.88	5.69	-0.19	5.22	5.09	-0.14
11	6.14	5.99	-0.15	5.76	5.57	-0.19

Next, we turn to differences across ethnic groups in views of teacher-pupil relations. These results can be found in Table 9.3 below. There are two key points to note. First, Asian pupils in general report having stronger relationships with teachers than other ethnic groups. Second, Black pupils – on average – give less positive responses than their White, Asian and Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi peers. In particular, Black pupils are less likely to report trusting teachers at their school (average score of 8.2 compared to 8.8 for White primary pupils) and less likely to feel there is an adult that they can talk to (average score of 7.8 versus 8.4 for White primary pupils).

Table 9.3. Variation across ethnic groups in perceptions of pupil-teacher relations.

(a) Primary

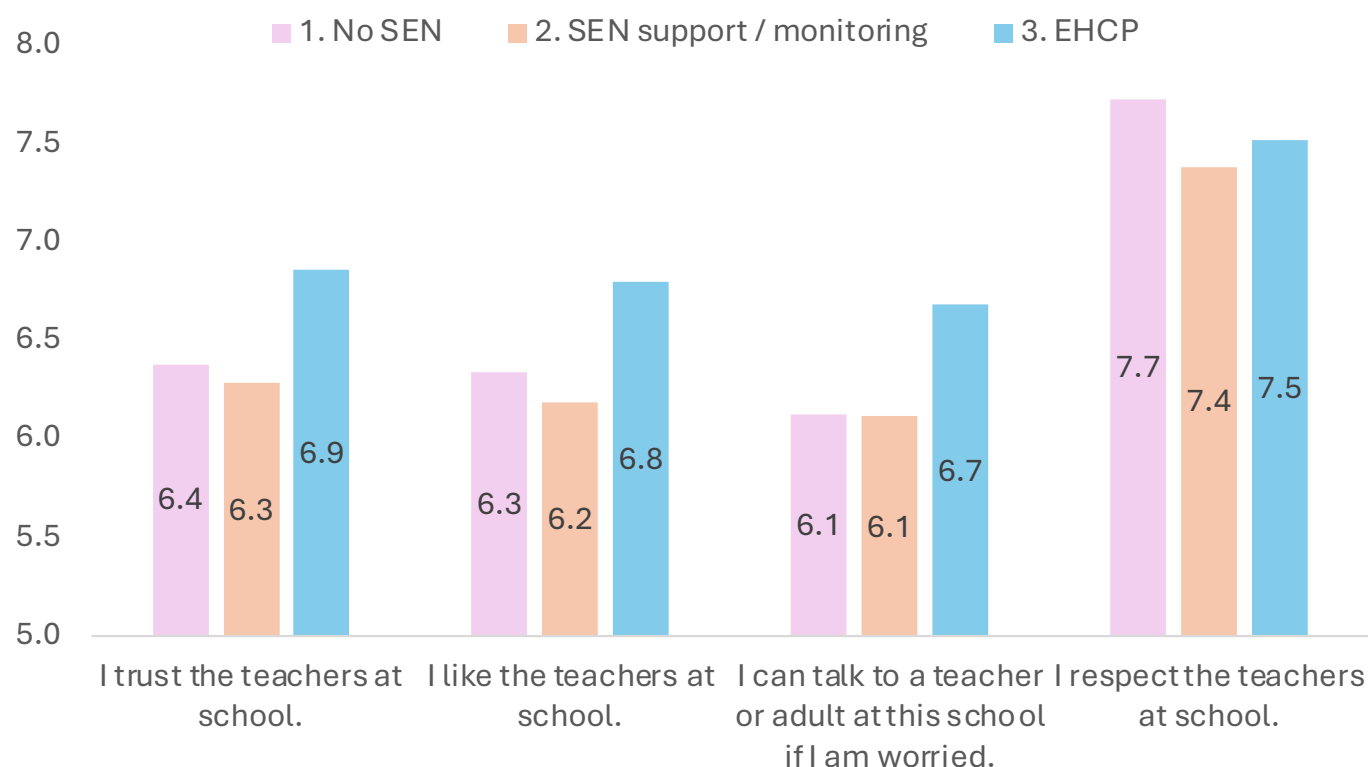
Question	Asian	Black	Indian / Pakistani / Bangladeshi	White
I trust the teachers at school.	8.8	8.2	8.6	8.8
I like the teachers at school.	8.5	8.1	8.2	8.6
I can talk to a teacher or adult at this school if I am worried.	8.4	7.8	8.2	8.4
I respect the teachers at school.	9.2	8.9	9.1	9.2

(b) Secondary

Question	Asian	Black	Indian / Pakistani / Bangladeshi	White
I trust the teachers at school.	5.9	5.2	5.6	5.7
I like the teachers at school.	6.0	5.4	5.5	5.7
I can talk to a teacher or adult at this school if I am worried.	5.6	5.1	5.4	5.5
I respect the teachers at school.	7.7	7.3	7.5	7.2

For most of the statements, children with an EHCP provide more positive responses than their peers with less intensive SEN support and those without additional needs (see Figure 9.4). With respect to the statement “*I trust the teachers at school*”, they respond with an average score of 6.9 out of 10, compared to 6.4 for those without SEN and 6.3 for those with lower levels of SEN support. Similar differences emerge for the statements “*I like the teachers at school*” and “*I can talk to a teacher or adult at this school if I am worried*” as well. The one exception is the statement on whether they “*respect*” teachers, where EHCP pupils report slightly lower scores than their peers without additional needs.

Figure 9.4. Differences in views of pupil-teacher relations according to whether the pupil has special educational needs.



10. Peer relationships

Summary

- On average, pupils in England rate the extent that they trust other children at their school at 5.4 out of 10, with close to half (51%) responding with a score below six.
- Girls are less likely to say that they trust other children in their school than boys (average scores of 5.1 versus 5.6), but are more likely to say that they respect their peers (mean scores of 7.6 versus 7.2).
- During primary school, there is no difference between genders in the extent that they trust other children. Trust of peers declines for both genders during secondary school, though by a much greater extent amongst girls.
- Girls in Years 9 rate their average trust of other pupils in their school as 4.3 out of 10 (compared to 5.2 out of 10 amongst boys).
- Pupils that are eligible for FSM are less likely to like and trust other children in their school than their peers from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, particularly amongst secondary pupils.
- Black pupils are less likely to report that they trust other children than pupils from other ethnic groups.

Positive peer relationships are fundamental to pupils' social and emotional development. When pupils have strong, supportive friendships, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness within the school community (Chiu et al, 2016). This sense of belonging can enhance their overall well-being and academic performance, as pupils who feel accepted and valued by their peers are more likely to engage actively in their studies and participate in school activities (Allen et al., 2021). Having positive relationships with one's peers is also likely to be a key factor related to pupil's level of attendance, engagement in schoolwork and extracurricular activities (Juvonen et al., 2012).

By capturing data on peer relationships, educators can gain valuable insights into the school climate. When pupils report positive (or improving) peer interactions, it suggests that the school's efforts to promote a respectful and inclusive environment may be effective. Conversely, if pupils express difficulties in forming or maintaining friendships, it may indicate a need for interventions to address issues such as bullying or social isolation. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating a safe and supportive school environment where all students can thrive.

Pupils' perspectives on the quality of their relationships with their peers are captured in TEP via the following questions:

- I trust other children at school.
- I like other children at school.
- I have close friends at school.
- I respect the other children at school.

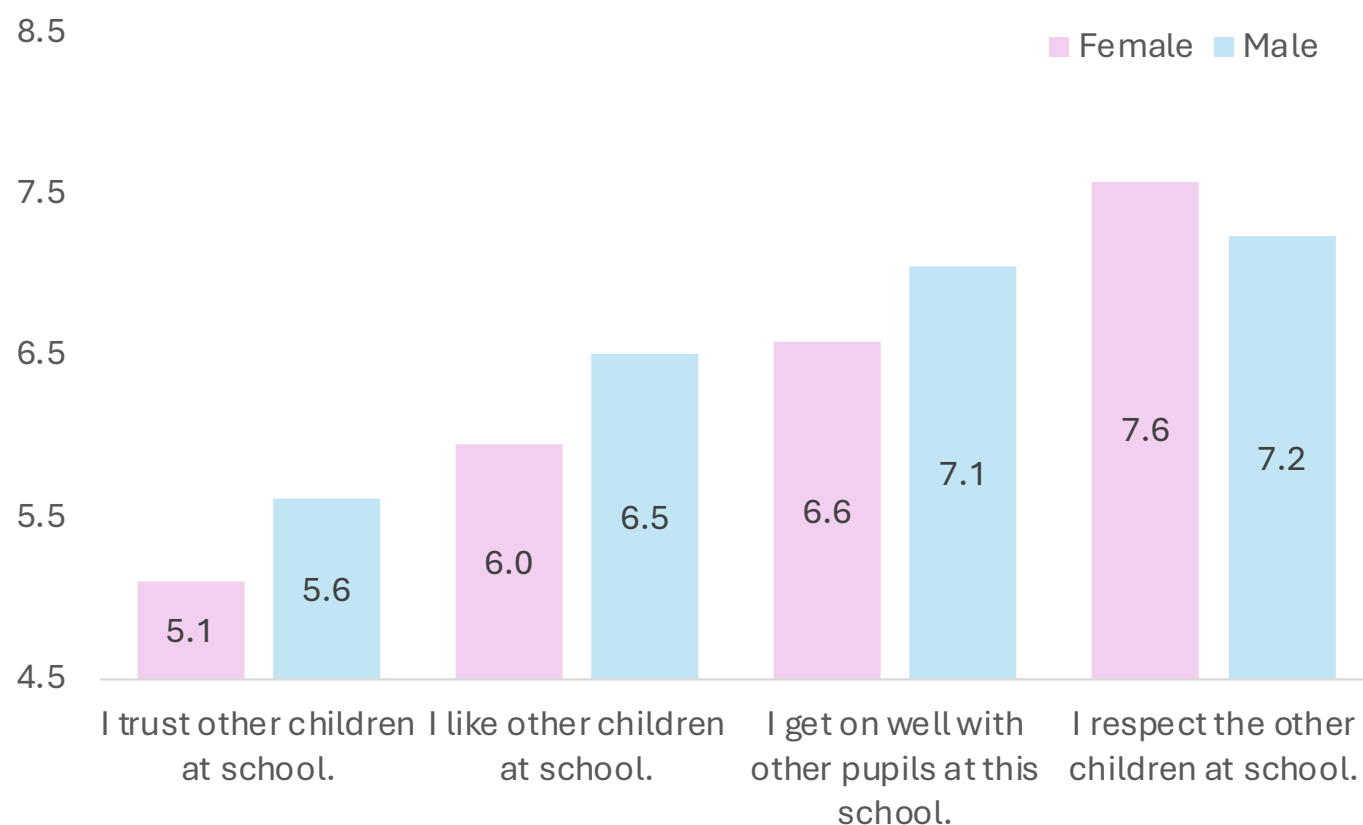
A summary of pupil responses to these four statements can be found in Table 10.1 below. This includes both the average score along TEP's 0-10 reporting scale, and the percent of pupils responding with a score of five or below. While pupils generally report respecting other pupils at their school (mean score 7.4), around one-in-five provided a negative or somewhat ambivalent response. Responses to the statements asking whether pupils like and trust other children at the school were somewhat more negative. For instance, on average, pupils in England rate the extent that they trust other children at their school at 5.4 out of 10, with close to half (51%) responding with a score below six.

Table 10.1. Average responses provided to the TEP peer relationships questions.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
I trust other children at school.	5.4	51%
I like other children at school.	6.2	38%
I get on well with other pupils at this school.	6.8	30%
I respect the other children at school.	7.4	22%

There are however some interesting differences in these results across genders, as illustrated in Figure 10.1 below. In particular, girls are less likely than boys to say that they trust (and that they like) other children within their school. Regarding trust, their average responses are 0.5 points lower than for boys (5.1 versus 5.6), while the difference for whether they like other children is 0.5 points (6.0 versus 6.5). Interestingly, the gender difference with respect to the final statement is the other way around. Specifically, girls are more likely to say that they respect other children than boys (mean scores of 7.6 versus 7.2). This is consistent with the results obtained regarding teacher-pupil relationships in the preceding subsection, where a similar difference for the question asking about “*respect*” is found.

