Wallsend Children's Community

ATTITUDES TO LGBTQ+ IN WALLSEND

STAFF, PARENTS & PUPILS SURVEY

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

In early 2022, the topic of LGBTQ+ was discussed during a regular meeting involving Wallsend schools. This discussion initially focussed on difficulties that some schools were encountering and then shifted towards trying to understand why differences in attitudes towards LGBTQ+ might exist. As such, the Wallsend Children's Community (WCC) was tasked with the goal of gathering research across Wallsend for the purpose of comparing and contrasting attitudes towards LGBTQ+.

After briefly reviewing the LGBTQ+ literature (for the purpose of understanding contemporary issues involving LGBTQ+), the WCC sought the insights of Wallsend pupils and a small number of their parents. Feedback from these conversations was incredibly useful, both in terms of framing the nature of the issues being encountered by young people who identify as LGBTQ+ in Wallsend and for informing the kinds of questions to ask in subsequent research.

Three separate, but nevertheless conceptually similar, surveys were created for pupils, parents and school staff. These surveys were designed by WCC, drawing on the learning from the initial literature review and from the conversations with pupils and their parents. Parents and school staff completed an online survey, whereas pupils answered questions either in class or in a larger group setting using voting keypads. Most schools in Wallsend participated to some extent, and there was a good response rate to the surveys overall, with 416 parents, 143 staff, and 640 pupils responding.

MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE STAFF & PARENT SURVEYS

Very few school staff or parents had negative attitudes towards individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, and very few school staff or parents said that their friends or family had negative attitudes towards individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ (Figures 2 & 3, overleaf).

However, it would appear that not everyone in Wallsend is as accepting of those who identify as LGBTQ+. For example, 25% of parents said that those who identify as LGBTQ+ are not treated fairly in the community where they live (Figure 1). And crucially, 49% of parents chose the '*I'm not sure*' option on this question, indicating that about half of parents do not know what their community thinks about LGBTQ+.

Figure 1. "*Do you think those who identify as LGBTQ+ are treated fairly in the community where you live?*"
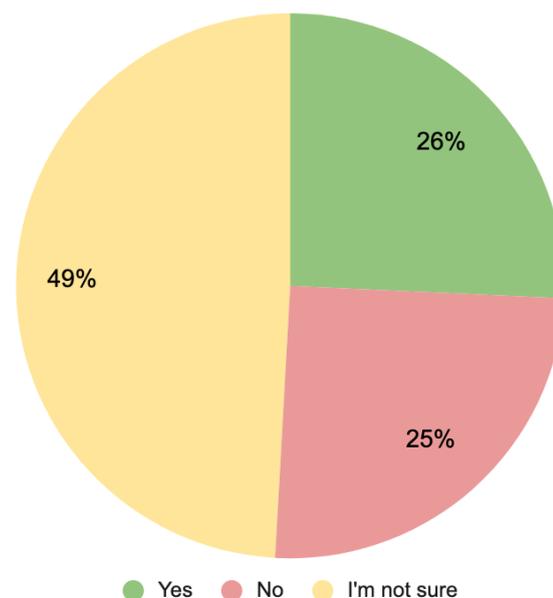
Figure 2. Attitudes towards LGBTQ+, from the perspective of school staff
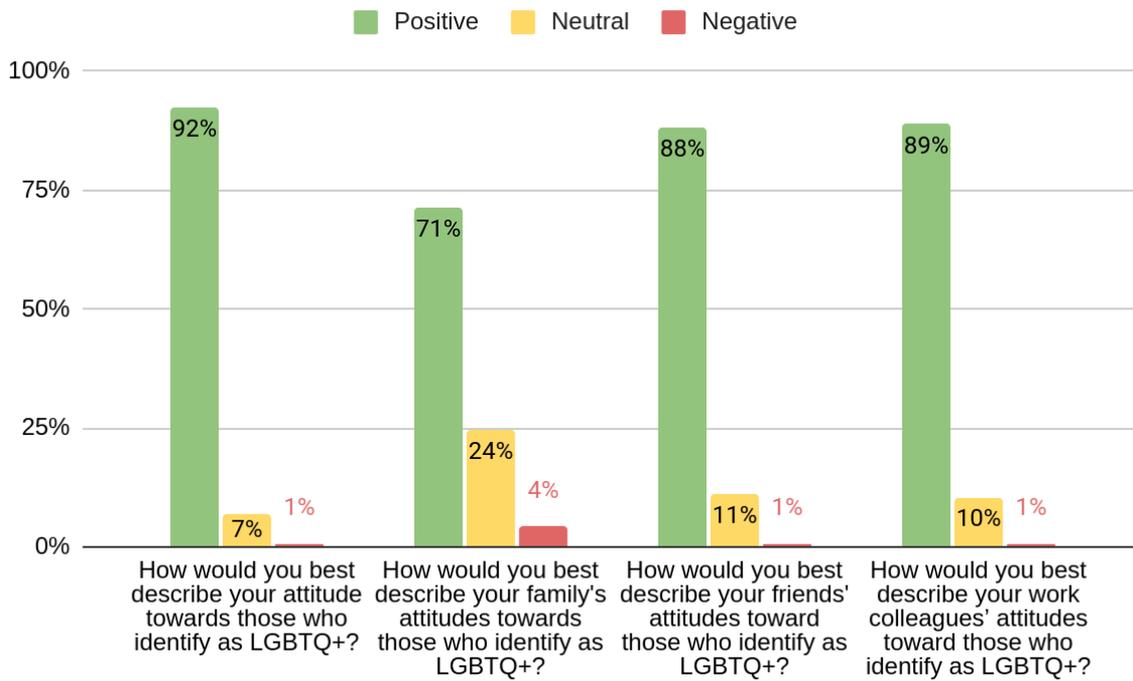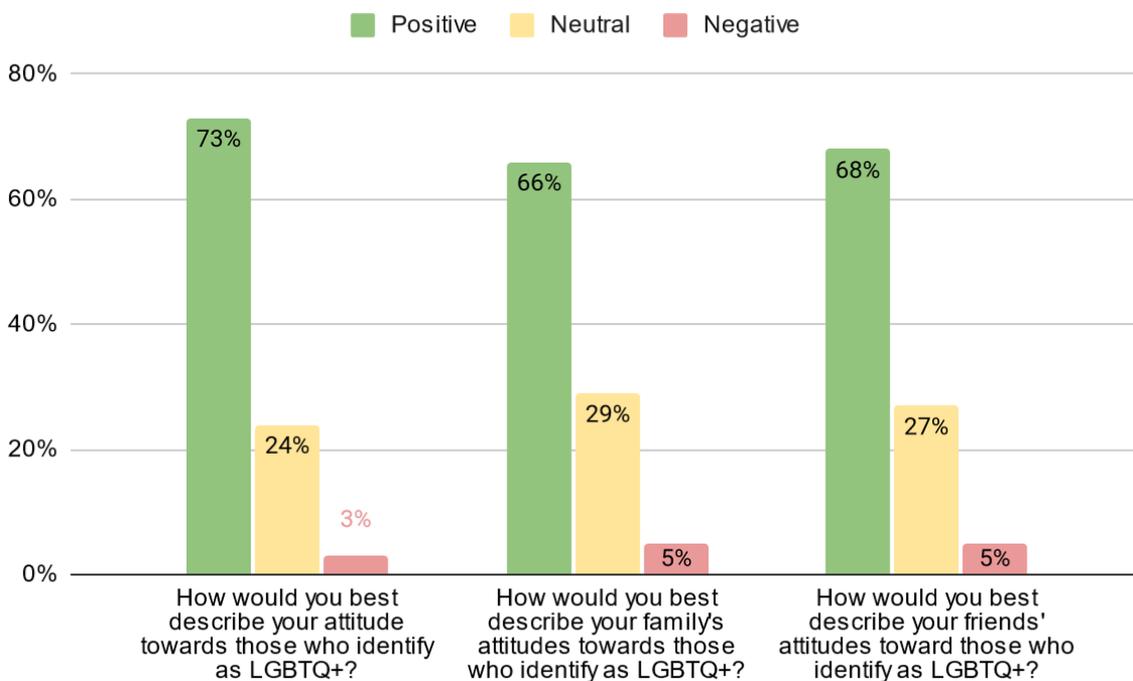

Figure 3. Attitudes towards LGBTQ+, from the perspective of parents

School staff were, on the whole, marginally more accepting of LGBTQ+ than parents (Figure 4). However, both school staff (83%) and parents (65%) were less accepting of non-binary, when compared with other aspects of LGBTQ+ such as gay/lesbian, trans, asexual, and bi. This was most pronounced for parents, with fewer than two-thirds having a positive attitude towards those who identify as non-binary.