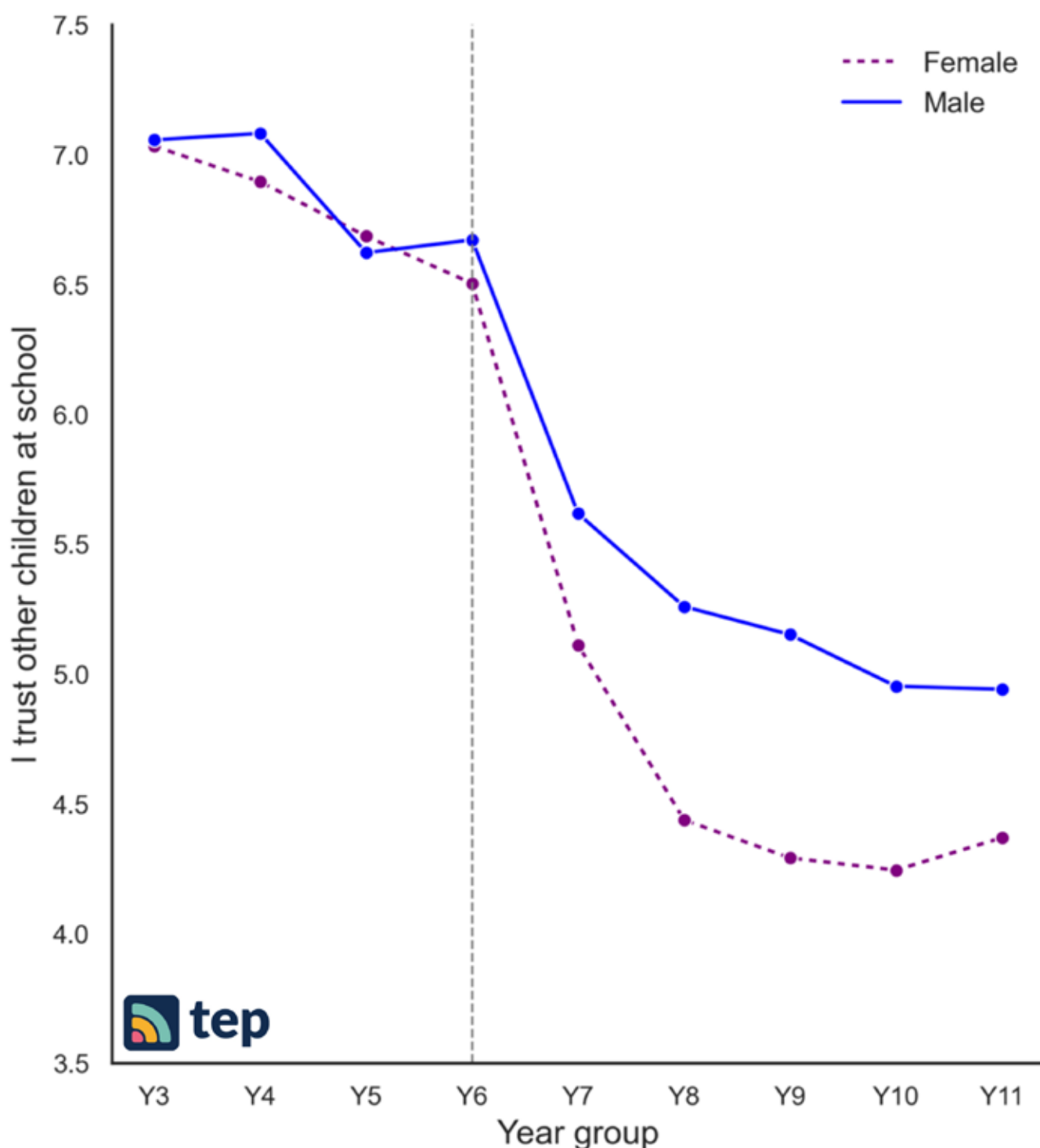
Figure 10.1. Gender differences in peer relationships.



This analysis is taken a step further in Figure 10.2, where we consider how gender differences with respect to a selection of these statements vary across school year groups. Inferences from this graph are similar to those for the extent boys and girls trust teachers discussed in the section above. Specifically, in primary school, there is little evidence of a gender difference. While the average response is lower for both genders during secondary school, the decline is much sharper amongst girls. For pupils in Years 9 to 11, the average score of girls on the extent that they trust other children in their school is around three-quarters of a point lower than their male peers.

We have also explored analogous results for gender differences across year groups in the extent that pupils say that they respect other pupils in their school. This indicates that, in primary school, girls provide more positive responses than boys (difference of around 0.5 points), but this narrows to close to no difference during most of secondary education.

Figure 10.2. Gender differences in the extent that children trust other pupils in their school by year group.



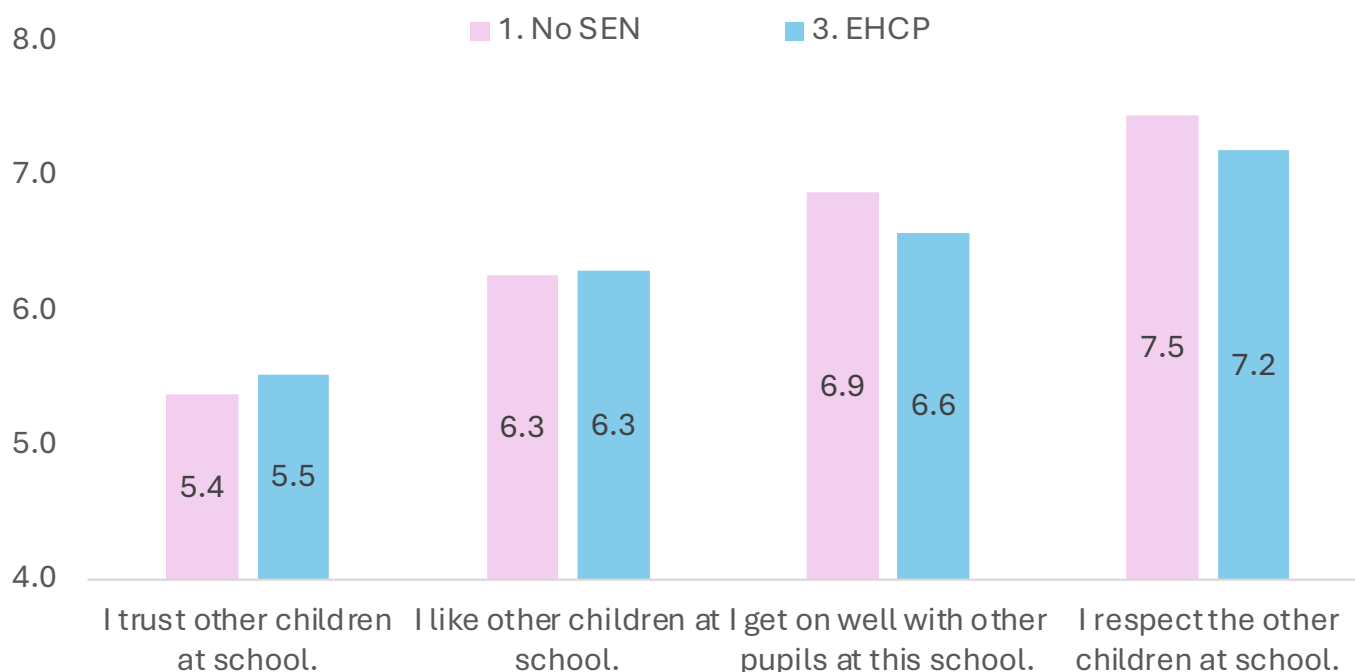
In Table 10.2 we investigate this finding by examining the change in the same pupils' reports of their trust of their peers between November 2024 and March 2025 (figures may differ from those reported above due to differences in the analytic sample). While there are clear declines amongst both genders, they are consistently steeper for girls (until Year 11). For instance, between Autumn and Spring term of Year 7, responses to the statement fall by 0.78 points amongst girls, compared to 0.66 for boys. A similar pattern emerges through to the end of Year 10.

Table 10.2. Change in responses to the statement “I trust other children at school” by gender and school year group. November 2024 to March 2025.

Year Group	Male			Female		
	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change
7	6.31	5.65	-0.66	5.92	5.13	-0.78
8	5.73	5.28	-0.44	5.03	4.48	-0.54
9	5.47	5.20	-0.26	4.66	4.30	-0.36
10	5.27	4.99	-0.28	4.59	4.22	-0.37
11	5.26	4.96	-0.30	4.61	4.35	-0.26

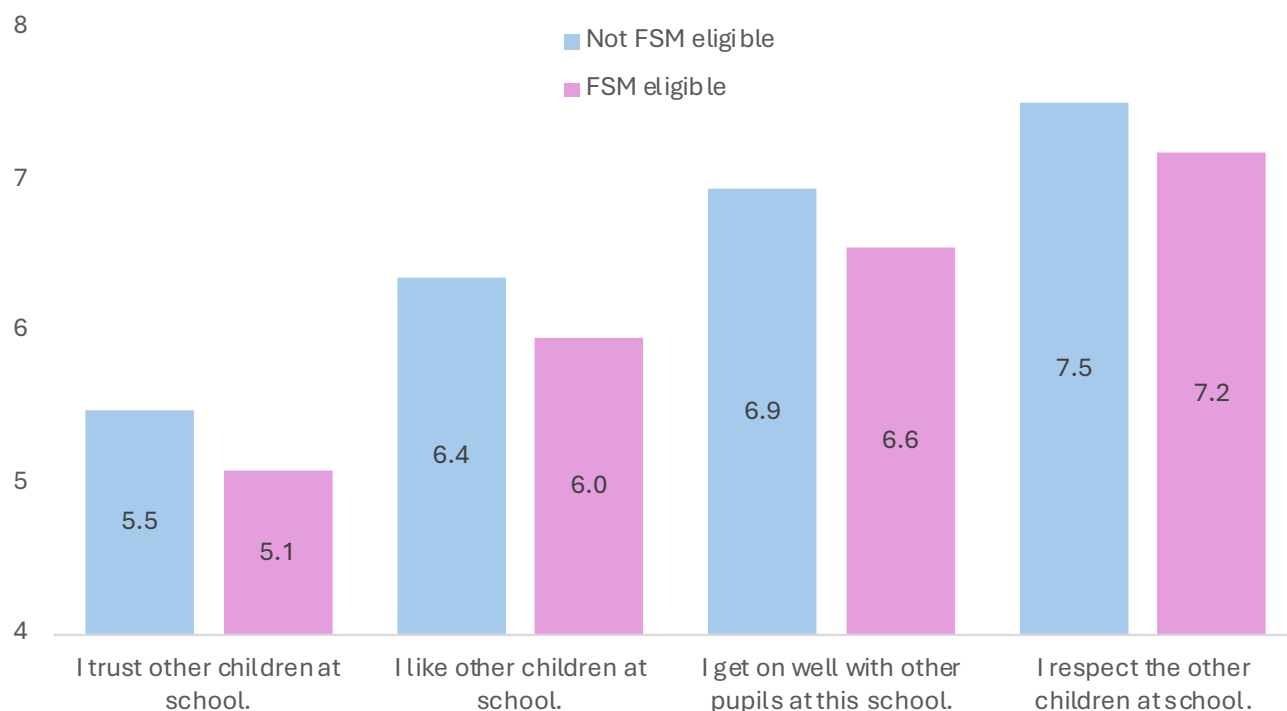
We now proceed by considering differences in peer relationships according to whether pupils have special educational needs. These results are presented in Figure 10.3 below. For the first two four statements, pupils with an EHCP report having a similar quality of peer relations as pupils without special educational needs. These focus on whether they trust and like other pupils. There is a clearer gap however with respect to whether they respect other pupils. Pupils without SEN respond with an average score of 7.5, compared to 7.2 for those with an EHCP.

Figure 10.3. Differences in peer relationships between pupils with an EHCP and those without special educational needs.



Children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) report having worse relationships with their peers than pupils from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. As Figure 10.4 reveals, FSM pupils are 0.4 points less likely to report trusting and liking other children at their school. They also 0.3 points less likely to say that they respect other children. These findings are in-line with results presented in previous subsections regarding other dimensions of FSM pupils' school engagement.

Figure 10.4. FSM differences in pupil perceptions of peer relationships.



11. Self-reported effort at school

Summary

- On average, pupil report their effort at school (e.g. whether they pay attention during lessons; do their best in their schoolwork) at around 7 out of ten.
- In secondary school, White pupils report putting the least effort into their schoolwork, followed by Black children, with Asian and Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils scoring highest.
- During Years 9 and 10, the self-reported effort amongst White pupils is around half a point lower than Asian, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils.
- FSM pupils put in less effort at school (across various dimensions) than their more socio-economically advantaged peers. The biggest difference is for handing homework in on time (mean score of FSM pupils of 5.3, compared to 6.7 for pupils not eligible for FSM).
- Girls to some extent report putting more effort into their schooling than boys, though most differences are relatively modest.
- Disadvantaged, white boys are the least likely to say they try their best with their schoolwork (average score of 6.4), while not disadvantaged Black girls, Asian girls and Asian boys are the most likely to say they try their best at school (average scores above 7.5).

Effort is a key determinant of academic success (Dunlosky et al., 2020). When pupils consistently put in effort, they are more likely to achieve their academic goals and develop a strong work ethic (Carbonaro, 2005). If pupils report high levels of effort, it suggests that they are motivated and invested in their learning. Conversely, if pupils indicate low effort, it may signal disengagement or underlying issues that need to be addressed. By capturing this data, schools can tailor their approaches to better support students and enhance their overall engagement.

However, measuring effort through self-reported surveys can be challenging. Pupils may overestimate or underestimate their effort due to various factors, such as social desirability bias or a lack of self-awareness. Additionally, pupils' perceptions of effort can be influenced by their individual definitions of what constitutes "*effort*" in the context of their schoolwork. To mitigate these challenges, it is important to complement self-reported measures of behavioural engagement with other data sources, such as attendance and behaviour records (including completion of homework). Nevertheless, despite the challenges of self-reported measures of effort, they are likely to still offer important insights into pupils' level of behavioural school engagement (including changes over time).

In TEP, pupils are asked a set of questions designed to capture their self-reported effort at school over the last month. These are as follows:

- This month, I did my best with my schoolwork.
- This month, I have paid full attention in lessons.
- This month, I handed in all my homework on time.

A summary of the responses provided by pupils can be found in Table 11.1 below. On average, responses to all statements between 6.5 and 7 out of ten. Relatedly, around a quarter of pupils responded with a score of five or below in response to whether they have tried their best with their schoolwork, have paid full attention during their lessons and whether they have not broken any school rules. This increases to over one-third when asked whether they have completed all their homework on time.

Table 11.1. Pupils' reports of self-reported effort at school over the last month.

Question	Mean score	% do not agree (score 0-5)
This month, I did my best with my schoolwork.	7.1	27%
This month, I have paid full attention in lessons.	6.7	31%
This month, I handed in all my homework on time.	6.4	38%

In Figure 11.1 differences in response to these four questions are illustrated across ethnic groups. Pupils of White ethnicity report putting the least effort into their schoolwork, followed by Black children, with Asian and Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils scoring the highest on this measure of behavioural engagement. The biggest difference is observed with respect to whether homework has been handed in on time. White pupils scored an average of 6.1 on this question, almost a full point behind their Black (6.7), Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi (7.2) and Asian (7.3) peers. Likewise, clear differences emerge across groups in response to the statement *"this month, I have paid full attention in lessons"*, ranging from a low of 6.6 for White pupils to 7.2 for Asian and Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi pupils. This demonstrates how White pupils tend to have lower levels of behavioural engagement at school relative to other ethnic groups.