Figure 4. % of positive attitudes towards specific aspects of LGBTQ+, staff vs. parents
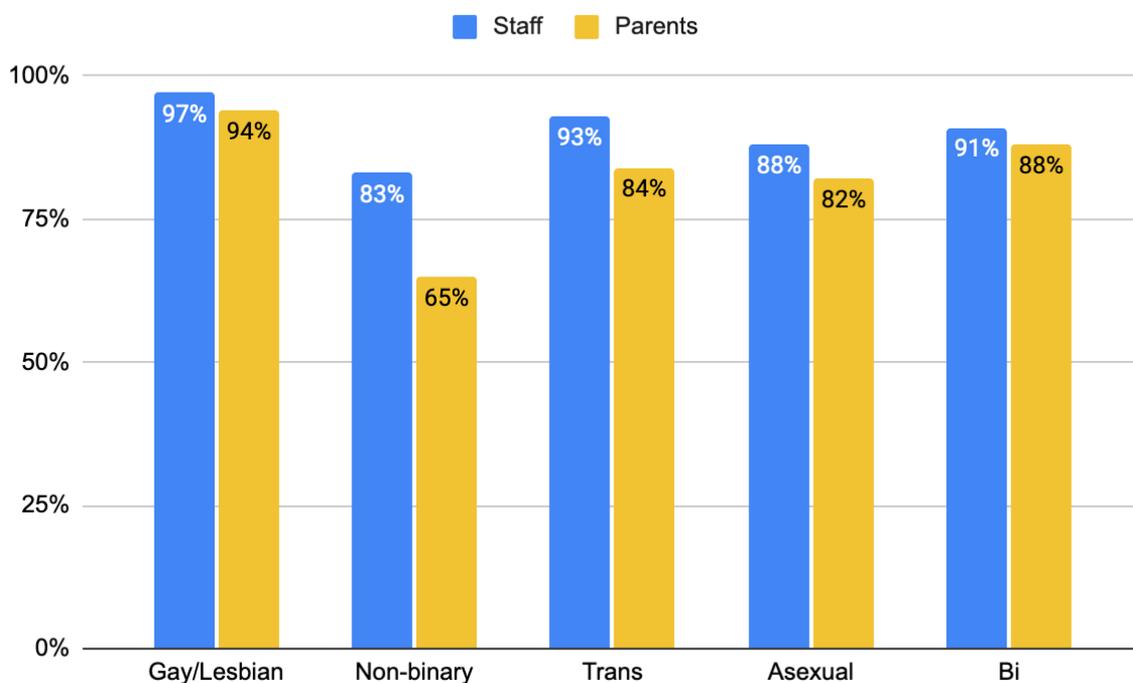
Encouragingly, most parents (92%) said that they would fully support their child if they were to identify as LGBTQ+. Similarly, most school staff (97%) said that they would fully support and accept pupils who identify as LGBTQ+. Nevertheless, considerably fewer staff agreed that they felt confident in talking to pupils who had questions about LGBTQ+ (76%) or in supporting pupils who were questioning their sexuality or gender (76%). And only half of staff (58%) agreed that their school does enough to promote awareness of LGBTQ+ (see Appendix).

There were discrepancies between what staff thought parents believed and what parents actually believed. For example, 45% of staff believed that parents wanted the broader meaning of LGBTQ+ taught in school, whereas 69% of parents wanted it taught (Figure 5). Similarly, 36% of staff believed that parents wanted the specific aspects of LGBTQ+ taught in school, whereas 54% of parents wanted it taught.

Figure 5. Teaching of LGBTQ+ in primary school: staff assessments of parents' beliefs vs. parents' actual beliefs
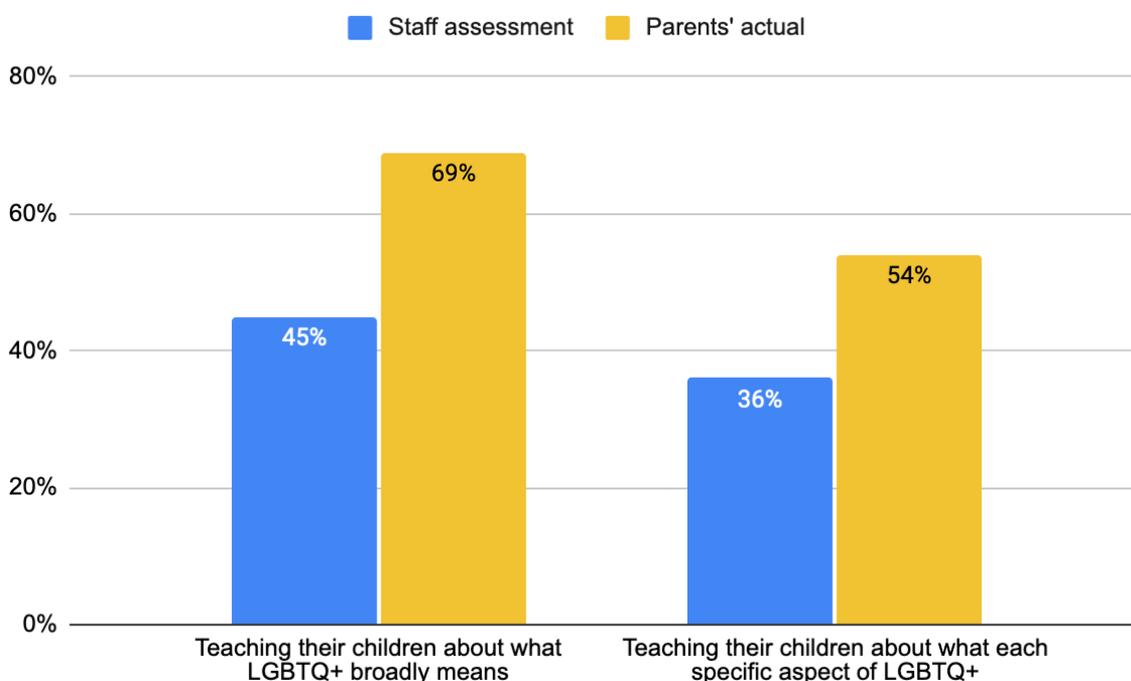
Even more strikingly, only 40% of school staff believed that parents would want their children to freely express their identities or gender in school, compared with 78% of parents (Figure 6, overleaf). And only 41% of staff said that parents would want school to provide support and advice for children who were questioning their gender or sexuality, compared with 86% of parents. As such, the beliefs that school staff ascribe to parents appear to be a little out of step with what parents actually believe about LGBTQ+ being taught in school.