Figure 11.1. Differences in pupils' self-reported effort across ethnic groups.

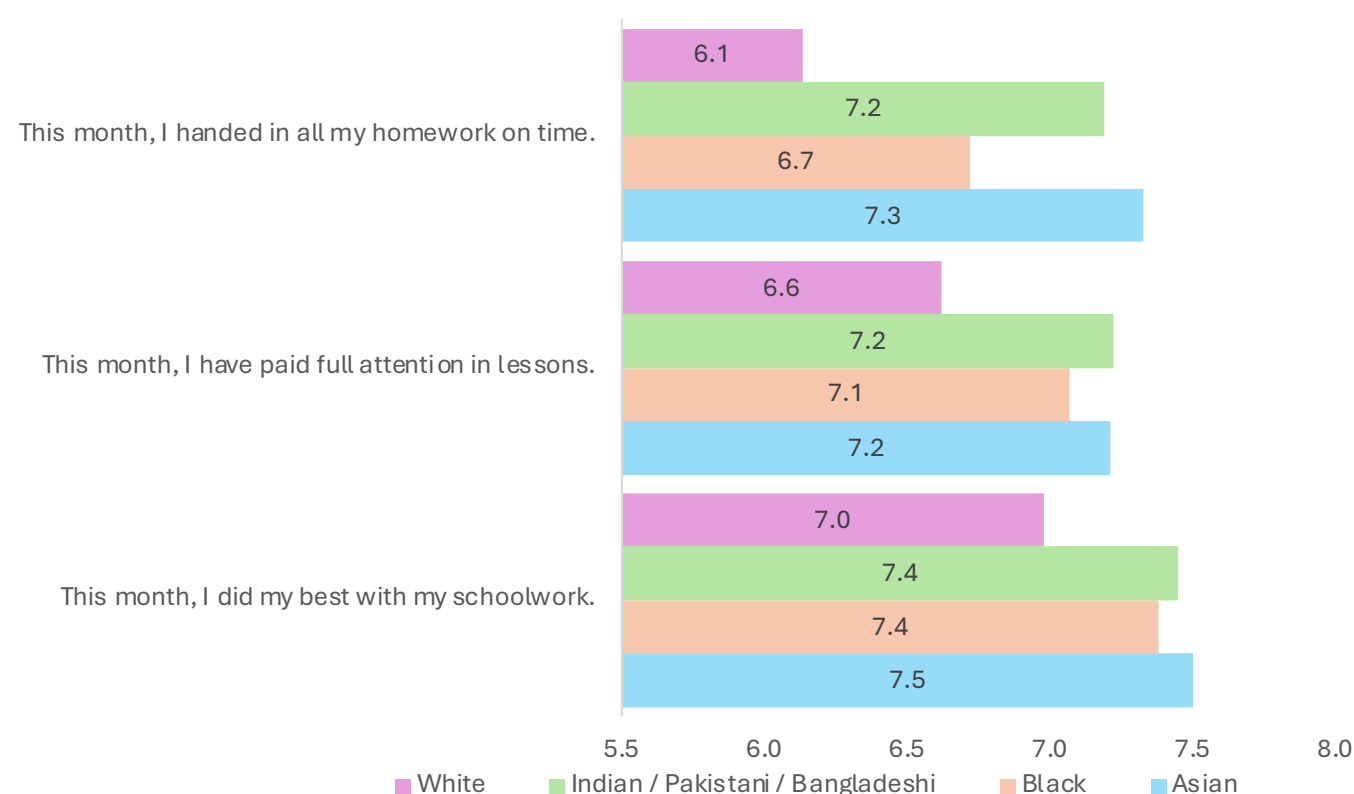
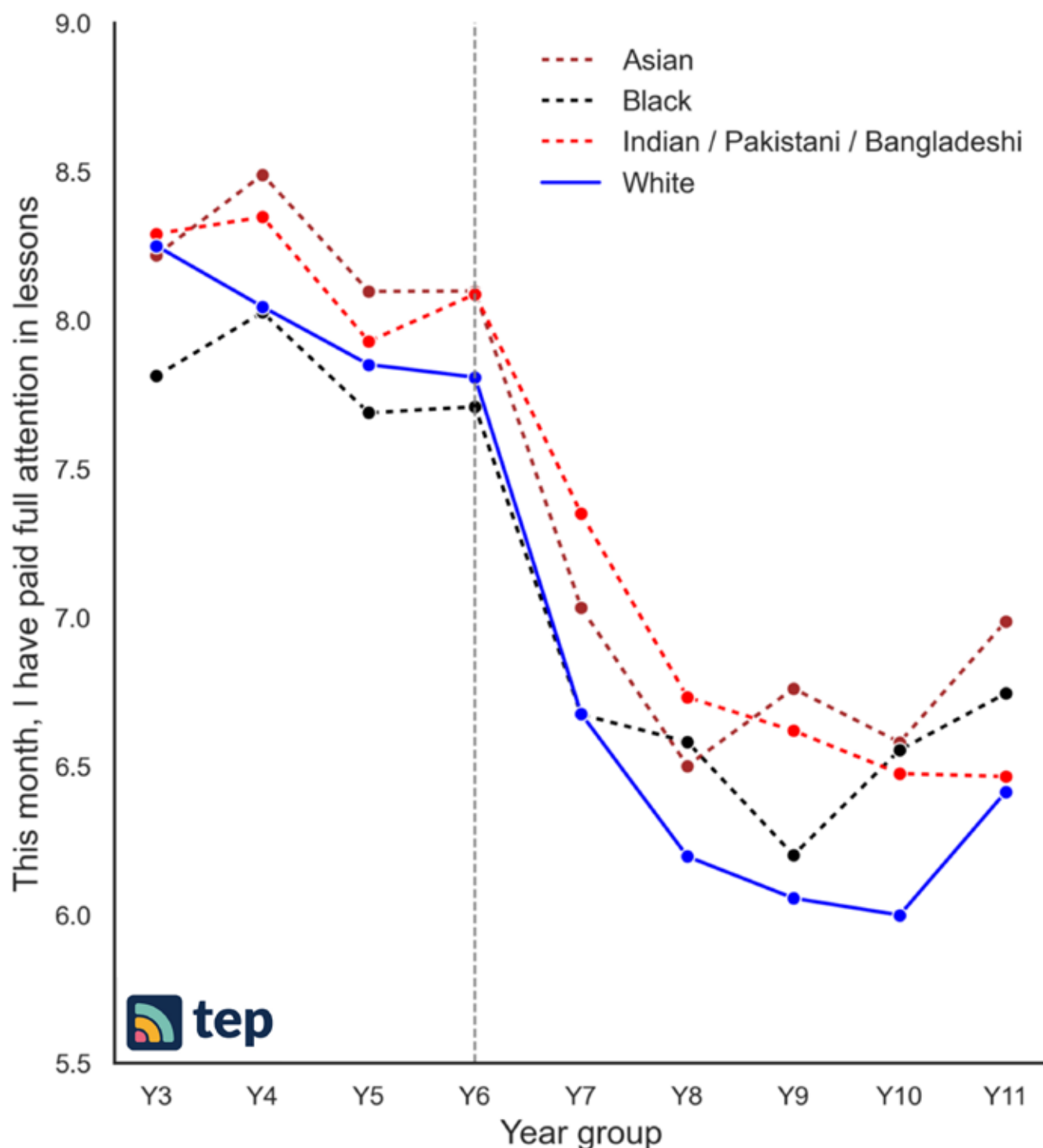


Figure 11.2 illustrates how ethnic differences in pupils' self-reported effort varies across pupils in different year groups. In primary school, differences across ethnic groups are relatively small, although self-reported effort does modestly decline for each group. Bigger differences emerge, however, during secondary education. Between Year 8 and Year 10 a clear difference emerges between White children and their Asian, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi peers. At its peak – around Year 9/10 – the self-reported effort of White pupils is around 0.7 points lower than for Asian, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils.

Figure 11.2. Ethnic group differences in paying attention during lessons by academic year group.



There are also substantial differences in self-reported effort according to whether the pupil is eligible for Free School Meals – more so than for most of the other dimensions of engagement measured by TEP. These results are reported in Figure 11.3, with the biggest difference observed with respect to the statement “*This month, I handed in all my homework on time*” (mean score of FSM pupils of 5.3, compared to 6.7 for pupils not eligible for FSM). However, sizeable differences can also be observed for whether they paid full attention during lessons (0.5 points) and whether they have tried their best with their schoolwork (0.5 points). Hence – by their own admission – pupils that are eligible for FSM put in less effort at school (across various dimensions) than their more socio-economically advantaged peers.

Figure 11.3. FSM differences in self-reported effort at school over the last month.

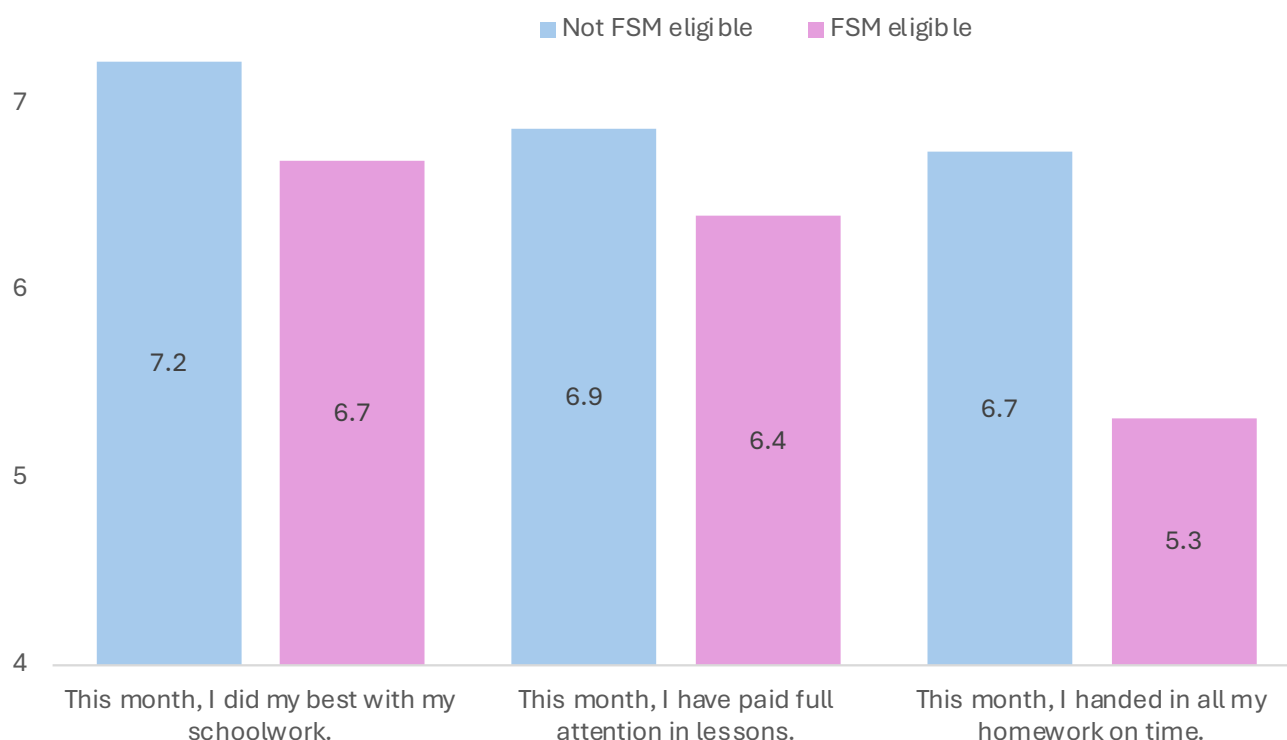


Table 11.2 turns to differences in self-reported effort between boys and girls. There is evidence in favour of girls in primary school (but less for secondary). For instance, over the last month, primary girls are more likely to have tried their best with their schoolwork than boys (8.6 versus 8.2). There is also a difference with respect to paying attention during lessons (average scores of 7.3 versus 6.8). In the secondary school sample, the gender gap in response to the self-reported effort questions are notably smaller.

Table 11.2. Gender differences in self-reported effort at school over the last month.

(a) Primary

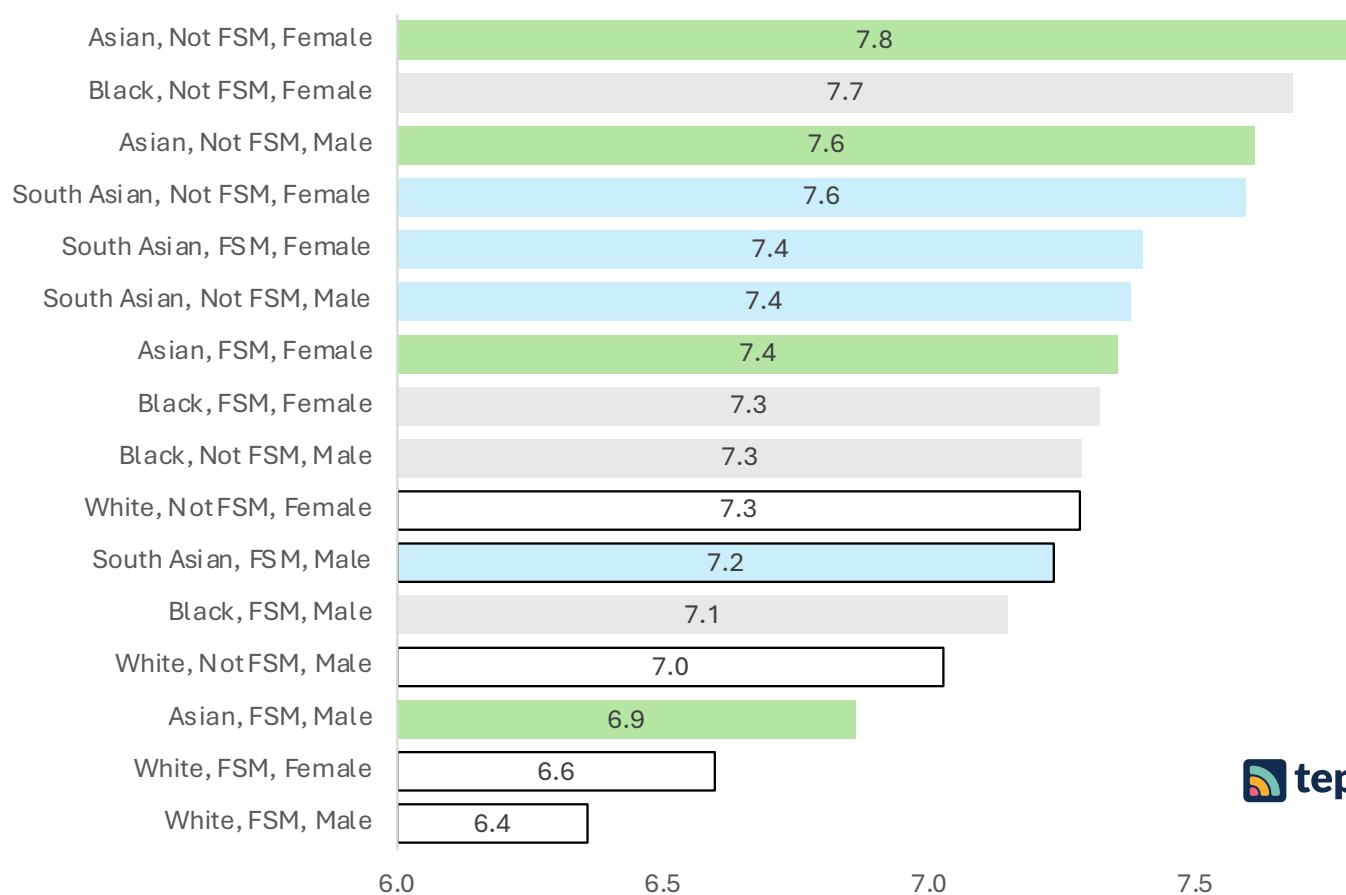
Question	Female	Male
This month, I did my best with my schoolwork.	8.6	8.2
This month, I have paid full attention in lessons.	8.2	7.8
This month, I handed in all my homework on time.	7.3	6.8

(b) Secondary

Question	Female	Male
This month, I did my best with my schoolwork.	6.8	6.6
This month, I have paid full attention in lessons.	6.3	6.4
This month, I handed in all my homework on time.	6.1	6.0

We now bring these results together in Figure 11.4 where we consider the intersection between gender, socio-economic disadvantage (proxied by FSM eligibility) and gender. When doing so, one can see that disadvantaged, white boys report putting the least effort into their education with an average score of 6.4 out of 10, closely followed by their disadvantaged, white, female peers (6.6 out of 10). This is substantially behind the groups reporting in the most effort – not disadvantaged Black girls, Asian girls and Asian boys.

Figure 11.4. The intersection between gender, disadvantage and ethnicity with self-reported effort with schoolwork.



12. How do average levels of school engagement change between Autumn and Spring terms?

Summary

- Across all dimensions with comparable data, average school engagement scores fell between the Autumn and Spring terms.
- The average agency score fell by around 0.4 points, with a 0.35-point decline in self-reported effort and diversity and inclusion.
- Smaller falls were observed in terms of pupil views of behaviour (0.15-point decline) and headline engagement (0.2-point decline).
- For some measures, this fall is almost entirely due to the decline in engagement amongst Year 7 pupils.
- Headline engagement scores fell from 7.7 to 6.3 out of 10 amongst Year 7 pupils between November 2024 and March 2025. Amongst all other year groups, average headline engagement scores were broadly stable.
- All secondary school year groups saw average agency scores decline between the Autumn and Spring terms. There was minimal decline in Agency scores amongst primary pupils.
- Between Autumn and Spring terms, average headline engagement scores fell by more amongst EAL pupils and those eligible for Free School Meals.
- Black and Bangladeshi secondary pupils saw the greatest declines in their headline engagement scores across the two terms.

Children's engagement with school may change between the Autumn and Spring terms for a variety of reasons. For instance, peer relationships often evolve over the course of the academic year; some friendships may become strained as conflicts arise or interests diverge, while others may strengthen as pupils support each other through academic and social challenges. Similarly, relationships with teachers can change; initial enthusiasm and curiosity may give way to frustration if pupils struggle with the curriculum or feel misunderstood. For others, a growing rapport with teachers may develop, enhancing their sense of belonging and motivation at school.

The transition back to school after holidays may also have an impact on pupil engagement. Some may initially struggle to readjust to the school environment before finding their feet again, gradually enjoying their lessons and interactions with others more. Conversely, other pupils might start the term enthusiastically, but their interest wanes as the demands of school increase. Similarly, as curriculum content becomes more challenging, pupils may react in different ways. Those who thrive on intellectual stimulation may find the tougher material more engaging, while others may feel overwhelmed and disengaged.

This interplay of peer and teacher relationships, personal adjustment periods, and curriculum challenges are likely to mean that some pupils will become more engaged in school as the academic year progresses, while others become less engaged. Yet little is currently known about inter-term variation in pupil engagement in England. This motivates this section of the report – how do average school engagement scores change across the Autumn and Spring terms? Note that, when conducting this analysis, the sample is restricted to pupils with data available from both November 2025 and March 2025 (figures may therefore differ in places to those reported in earlier sections, due to differences in analytic sample selections). The analysis is also based on only those questions where the wording did not change between the two time-points.

Table 12.1 begins by presenting average scores for the subset of pupils with data available in November 2024 and March 2025. (This difference in analytic sample may lead to some differences between the figures presented below and those presented in previous sections). This pools together data from both primary and secondary pupils. Across almost all areas with comparable data, average scores have fallen over this four-month period. For instance, the average agency score fell by around 0.4 points, with a 0.35-point decline in self-reported effort and in diversity and inclusion. Smaller falls were reported in terms of pupil views of behaviour (0.15-point decline) and headline engagement (0.2-point decline). Nevertheless, on average, pupils in England become less engaged in school as the academic year progresses (though this differs substantially according to school year group, as will be discussed below).

Table 12.1. Average school engagement scores in November 2024 and March 2025.

	November 2024	March 2025	Change
Agency	7.92	7.53	-0.39
Effort	7.19	6.83	-0.36
Diversity & Inclusion	6.09	5.74	-0.35
Peer relationships	6.70	6.39	-0.32
Value of education	7.44	7.12	-0.31
Pupil-Teacher relations	7.02	6.74	-0.28
Headline engagement	6.56	6.36	-0.20
Behaviour	5.67	5.52	-0.15

Notes: Figures refer to average scores using TEP's 0-10 reporting scale.

Table 12.2 replicates this analysis but now focusing on the percentage of pupils reporting a score of 5 or below along TEP's 0-10 reporting scale. There is a clear increase in all areas in the percentage of pupils one might consider to not be fully engaged. For instance, in November 2024 just 9% of pupils reported an average agency score of five or below. However, by March 2025, this has risen to 14%. A similar increase is observed in other areas such as the percentage point increase in pupils' reporting relatively low levels of effort (20% to 25%), value placed on education (16% to 20%) and in the quality of their peer relationships (24% to 29%). This reiterates that – on average across all pupils – levels of engagement fell between the Autumn and Spring terms.

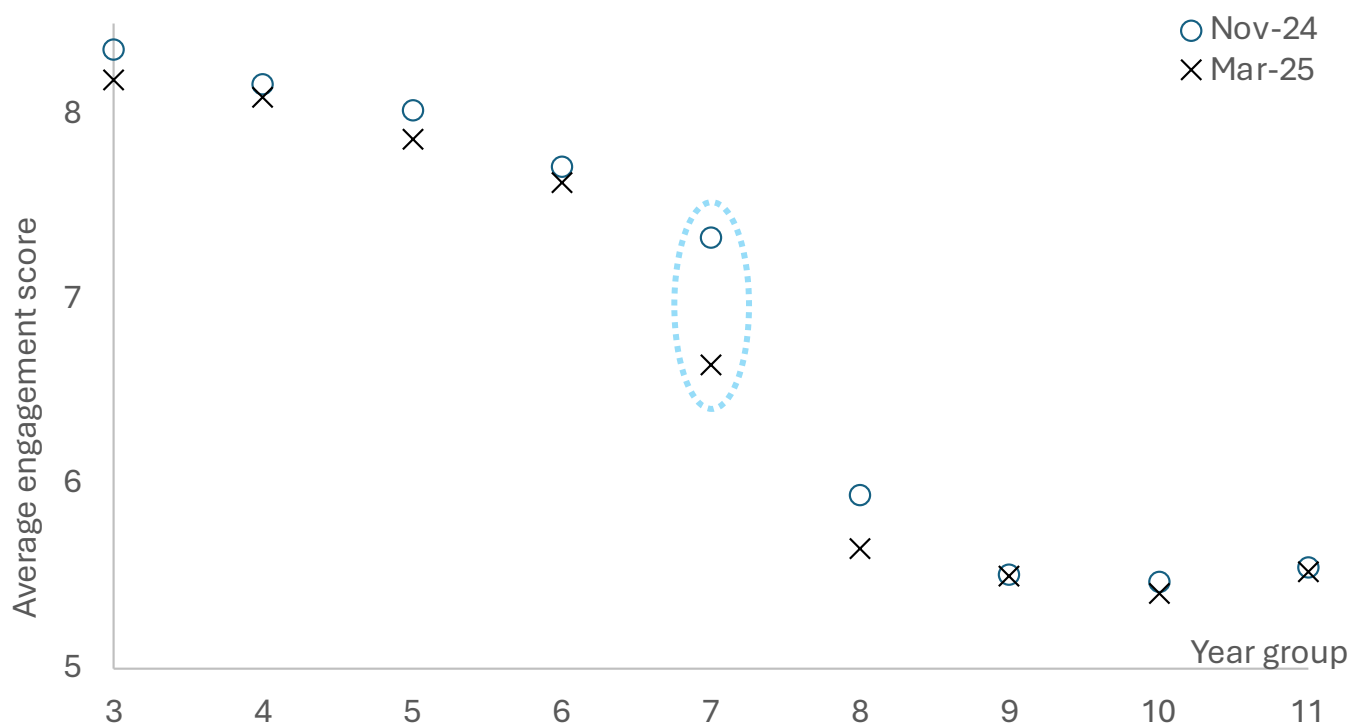
Table 12.2. The percent of pupils reporting a low engagement score (five or below) in November 2024 and March 2025.

	November 2024	March 2025	Change
Diversity & Inclusion	38%	44%	5%
Peer relationships	24%	29%	5%
Agency	9%	14%	5%
Effort	20%	25%	5%
Value of education	16%	20%	4%
Pupil-Teacher relations	23%	27%	4%
Behaviour	39%	42%	3%
Headline engagement	28%	31%	3%

Notes: Figures refer to the percent of pupils reporting a score of 5 or below.

Critically, there are substantial differences in the magnitude of these falls by school year group. This is illustrated initially in Figure 12.1, which plots for each year group the average headline engagement score in November 2024 (circles) and March 2025 (crosses). Interestingly, for almost every school year group, these points sit very close to one another. The main exception – as highlighted in the blue oval – is Year 7s. The headline engagement scores of this group fell substantially (from 7.7 to 6.3 out of 10), accompanied by a comparatively small fall amongst Year 8s (from 5.9 to 5.7). This demonstrates how the fall in average headline engagement scores between the Autumn and Spring terms is almost entirely due to the decline that occurs amongst Year 7 pupils.

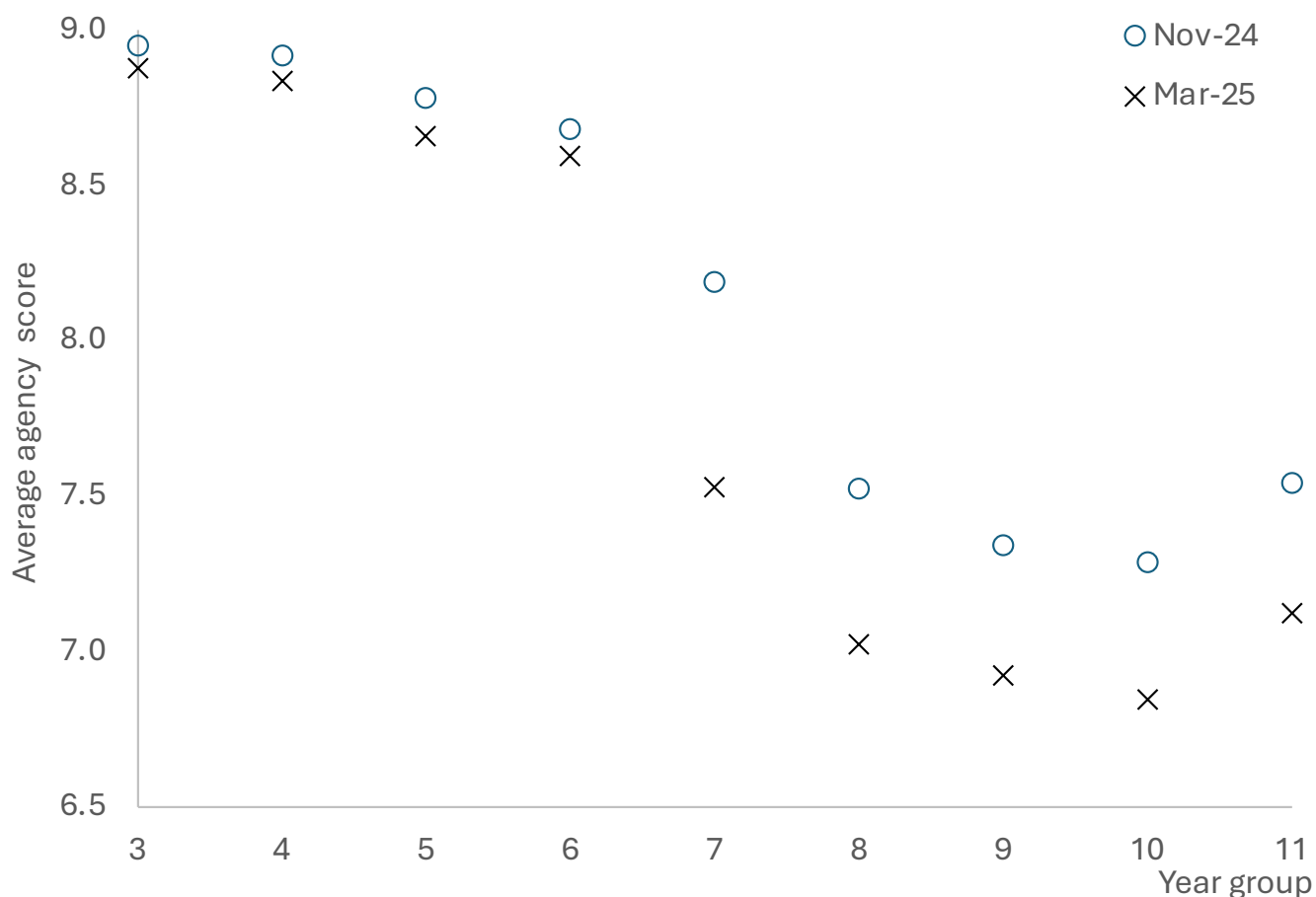
Figure 12.1. Average headline engagement scores in November 2024 and March 2025 by school year group.