Figure 6. Supporting LGBTQ+ in primary school: staff assessments of parents' attitudes vs. parents' actual attitudes
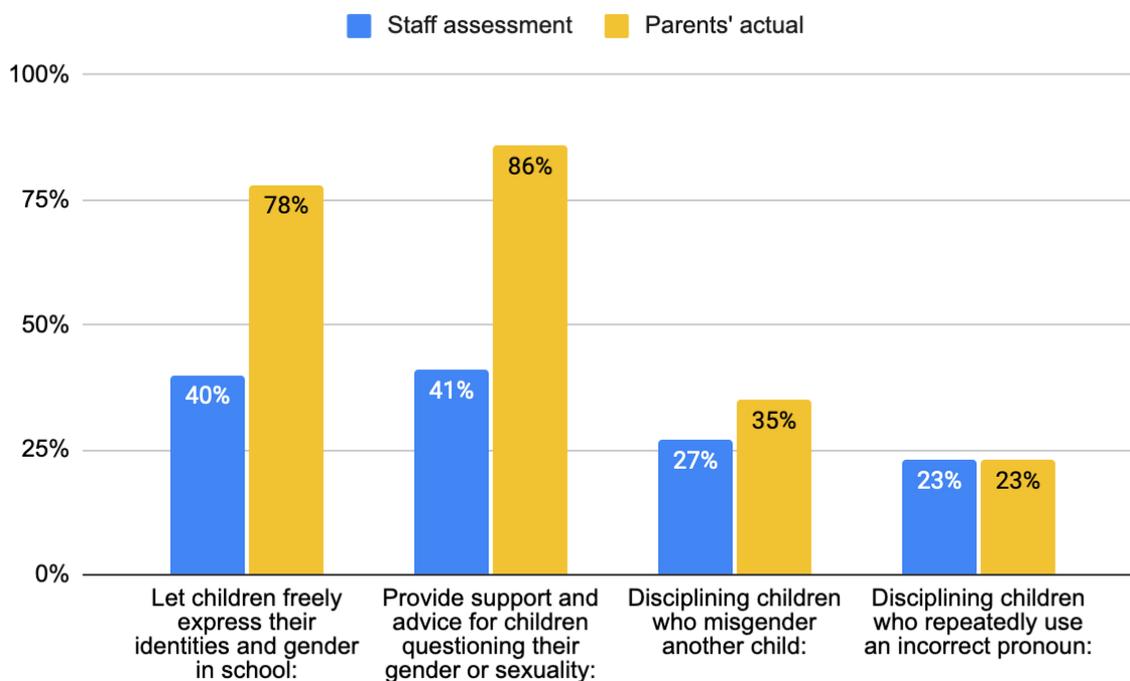
Finally, there were large differences between men's and women's attitudes towards LGBTQ+. The responses from men (after statistically controlling for the smaller number of men who responded to the survey), are overall less positive towards LGBTQ+ than women. Significantly fewer men (compared with women) said that their own attitudes and the attitudes of their friends and family towards LGBTQ+ were positive (Figure 7, overleaf).

Similarly, significantly fewer men said that they fully accept an adult (77%) or a child (55%) who identifies as LGBTQ+, compared with 91% and 75% of women, respectively. And men were much less accepting of the specific aspects of LGBTQ+ too, with only 38% of men reporting positive attitudes towards those who identify as non-binary (Figure 8).

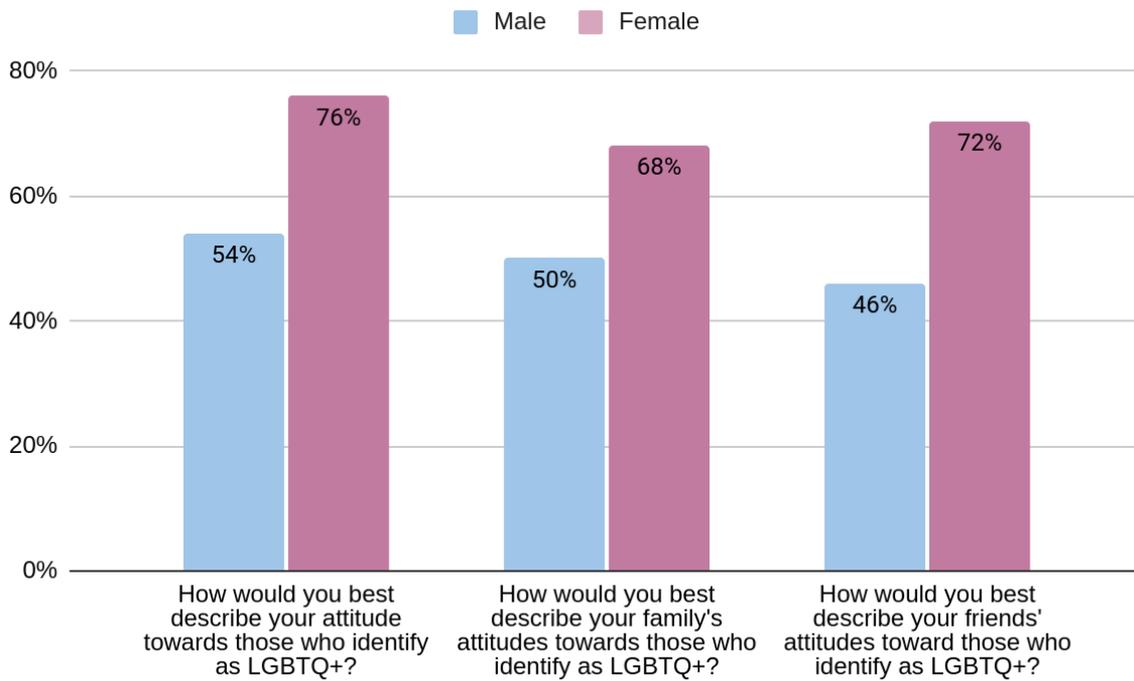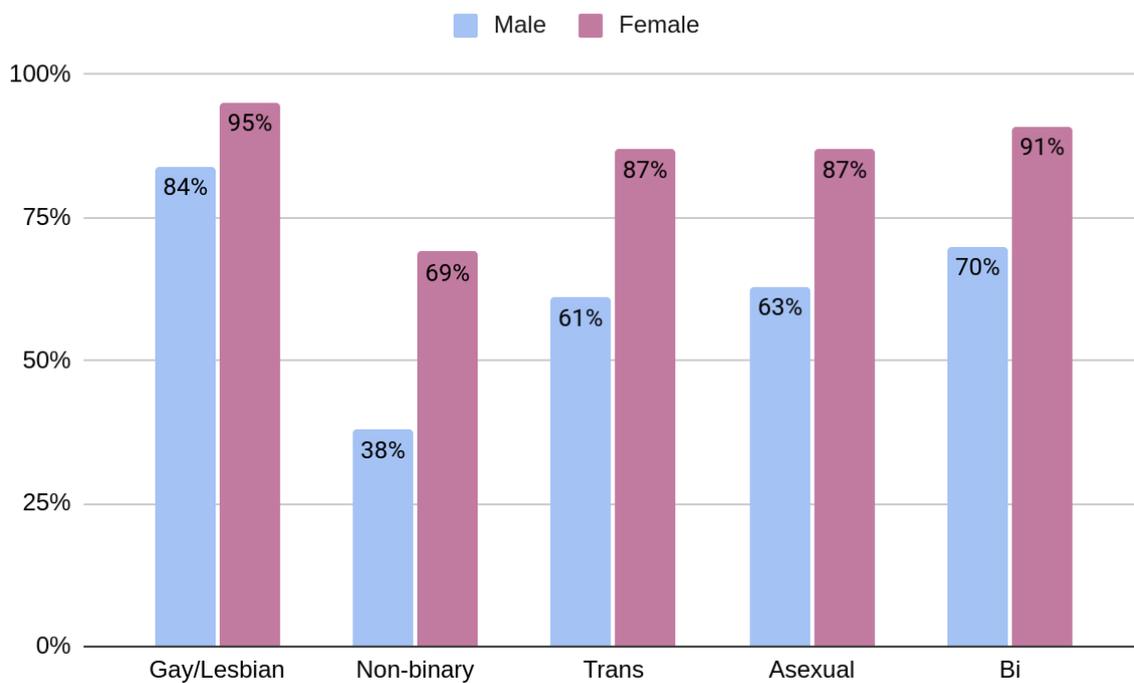**Figure 7**. % of men and women with positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+

Figure 8. % of men and women with positive attitudes towards specific aspects of LGBTQ+

MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE PUPIL SURVEY

About half of the pupils (57%) said that they knew someone at school who identifies as LGBTQ+ and, interestingly, the same percentage of pupils said that they understand what LGBTQ+ means.