Notes: Figures refer to average headline engagement scores. Circles capture responses in November 2024 and crosses March 2025.

The equivalent graph with respect to pupils' sense of school agency is presented in Figure 12.2. Interestingly, a subtly different pattern emerges. Amongst primary pupils, there is very little change in average scores (despite the high level of inter-term variability at the pupil level reported under Research Question 1 above). There is then the large decline between Autumn and Spring amongst Year 7s, as discussed above in the context of headline engagement scores. However, we also observe declines in average agency scores amongst pupils in older school year groups as well. For instance, the decline in agency scores amongst Year 7s (from 8.2 to 7.5 out of 10) is only marginally greater than the fall amongst – for instance – Year 9s (from 7.3 to 6.9) and Year 10s (from 7.3 to 6.8). Consequently, for at least some measures, there is a decline in engagement across secondary school year groups (and not just year 7s alone).

Figure 12.2. Average agency scores in November 2024 and March 2025 by school year group.



Notes: Figures refer to average agency scores in November 2024 (circles) and March 2025 (crosses) by school year group.

To conclude, Table 12.3 illustrates how average headline engagement scores have declined across demographic groups between the Autumn and Spring terms. In both primary and secondary, average headline engagement scores have fallen by more amongst EAL pupils. Similarly, the decline in engagement is most pronounced amongst those that are eligible for Free School Meals. Differences in the magnitude of the falls are less clear according to gender and whether the pupil has special educational needs. In the primary school sample, declines are largest amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils, with virtually no change amongst White British pupils. Black and Bangladeshi secondary pupils saw the greatest declines in their headline engagement scores across the two terms.

Table 12.3. Change in average headline school engagement scores across demographic groups. November 2024 to March 2025.

		Primary			Secondary		
		Nov-24	Mar-25	Change	Nov-24	Mar-25	Change
EAL	EAL	8.05	7.86	-0.18	6.03	5.68	-0.36
	Not EAL	8.06	7.98	-0.08	6.00	5.80	-0.20
Ethnic group	Asian	8.18	8.03	-0.15	6.21	6.01	-0.20
	Bangladeshi	7.95	7.62	-0.33	5.76	5.33	-0.43
	Black	7.74	7.55	-0.18	5.80	5.32	-0.48
	Indian	8.36	8.44	0.08	6.77	6.42	-0.35
	Mixed	7.88	7.71	-0.18	6.06	5.84	-0.22
	Other	7.84	7.70	-0.14	5.95	5.64	-0.30
	Pakistani	7.95	7.60	-0.34	5.47	5.13	-0.34
	White British	8.20	8.18	-0.01	6.03	5.83	-0.20
	White Other	8.09	7.88	-0.21	6.17	5.87	-0.30
FSM	FSM	7.92	7.74	-0.17	5.54	5.24	-0.30
	Not FSM	8.17	8.09	-0.07	6.20	5.99	-0.21
Gender	Female	8.22	8.14	-0.08	5.80	5.55	-0.25
	Male	7.94	7.81	-0.13	6.24	6.02	-0.22
SEN	Education, health and care plan	7.93	7.82	-0.11	6.01	5.76	-0.25
	No special educational need	8.10	8.00	-0.09	6.07	5.85	-0.23
	SEN support	7.90	7.71	-0.19	5.67	5.38	-0.29

13. Do pupils report higher levels of engagement in schools where staff are more engaged in their jobs?

Summary

- In schools where teachers are more engaged in their work, their pupils are more engaged in their studies. The correlation coefficient sits around 0.6, indicating a reasonably strong association.
- Part of this association is due to the differences in school engagement that occurs across the primary and secondary sectors.
- After controlling for a set of pupil and school characteristics, the association between staff and pupil levels of engagement is reduced. There does however continue to be a moderate positive relationship, with the correlation standing around 0.4.

There are several reasons to suspect pupil and staff engagement within schools to be linked. For instance, a positive school environment, characterised by good pupil behaviour and strong leadership, may foster mutual respect between pupils and staff. This may make it easier for teachers to feel more passionate and committed to their jobs. Moreover, when the leadership supports staff and maintains a well-structured environment, it may create a foundation where both school employees and pupils can thrive. This supportive atmosphere is likely to encourage teachers to invest more in their teaching, which may then positively impact pupil engagement.

There could also be a direct influence of teacher engagement on pupil engagement. Enthusiastic and dedicated teachers can inspire and motivate pupils, making learning more enjoyable. When teachers are more engaged in their work, pupils may be more likely to reciprocate with increased attention and effort. This can then translate into a more vibrant classroom experience, where pupils feel valued and actively participate.

On the other hand, pupil engagement may also directly influence teacher engagement. When pupils are engaged and responsive, it can boost teachers' morale and job satisfaction, creating a virtuous cycle where both groups support each other to succeed in their role. Engaged pupils are likely to contribute to a lively and productive classroom environment, which can make teaching more rewarding and enjoyable for teachers. This helps sustain high levels of engagement on both sides, enhancing the overall educational experience.

Our fifth research question investigates whether there is indeed this hypothesised correlation between pupil and staff engagement (noting that this will reflect an association and may not capture cause and effect). We focus on two particular areas where pupils and teachers responded to very similar survey questions: *"headline engagement"* with the school and the extent that they look forward to going to school/work. The questions pupils and staff were asked are provided in Table 13.1. The analysis is based on data from 85 schools where both pupil and teacher responses are available. All analyses are conducted at the school level, as it is not possible to link the responses of teachers to individual pupils.

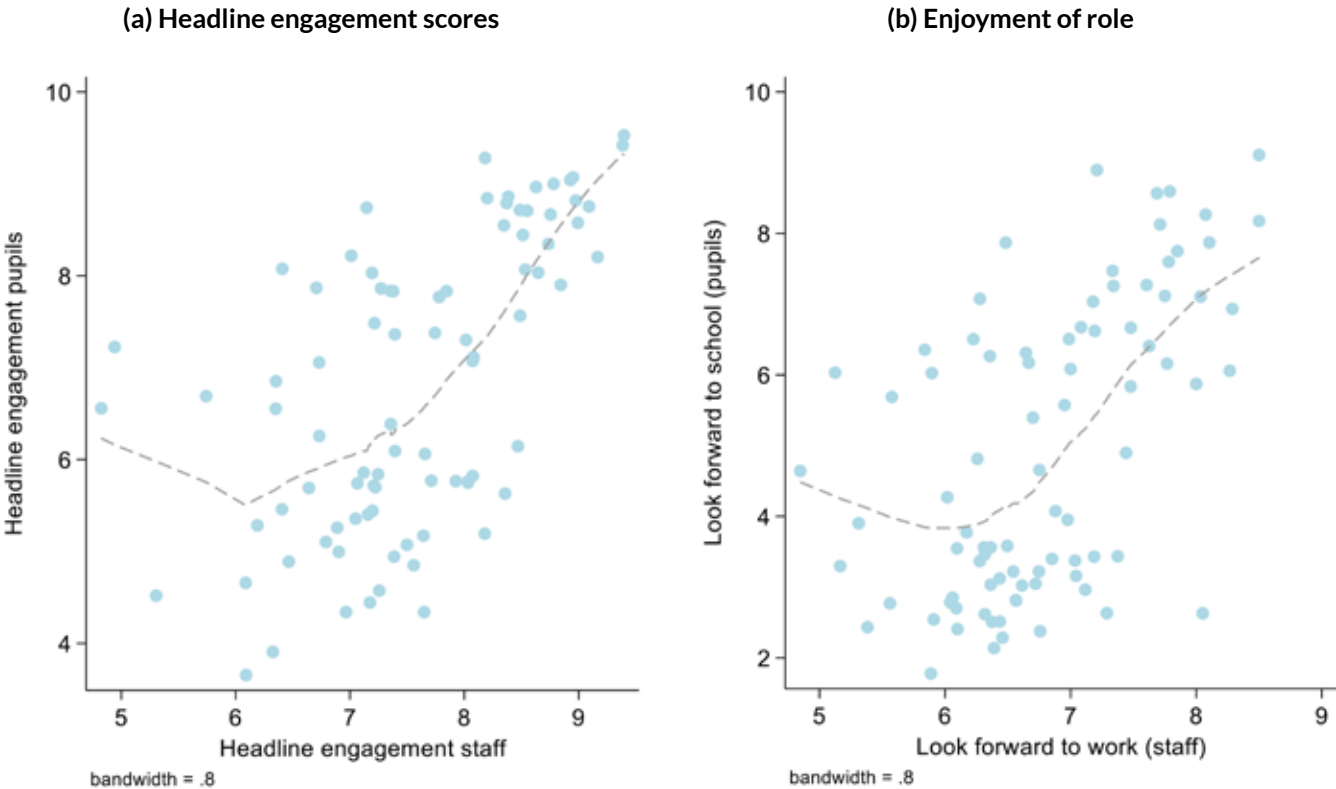
Table 13.1. Questions capturing headline engagement and whether pupils/staff look forward to going to school.

	Staff	Pupils
Headline engagement	If you had local friends looking for a school for their children, how likely is it you would recommend this school to them?	Would you tell your friends to come to this school.
	If you were offered the same job at another school, how likely is it that you would stay at this school?	Would you choose this school again?
	Overall, how satisfied are you working at this school?	How happy are you with this school?
Look forward to school	When I get up in the morning, I usually feel happy about going into work to teach.	I feel happy to go to school in the morning.
	On a Sunday evening, I look forward to teaching my classes on the Monday morning.	I look forward to going to school on Monday.

Figure 13.1 begins by presenting school-level scatterplots of pupils and teacher’s average responses. The Locally Weighted Scatterplot Smoothing (LOWESS) dashed grey line illustrates the association, including capturing potential non-linearities.

For both headline engagement (panel a) and enjoyment (panel b) there is a clear, positive association. In schools where teachers are more engaged in their work, their pupils are more engaged in their studies. The correlation sits around 0.6, indicating a reasonably strong association. Similar results have been obtained when the analysis has been conducted using the November 2024 data, and when conducting the analysis separately for primary and secondary schools. It can be hence said that, in schools where staff show higher levels of engagement, pupils have higher levels of engagement as well. (Though this correlation may not be capturing cause and effect).

Figure 13.1. Correlation between staff and pupil engagement scores at the school level.



Notes: Sample restricted to 85 schools with both pupil and staff reports available. Correlations are 0.59 and 0.56. Dashed grey line illustrates the lowest line of best fit. Each dot refers to one of the schools in the sample. Estimates based on data from the wave 2 (March 2025) data collection.

We further probe this link between teacher and pupil engagement by estimating a series of regression models. These control for a set of school-level factors that may explain some of the relationship. All models are estimated at the school level, comparing school-average staff engagement levels to school-average pupil engagement levels. The first model (M0) does not include any controls, while model M1 simply controls for primary/secondary phase. Model M2 then additionally controls for demographic characteristics of the school intake, with M3 also controlling for historic levels of school absence and suspensions. The final model additionally controls for Attainment 8 scores among secondary schools in the sample.

Results from these regression models are presented in Table 13.2. Figures refer to the change in school-average pupil engagement scores per each point increase in school-average staff engagement scores.

Table 13.2. Change in pupil engagement at school associated with change in staff engagement in their jobs.