The views of pupils and school staff, regarding the extent to which LGBTQ+ is accommodated at school, differ quite dramatically in some areas. For example, 81% of school staff agreed that their school's culture is supportive of young people who identify as LGBTQ+ (see Appendix), whereas only 47% of pupils said that those who identify as LGBTQ+ are treated fairly in school (Figure 9), and only 35% said that their school does enough ("*a little bit*" & "*a lot*") to support those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Figure 10, overleaf).

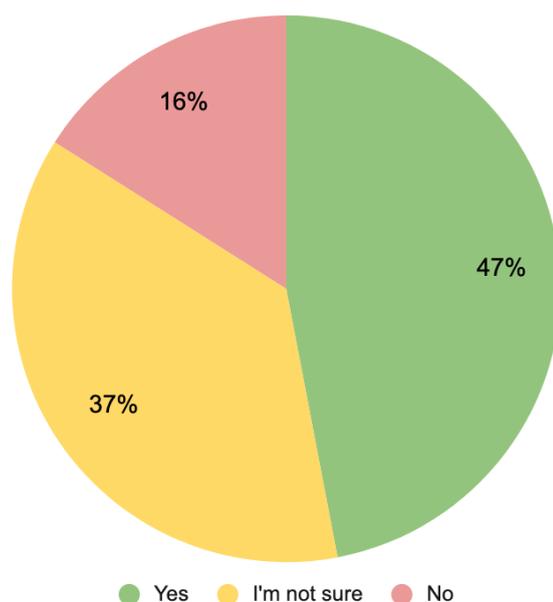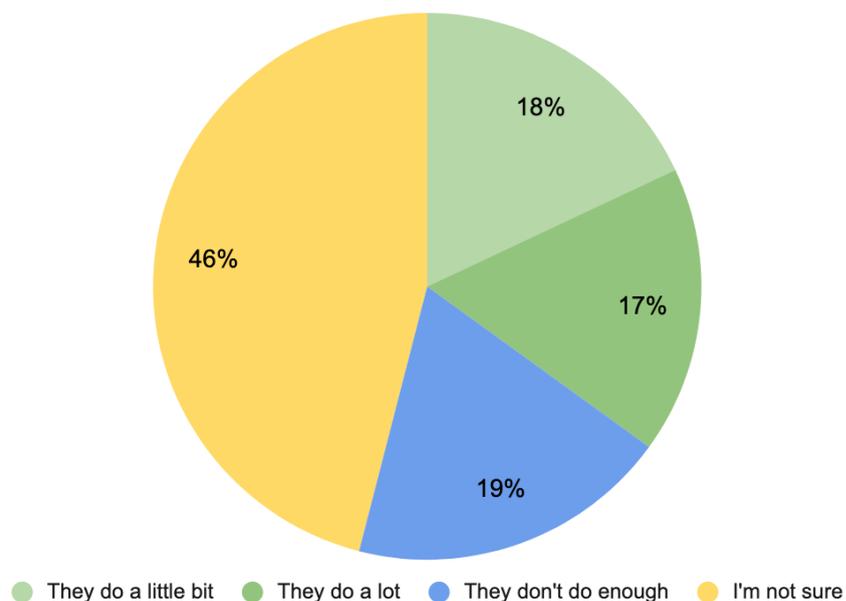**Figure 9**. "*Do you think pupils that identify as LGBTQ+ are treated fairly in school?*"

Figure 10. "*Does your school do enough to support LGBTQ+ pupils?*"

It is worth noting that, as can be seen in Figures 9 & 10, many pupils chose the "*I'm not sure*" option, indicating either a) that they do not know anyone who identifies as LGBTQ+ to know the impact of the wider school environment on them or b) uncertainty regarding the extent to which their school does, or should, treat and support pupils who identify as LGBTQ+.

Although most school staff (95%) said that they would challenge inappropriate language and behaviour towards LGBTQ+ in school (see Appendix), 55% of pupils said that pupils at school talk negatively ("*sometimes*" & "*quite a bit*") about those who identify as LGBTQ+ (Figure 11, overleaf). Similarly, although 75% of staff said that their school's bullying policy was adequate and 73% said that their school does enough to prevent LGBTQ+ related bullying (see Appendix), 59% of pupils said that those who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to get bullied in school (Figure 12, overleaf).

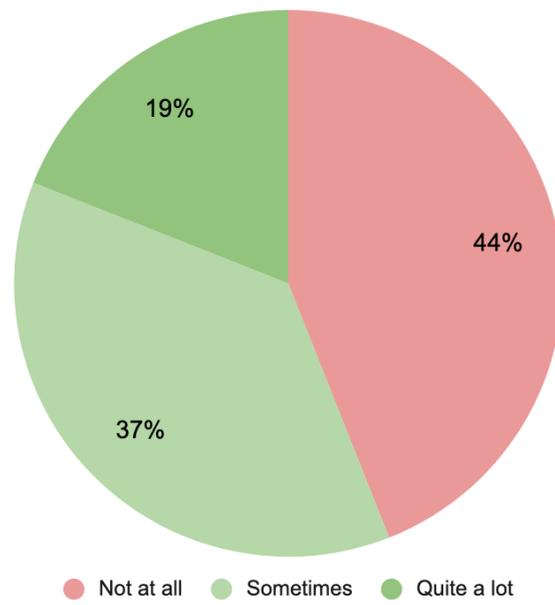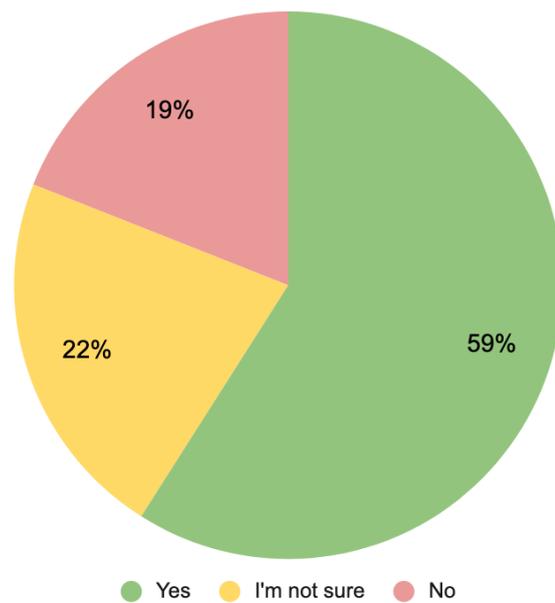**Figure 11**. "*Do children talk negatively about being LGBTQ+ in school?*"

Legend: Not at all (44%), Sometimes (37%), Quite a lot (19%)

Figure 12. "*Do you think children who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to get bullied in school?*"

Legend: Yes (59%), I'm not sure (22%), No (19%)

In addition, although nearly all staff (97%) said that they fully accept and support LGBTQ+ pupils, only three-quarters of staff said that they would feel confident supporting a pupil who is questioning their sexuality/gender (76%) or talking to a pupil who has questions about LGBTQ+ (76%). Furthermore, only 35% of pupils said that they would feel comfortable talking to their teacher about LGBTQ+ (Figure 13).

Figure 13. "*If you had any questions about LGBTQ+ would you feel comfortable talking to your teacher about it?*"
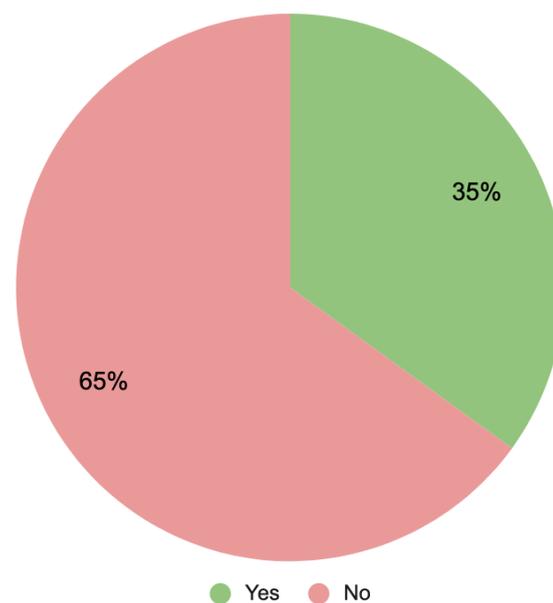
Finally, nearly half of pupils (48%) said that they had heard an adult talking negatively about LGBTQ+ (Figure 14, overleaf), 40% said that children who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to get bullied in the area where they live (Figure 15, overleaf), and 16% of pupils said that people in the area where they live are not accepting of LGBTQ+ (Figure 16, overleaf). However, it is worth noting that over half of pupils chose the "*I'm not sure*" option on this last question, suggesting that many pupils do not know what their community thinks about LGBTQ+, which is consistent with what parents indicated.