Model	Change in pupil engagement per each point increase in staff engagement	Standard error	Change in whether pupils look forward to school per each point increase in staff	Standard error
M0	0.94*	0.14	1.41*	0.23
M1	0.57*	0.08	0.69*	0.13
M2	0.56*	0.09	0.71*	0.14
M3	0.50*	0.10	0.71*	0.14
M4	0.51*	0.09	0.71*	0.14

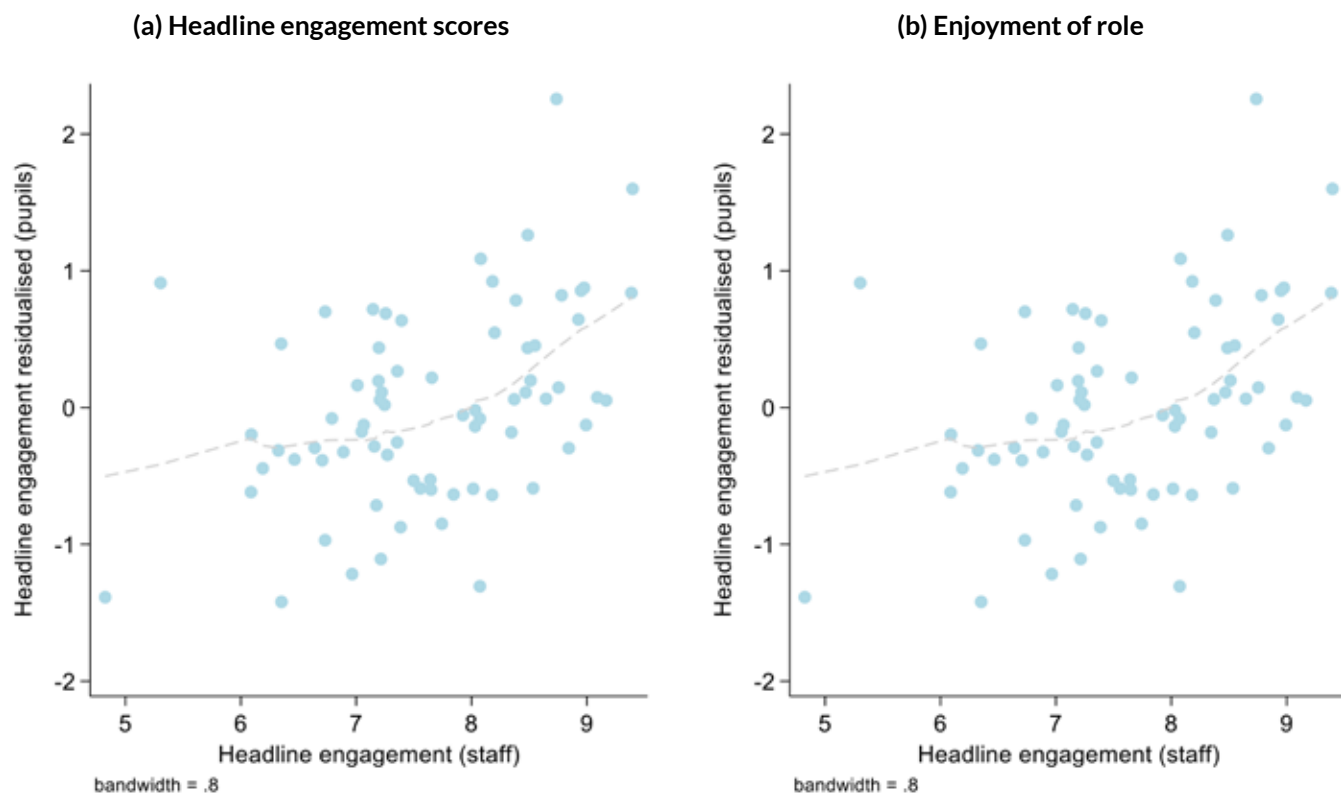
Notes: Model M0 includes no controls. M1 controls for school phase (primary/secondary). M2 adds controls for demographics of school intakes. M3 adds controls for historic levels of school absence and suspensions. M4 adds controls for Attainment 8 quartiles (for secondary schools). * indicates statistical significance at the 5% level.

Results from model M0 confirm the strong bivariate association observed in Figure 13.1. Each point increase in school-average staff engagement scores is associated with a 0.94-point increase in school-average pupil engagement scores. A non-trivial part of this association is due to differences in school engagement across the primary and secondary sectors. For instance, between model M0 and M1, the association between staff and pupil headline engagement falls from 0.94 to 0.57. A similar result occurs with respect to pupils' and staffs' feelings of enjoyment, with the association falling from 1.41 to 0.69 points once primary/secondary sector has been controlled. The relationship between staff and pupil views nevertheless continues to be statistically significant and relatively strong. It is noteworthy that the inclusion of additional controls in models M2, M3 and M4 (for demographic characteristics of school intakes, historic levels of school absence/suspensions and Attainment 8 scores of secondary schools) does little to change this result.

Figure 13.2 provides a visual representation of the relationship between school-average levels of staff and pupil engagement once these factors have been controlled. These plots can be interpreted in a similar way to those presented in Figure 13.1, but with school-average pupil engagement scores on the vertical axis adjusted for school phase, school percent FSM, percentage of White pupils and suspension rate in the 2022/23 academic year. The left-hand panel again presents results for headline engagement scores, with the right-hand panel capturing results for whether the pupil/staff member looks forward to going to school.

One can see that, although the grey lowess lines are slightly shallower than before, there continues to be a positive relationship of reasonably strong magnitude. Likewise, while the correlation coefficients are reduced, they continue to stand around 0.4 – a moderately strong relationship. Thus, while causation still cannot be inferred, Figure 13.2 continues to show that schools with more engaged members of staff tend to have more engaged pupils.

Figure 13.2. Residual correlation between staff and pupil engagement after controlling for differences in school characteristics.



Notes: Correlation is 0.43 in the left axis and 0.42 in the right axis. Based on models controlling for school phase, school percent FSM, percentage of White pupils and suspension rate in 2022/23 academic year.

14. Is there a link between pupils' engagement and their school attendance?

Summary

- There is a strong link between headline engagement scores and attendance amongst secondary pupils.
- Secondary pupils in the top 25% of headline engagement scores in November 2024 are 10 percentage points less to be persistently absent from school than pupils in the bottom 25% of headline engagement scores.
- The link between engagement and attendance amongst primary pupils is weaker.
- Primary pupils with the lowest engagement scores are three percentage points less likely to be persistently absent from school than their peers with moderate to high levels of engagement.
- Amongst secondary pupils, higher engagement scores are also associated with a lower risk of being late for school, over and above their link to attendance.
- Differences between persistently absent and non-persistently absent pupils are greatest for headline engagement scores and levels of self-reported effort. Differences are smaller with respect to pupils' sense of agency, peer relations and views on behaviour.

The TEP model of engagement divides pupil engagement into three components. The first is cognitive engagement – what pupils think about education and their school. This includes, for instance, their sense of agency, value they place on education and what they think about aspects of the school environment (e.g. behaviour). The second is emotional engagement – what pupils feel about their time at school. This includes their inter-personal relationships (e.g. with other pupils and teachers) and how much they enjoy being in school.

The TEP model hypothesises that pupils' cognitive and emotional engagement then influences pupils' behavioural engagement. This captures the actions pupils take in school that either support or undermine their academic progression and development. Three questions within TEP measure pupils' behavioural engagement in terms of self-reported effort. However, behavioural engagement can also be captured by objective measures, such as absence from school and punctuality.

This section therefore investigates whether pupils with higher levels of engagement have lower levels of school absence and are more likely to arrive at school on time.

Information on pupils' attendance was drawn directly from school's management information systems. At the time of writing, this was only available for the academic year to date up until the end of the second data collection wave. The attendance measures hence cover the sessions pupils missed between September 2024 and March 2025. Our focus is on how school absences over this seven-month period is related to measures of pupil engagement that were gathered in November 2024.

Table 14.1 begins by presenting average engagement scores for pupils defined as persistently absent (attendance rate below 90% between September 2024 and March 2025). Results are presented separately for primary and secondary pupils.

Table 14.1. Average engagement scores by whether the pupil was classed as persistently absent from school.

	Primary		Secondary	
	Not persistently absent	Persistently absent	Not persistently absent	Persistently absent
Headline engagement	8.1	7.8	6.1	4.9
Value of education	8.9	8.7	7.2	6.3
Academic drive	9.0	8.9	8.3	7.5
Views of behaviour	7.0	6.9	5.1	4.6
Agency	8.8	8.7	7.6	6.9
Teacher relations	8.8	8.6	6.4	5.5
Peer relations	8.2	8.0	6.8	6.2
Diversity & inclusion	8.4	8.2	6.1	5.2
Enjoyment	6.9	6.6	4.4	3.3
Self-reported effort	8.2	7.8	7.1	5.5

Notes: Persistently absent has been defined as pupils with an attendance rate below 90%.

In primary schools, differences in average engagement scores across most areas are modest. While headline engagement scores are lower amongst the persistently absent group (7.8 versus 8.1), the magnitude of this difference (0.3 points along TEP's 0-10 reporting scale) is reasonably small. In some other areas – such as academic drive, views of behaviour and sense of agency – there is virtually no difference across the two absence groups. In terms of individual drivers, the largest difference by persistent absence is pupils' enjoyment of school (6.9 versus 6.6) and pupils' level of self-reported effort (8.2 versus 7.8). However, overall, the link between pupil engagement and attendance in primary schools is relatively weak.

A different pattern emerges for secondary schools, where differences in engagement scores by whether the pupil is classed as persistently absent are larger. For instance, pupils with an attendance rate below 90% report headline engagement scores of 4.9 out of 10, compared to an average of 6.1 for their peers with an attendance rate of 90% and above. An even bigger difference can be observed with respect to self-reported effort, with average scores of 5.5 compared to 7.1 out of 10. In terms of individual drivers, the largest differences are found in terms of school enjoyment (3.3 versus 4.4 out of 10) and pupil-teacher relations (5.5 versus 6.4 out of 10). Smaller differences are observed for peer relations (6.2 versus 6.8) and views of behaviour (4.6 versus 5.1).

We build on the above by estimating a set of linear probability regression models. The outcome is whether the pupil was persistently absent from school (coded 1) or not (coded 0). The key covariate of interest is quartiles of pupils' headline engagement scores, with the bottom quartile acting as the reference group. Results from these models thus capture the percentage point difference in the chance of a pupil being persistently absent by their quartile of headline engagement scores (with the least engaged acting as the reference group).

Three versions of these models are estimated. The first (M0) does not include any controls. The second (M1) controls for school form fixed effects – meaning we are now essentially comparing pupils attending the same school and are in the same school form. The final model also controls for demographic background characteristics (gender, FSM, English as an Additional Language, Special Educational Needs, ethnic group, year group), meaning we are now comparing pupils in the same school, within the same form and with similar demographic characteristics. These results are presented in Table 14.2 below.

Table 14.2. The link between school engagement quartile in November 2024 and the probability of being persistently absent across September 2024 to March 2025.

(a) Primary				(b) Secondary			
	Second quartile	Third quartile	Fourth quartile		Second quartile	Third quartile	Fourth quartile
M0	-3.7%	-5.0%	-4.8%	M0	-8.3%	-12.3%	-13.9%
M1	-3.6%	-4.9%	-4.4%	M1	-7.4%	-10.5%	-11.9%
M2	-2.7%	-3.5%	-2.9%	M2	-6.1%	-8.6%	-10.0%

Notes: Figures refer to difference in the probability of being classed as persistently absent compared to pupils in the bottom quartile of headline engagement scores in November 2024. M0 includes no controls. M1 controls for school form fixed effects. M2 adds controls for demographic characteristics. All estimates are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Starting with the results for primary schools, results from each specification indicate that pupils in the second, third and top headline engagement quartile are less likely to be persistently absent from school than pupils in the bottom quartile. Focusing on the results from model M2 (most extensive set of controls), the difference is modest, standard at around three percentage points. Moreover, it is clear that – in primary schools – the key difference is between the least engaged pupils (bottom engagement quartile) and the other groups. Hence while there is some association between headline engagement scores and persistent absence in primary schools, this is mainly being driven by the least engaged pupils.

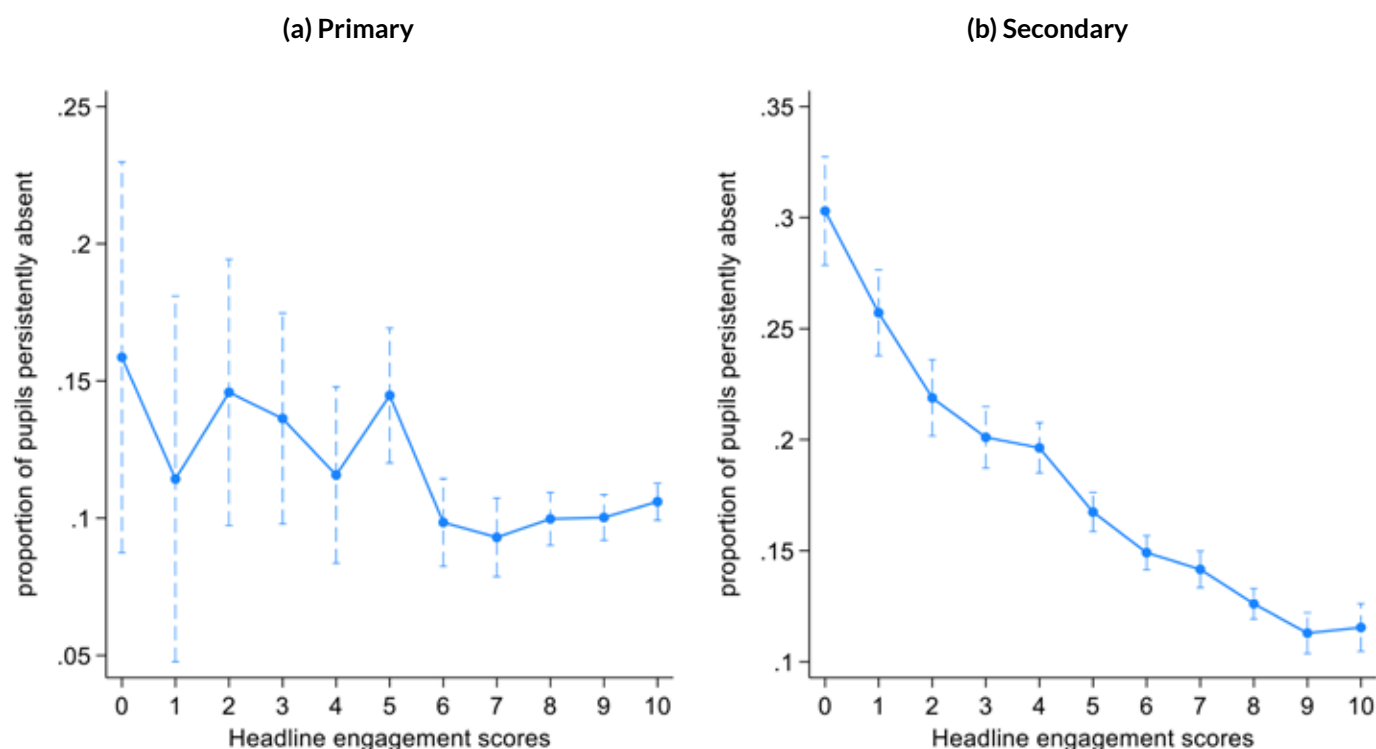
Again, in secondary schools, the link between engagement and absence is more clear-cut. From model M2, one can see that the most engaged pupils are around 10 percentage points less likely to be persistently engaged than the least engaged pupils. Put another way, disengaged secondary pupils are around twice as likely to be persistently absent than the most engaged pupils, amongst those attending the same school, in the same form group and with similar demographic characteristics. Sizeable differences can also be observed between pupils in the third (8.6 percentage points less likely to be persistently absent) and second (6.1 percentage points less likely to be persistently absent) quartiles relative to the least engaged quartiles. While this evidence is correlational – and does not establish cause and effect – it nevertheless highlights how school engagement and attendance amongst secondary school pupils are closely linked.

In Figure 14.1 we provide a visual representation of results from a model similar to specification M2 (demographics and school-form fixed effects controlled). The left-hand panel provides estimates for primary pupils and the right-hand panel those for secondary pupils.

The results for primary pupils reiterate how the association between engagement and attendance is relatively weak. Broadly speaking, there appears to be two groups. Pupils with headline engagement scores of five and below tend to have levels of persistent absence around three percentage points higher than those with scores of six and above. There are, however, relatively few primary pupils in the bottom half of the headline engagement distribution (hence the large confidence intervals surrounding the estimates). Figure 14.1 panel (a) nevertheless shows how – amongst primary pupils – any link between engagement and persistent absence is being driven by those with particularly low levels of engagement.

The equivalent results for secondary pupils are presented in Figure 14.1 panel (b), where the relationship is clearly much stronger. Among secondary pupils with the lowest headline scores, 30% are modelled to be persistently absent from school. This then declines sharply, to around a 20% persistent absence rate among those with headline engagement scores around 3 or 4. There is then a steady, shallower decline as one moves up to higher levels of engagement. For instance, once headline engagement scores reach nine out of ten, the modelled proportion of persistently absent secondary pupils reaches just over 10%.

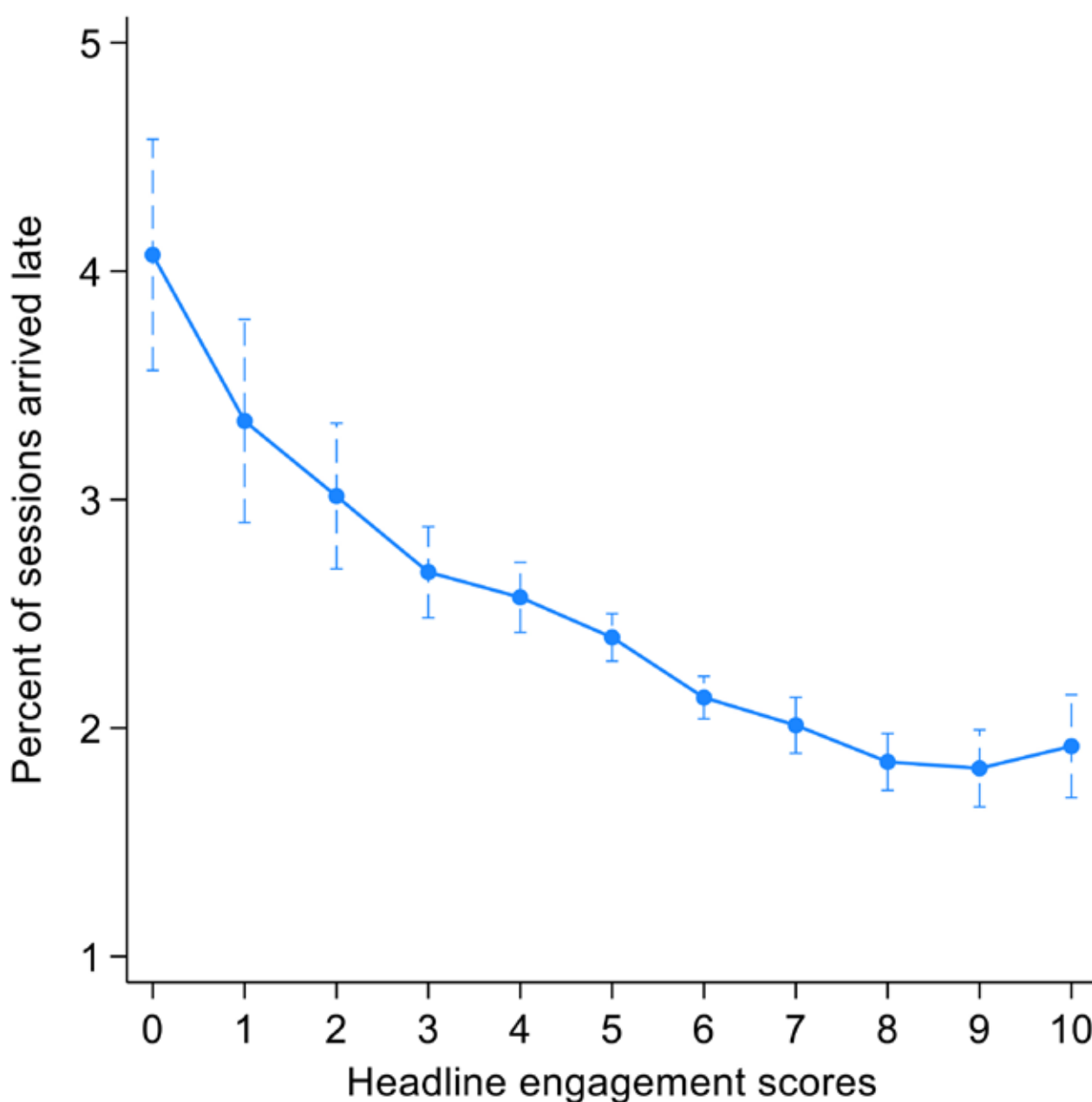
Figure 14.1. The association between headline engagement scores (November 24) and persistent absence rates (September 24 – March 25).



Notes: Estimates are predicted margins from a model including school form fixed effects and demographic characteristics as controls. Headline engagement scores rounded to nearest whole number and entered as a set of dummy variables. Thin blue lines running through the centre of the bars reflect the 95% confidence intervals.

A further analysis has also been conducted where we link headline engagement scores to pupils' arriving late to registration. Importantly, this is based on a model that controls for pupil absence rates and their level of unauthorised absence, in addition to school form fixed effects and demographic characteristics. One is hence now investigating whether secondary pupils attending the same school, in the same form, with similar demographic characteristics and with similar attendance profiles are more likely to arrive late if they are disengaged. The results for secondary pupils are presented in Figure 14.2.

Figure 14.2. The link between headline engagement scores and arriving late for school amongst secondary pupils.



Over and above their levels of attendance, less engaged pupils are more likely to be recorded as arriving late for school. Estimates suggest that – *ceteris paribus* – the least engaged pupils in November 2024 were recorded as late for 4% of sessions between September 2024 and March 2025. This then falls rapidly to 3% of secondary pupils with headline engagement scores of two, before falling to 2% amongst those with headline engagement scores of eight and above. (When similar estimates have been produced for primary pupils, we have failed to find a clear relationship). Nevertheless, the results based on the secondary sample illustrate how – even amongst pupils with similar levels of attendance at the same school – those with lower headline engagement scores are less likely to arrive at school on time.

One explanation for the relationship between engagement and attendance only being strong in secondary schools is that – during this phase of education – young people assume greater responsibility for their attendance and punctuality. During primary school, parents are more likely to assist their child in getting ready for school and taking them to the school gate. Consequently, even if the child is disengaged, their parents may be more active in ensuring they attend. The same may not hold in secondary education, where young people are more autonomous and hold greater responsibility for their actions.

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Appendix A.

TEP pupil survey. Representativeness of the November 2024 data.

There are two reasons that could lead the sample to not be fully representative of the broader population of pupils. The first is that participating schools are not a random sample from the population. Rather, the participating schools (and local authorities / multi-academy trusts they are in) have chosen to take part in the study. The second is that – as with any survey – some pupils will choose to not respond to the survey. This pupil non-response could reduce the representativeness of the data under two conditions: (a) when the level of non-response is higher and (b) when the participating pupils differ from non-participating pupils in terms of characteristics that are likely to be correlated with their school engagement.

Within this appendix, we investigate these two issues in turn. In doing this, this will provide useful insights into the likely representativeness of the data that has been collected.

Participating schools

While participating schools are not a random sample, it is possible to compare the characteristics of schools in the sample to those that are not, using publicly available information published by the department for education (e.g. School Performance Tables; Get Information About Schools). We present the results from such comparisons in Table A1 (primary) and A2 (below). The “In sample” columns refer to those schools that participated in TEP, while the “Not in sample” refers to all other schools in England that did not. As all the school characteristics we consider are continuous variables, we compare the mean, median and standard deviation of each measure across these two groups.

Starting with primary schools (Table A1), for most characteristics considered, the participating sample of schools appears similar to the broader population. For instance, the median percentage of pupils persistently absent is 16% amongst participating schools, compared to a figure of 15% amongst schools not in the sample. Likewise, school-average Key Stage 2 scores are very similar across the two groups (e.g. mean Key Stage 2 maths scores are 104.5 in the sample of participants compared to 104.3 amongst non-participants). The only modest exceptions are with respect to the percentage of pupils that speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) and the percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). For both of these characteristics, the percentage within participating primary schools is slightly higher than in non-participating primary schools (e.g. the median primary school in the sample has 21% of EAL pupils, compared to 9% of primary schools not in the sample). Nevertheless, on the whole, the sample of participating schools appears to be broadly representative of the population of England’s primary schools (at least in terms of these key observable school-level characteristics).

Table A1. Characteristics of schools in the sample in comparison to schools not in the sample. Primary schools.

	Mean		Median		Standard deviation	
	In sample	Not in sample	In sample	Not in sample	In sample	Not in sample
Percent of pupils in the school that speak English as an Additional Language.	26	18	21	9	22	21
Percent of pupils in the school ever eligible for Free School Meals.	34	24	33	21	18	16
Percentage of pupils in school with an education, health and care plan/ SEN statement (23/24).	3	4	3	3	2	10
Percent of pupils in school with SEN support (23/24).	15	14	14	13	5	6
School average KS2 reading scores (23/24).	105.0	105.4	105.0	105.0	2.2	2.7
School average KS2 mathematics scores (23/24).	104.5	104.3	105.0	104.0	2.3	3.0
School average KS2 Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling scores (23/24).	104.7	105.2	104.0	105.0	2.8	3.3
School average of the % of pupils absent (23/24).	4.9	4.6	4.7	4.3	1.6	1.7
School average of the % of pupils persistently absent (23/24).	16	16	16	15	3	5

Table A2 presents analogous evidence for the TEP secondary school sample. A similar pattern emerges. Indeed, if anything, the sample of participating secondary schools appears even more similar to non-participating schools in terms of the observable characteristics considered. For instance, the median percentage of pupils eligible for FSM and that speak EAL are identical across the two groups. Likewise, key absence statistics are very similar across participating and non-participating schools (e.g. the persistent absence rate was 22% in secondary schools in the sample compared to 21% of those not in the sample). Median Attainment 8 scores are also comparable. Overall, as with primary schools, the sample of participating schools appears to be broadly representative of the population of England's primary schools (at least in terms of these key observable school-level characteristics).

Table A2. Characteristics of schools in the sample in comparison to schools not in the sample. Secondary results.

	Mean		Median		Standard deviation	
	In sample	Not in sample	In sample	Not in sample	In sample	Not in sample
Percent of pupils in the school that speak English as an Additional Language.	16	17	11	10	15	18
Percent of pupils in the school ever eligible for Free School Meals.	32	32	30	29	15	17
Percentage of pupils in school with an education, health and care plan/ SEN statement (23/24).	4	23	3	3	8	39
Percent of pupils in school with SEN support (23/24).	15	11	15	11	6	8
Attainment 8 score (23/24).	44.4	42.5	44.0	44.8	7.5	16.2
School average of the % of pupils absent (23/24).	7.7	7.8	7.2	6.5	3.0	4.7
School average of the % of pupils persistently absent (23/24).	22	22	22	21	4	5
School average of the % of pupils absent (23/24).	4.9	4.6	4.7	4.3	1.6	1.7
School average of the % of pupils persistently absent (23/24).	16	16	16	15	3	5

Pupil non-response and representativeness

The previous sub-section has illustrated how – despite not being a random sample – the schools that participated in TEP are similar to the broader population of schools in terms of important observable characteristics. Bias could however still emerge in the sample if pupil response rates are low and “selective” (e.g. pupils with lower levels of school engagement being less likely to respond).

Figure A1 presents the first piece of evidence on this matter by displaying the distribution of the pupil response rate across schools. The overall response rate across all 200 schools is 74% - a good level of response. However, as Figure A1 illustrates, there is a strong negative skew to the distribution of pupil response – i.e. a relatively small number of schools had very low levels of pupil response which deflates the overall response rate figure. In other words, high levels of non-response (and unrepresentative samples) is likely to be a significant problem in only a limited number of participating schools. For instance, in 10% of schools, only half the pupils in the school (or fewer) responded. However, 50% of schools achieved pupil response rates over 90%, while three-quarters of schools managed to get over 72% of their pupils to respond. Hence any issues surrounding high levels of pupil non-response are likely to be clustered in a small number of schools (which can be removed from the sample, when needed, to investigate the robustness of results).

Figure A1. Pupil response rate across schools

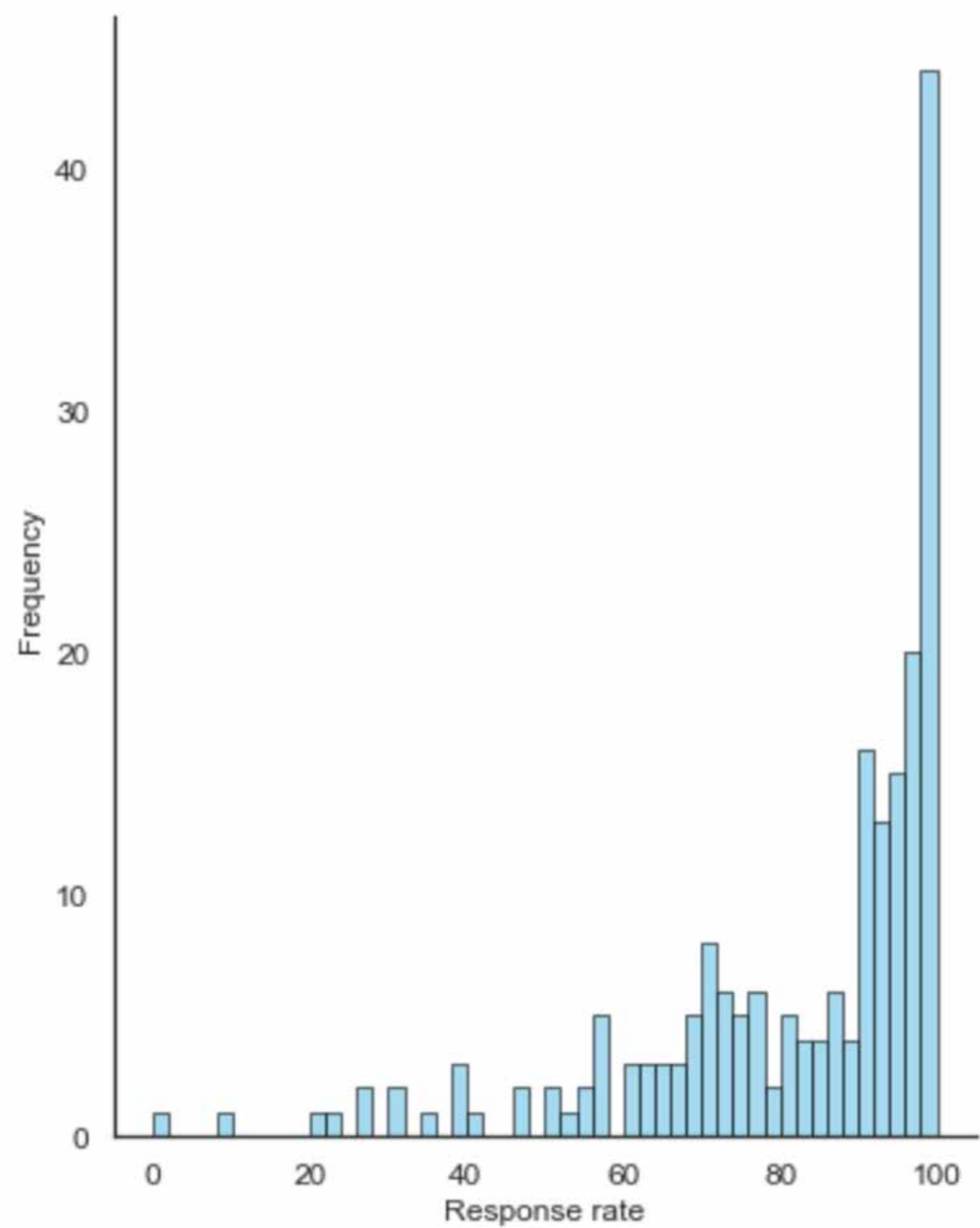


Table A3 considers the issue of pupil non-response in further detail, investigating how this differs across different demographic groups. These results are presented when including all participating schools in the analysis, and when focusing on the sub-sample where the pupil response rate was above 75% (153 out of the 200 schools). There are some modest differences across ethnic groups, with Pakistani pupils being the most likely to respond (86%), with Mixed (71%), Black (74%) and White British (74%) pupils the lowest. There is little difference by gender, while those by FSM eligibility being relatively small (76% versus 70%). Bigger differences can be observed across pupils with and without special educational needs. Across all participating schools, 59% of pupils with an EHCP responded to the survey, compared to 68% of those in receipt of other forms of SEN support and 75% of those without a special educational need. The final panel also illustrates how these are sizeable differences in response rates by school phase; over 90% of primary pupils responded to the survey compared to around 70% of secondary pupils. Moreover, while overall response rates decline only gradually between Year 7 (77%) and Year 10 (68%), they are markedly lower amongst Year 11s (59%). Together, Table A3 suggests that there is some selectivity of response by observable pupil characteristics, though differences are typically small to moderate in size.

Table A3. Pupil response rate across schools.

		All schools	School >75% response rate
English Language	Additional Language	79%	92%
	First language	73%	88%
Ethnicity	Pakistani	86%	91%
	Indian	84%	92%
	Bangladeshi	81%	94%
	Chinese	81%	92%
	Asian	80%	92%
	White Other	75%	91%
	White British	74%	88%
	Black	74%	92%
	Mixed	72%	89%
Disadvantage	Not FSM	76%	90%
	FSM	70%	86%
Gender	Female	74%	89%
	Male	73%	89%
Special educational needs	No SEN	75%	90%
	SEN - Monitoring	69%	86%
	SEN support	68%	83%
	SEN - EHCP	59%	74%
Year group (PRIMARY)	3	92%	0%
	4	92%	0%
	5	92%	0%
	6	91%	0%
Year group (SECONDARY)	7	77%	0%
	8	76%	0%
	9	74%	0%
	10	68%	0%
	11	59%	0%
Year group (POST-16)	12	64%	0%
	13	57%	0%

We consider the implications of this potentially selective non-response in Table A4. This compares the characteristics of the “*full sample*” (all pupils in all participating schools) to the characteristics of “*participating*” pupils (those that completed the survey). In other words, does the level and selectivity of pupil non-response discussed above lead to sample to become unrepresentative in terms of the characteristics considered? For completeness, national figures (based on the characteristics of pupils within all state schools in England) are also included for reference. This provides insight into the comparability of the TEP sample of pupils to the national state school population.

Table A4. The characteristics of pupils in the sample compared to national figures.

		Primary			Secondary		
		Participating	Full sample	National	Participating	Full sample	National
Ethnicity	Asian	16%	15%	13%	10%	8%	13%
	Black	10%	10%	6%	4%	4%	7%
	Mixed	8%	8%	7%	5%	5%	7%
	White	56%	56%	69%	73%	72%	69%
	Other / unclassified	10%	10%	4%	9%	10%	4%
FSM6	Yes	35%	35%	25%	28%	30%	29%
	No	65%	65%	75%	72%	70%	71%
SEN	EHCP	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%
	SEN support	17%	17%	14%	14%	16%	13%
	None	80%	79%	83%	83%	80%	84%
EAL	Yes	32%	31%	23%	18%	18%	19%
	No	68%	69%	77%	82%	82%	81%
Gender	Female	50%	49%	49%	49%	49%	50%
	Male	50%	51%	51%	51%	51%	50%

Overall, the comparisons made in Table A4 are reassuring. In both the primary and secondary sectors, the distribution of observable characteristics across participants and the full sample are very similar. This suggests that pupil non-response has not led to the sample being unrepresentative within participating schools, at least in terms of these key observable characteristics. Moreover, the figures for participating pupils appear broadly similar to national figures, particularly within secondary schools (where the only modest difference is a slight underrepresentation of Black pupils). In primary schools, the TEP sample has slightly higher levels of disadvantage (35% FSM eligible compared to 25% nationally), more likely to speak EAL (32% versus 23%) and more likely to be Asian (16% versus 13%) or Black (10% versus 6%) than in the national figures.

Appendix B.

Response rates across waves

Table B1 begins by focusing on schools that either joined or left the sample between the first and second survey waves. In total, 18 schools joined the March 2025 survey that did not participate in November 2024. There were 4,826 pupils in these schools. In total, 77% of these pupils responded to the survey. There were a further 16 schools that participated in November 2024 that did not participate in the March 2025 wave. There were, in total, 9,410 pupils in these schools. In November 2024, the pupil response rate in these schools stood at 77%.

Table B1. Participation rates amongst schools that either left or joined the sample between waves 1 and 2.

	Wave 1	Wave 2	N
Joining schools	-	Pupil in school and participated	3,696 (77%)
	-	Pupil in school, did not participate	1,130 (23%)
Leaving schools	Pupil in school and participated	-	7,228 (77%)
	Pupil in school, did not participate	-	2,182 (23%)

Next, we focus on the 184 schools that took part in both the wave 1 and wave 2 data collections. This divides pupils into the following three broad groups, and whether they “*participated*” (i.e. completed the survey) in each of the two waves:

- **Remainers.** Pupils that were enrolled in the school in both survey waves.
- **Joiners.** Pupils not enrolled in the school at wave 1 (November 2024) but were enrolled by wave 2 (March 2025). We also restrict the sample to schools where less than 50% of pupils were “*new pupils*” to the school between November 2024 and March 2025 ¹.
- **Leavers.** Pupils enrolled at the school at wave 1 (November 2024) but were no longer enrolled at the school in wave 2 (March 2025). We also restrict the sample to schools where less than 50% of pupils left the school between November 2024 and March 2025.

Details on the number of pupils falling into each of these categories – and whether they completed the survey or not – can be found in Table B2. In total, 106,553 pupils were enrolled in participating schools at both survey timepoints. Of these, 65,557 (61%) responded to both the November 2024 and March 2025 surveys. A further 11,683 (11%) completed just the November 2024 survey, and 13,254 (12%) only completed the survey in March 2025. There were a further 16,059 pupils (15%) that did not respond to either survey. As discussed in Appendix A, these figures are to some extent being driven by high levels of pupil non-response in a small number of schools.

Of the 470 pupils that joined participating schools in the spring term, the participation rate was 65%. Similarly, only 33% of pupils that left the school by the time of the March 2025 survey, responded to the survey in November 2024. This suggests that pupils about to move schools are less likely to complete the survey.

1. Our definition of pupils joining or leaving the school is based on their enrolment on the TEP platform, which draws on information provided by schools on the pupils that are currently enrolled (and thus eligible to complete the survey at a given time point).

Table B2. Pupil participation patterns amongst schools taking part in both wave 1 (November 2024) and wave 2 (March 2025).

	Wave 1	Wave 2	N
Remainers	In school. Participated.	In school. Participated.	65,557 (61%)
	In school. Did not participate.	In school. Did not participate.	16,059 (15%)
	In school. Participated.	In school. Did not participate.	11,683 (11%)
	In school. Did not participate.	In school. Participated.	13,254 (12%)
Joiners	Not in school.	In school. Participated.	305 (65%)
	Not in school.	In school. Did not participate.	165 (35%)
Leavers	In school. Participated.	Not in school.	750 (33%)
	In school. Did not participate.	Not in school.	1,525 (67%)

Appendix C.

Question changes between the November 2024 and March 2025 surveys

A small number of changes were made to the survey questions asked between the first and second waves. These were made due to the sub-component not functioning as planned, removing or altering wording to reduce potential ceiling effects (or social desirability bias), or to better measure sub-components of their emotional engagement. These can be summarised as follows.

First, in the November 2024 survey, four questions were included that attempted to measure pupils' academic drive. However, further analysis suggested that several of these questions suffered from ceiling effect (a large proportion of pupils reporting very high values) and that they were not capturing much additional information over and above other parts of the survey. Consequently, in March 2025, these were replaced with the following four questions capturing pupils' cognitive engagement with their school lessons:

- I don't feel bored at school.
- My school lessons are not too easy.
- My school lessons are interesting.
- My school lessons are not too hard.

Second, some similar issues were identified with the Inclusion and Diversity questions asked as part of the November 2024 survey. This led to the following two questions to be removed:

- Being kind and including everyone is very important at this school.
- I don't think anyone is being treated unfairly by the teachers and other staff at this school.

With the following two alternative questions added in their place:

- People at school treat me the same as everyone else.
- I am accepted for who I am at school.

In addition, when measuring behavioural engagement (self-reported effort) the following question was removed (*"over the last month, I have not broken the school rules"*). This was based on the limited value this question was adding to others in the surveys, along with concerns surrounding socially desirable responses.

Within the peer-relationships scale, the following item was removed due to ceiling effects and limited variation in responses (*"I have close friends at school"*). It was replaced with the following question (*"I can work and play well with others at school"*).

On the *"value of education"* scale, one of the items *"learning at school is important"* suffered from ceiling effects. The question was therefore reworded to *"school teaches me lots of useful things"*.

Finally, the November 2024 survey measured pupils' enjoyment of school through four questions. However, further analyses of these data suggested that they were potentially measuring two different (though related) constructs: enjoyment of school and concerns about school. Consequently, in the March 2025 survey, school enjoyment was measured using the following (simplified) questions:

- I usually feel happy about going to school.
- I look forward to going to school on Monday.
- I enjoy being in school.

While a new “*school confidence*” measure was added using the following three questions:

- I feel happy to come back to school after holidays.
- I feel calm about the next day after school.
- I don’t feel worried about going to school in the morning.

However, in preliminary analysis, the first of these questions (“*I feel happy to come back to school after holidays*”) did not seem to work as intended. In particular, it became clear that it was not measuring concerns about school as intended. It has consequently been excluded from additional analysis.



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