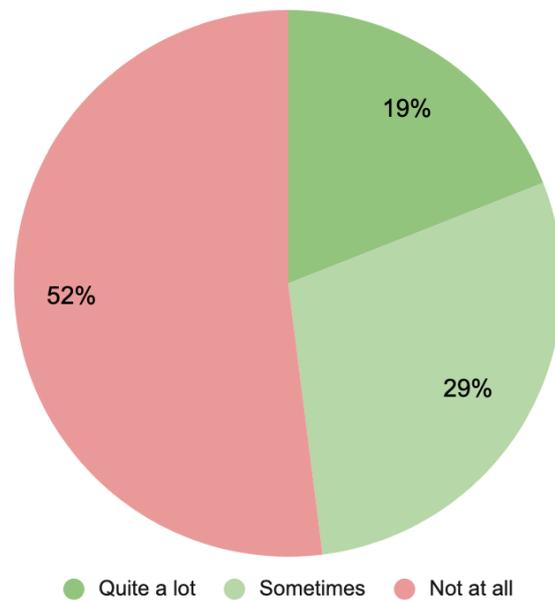**Figure 14**. *"Have you ever heard an adult talking negatively about LGBTQ+?"*

Figure 15. *"Do you think children who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to get bullied in the area where you live?"*
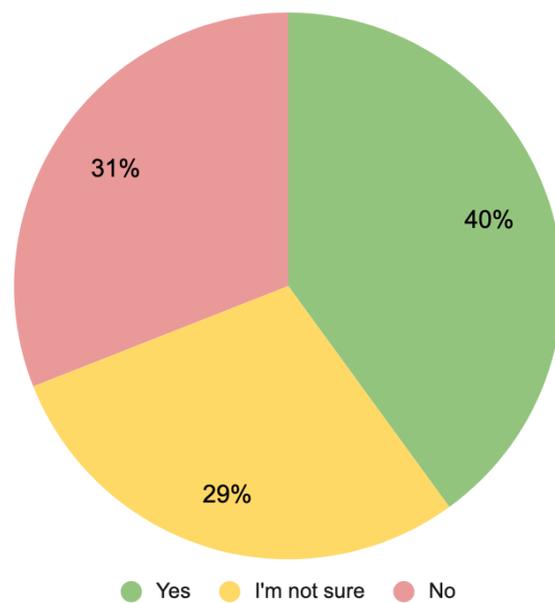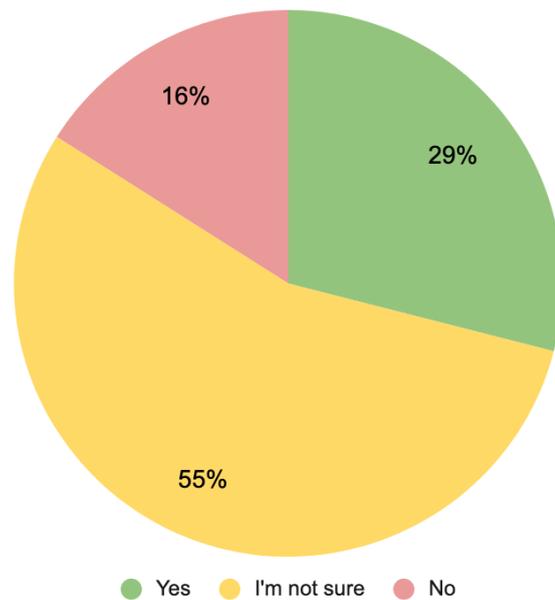
Figure 16. *"Are people in the area where you live accepting of LGBTQ+"*

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This report highlights several important considerations that could be addressed in future efforts. It shows that, although most parents and school staff have positive attitudes towards those who identify as LGBTQ+, this does not extend entirely to those who identify as non-binary. It is important to understand why acceptance is lower for non-binary.

Furthermore, it appears that significantly fewer men have positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ than women, especially towards those who identify as non-binary. It is therefore important to understand why men's attitudes are less positive overall.

In addition, the report shows that the communities where parents live are not necessarily as accepting of LGBTQ+ as they are, though there appears to be quite a bit of uncertainty about what these communities think. Nevertheless, high numbers

of pupils said that children who identify as LGBTQ+ are likely to get bullied where they live, and that they have heard an adult talking negatively about LGBTQ+.

There are some large discrepancies between the beliefs that staff ascribe to parents and the beliefs that parents hold themselves, especially when it comes to the question of schools advising pupils about their gender/sexuality or letting pupils freely express their identities. This might reflect a general lack of discourse about LGBTQ+ between schools and parents.

Similarly, there are some large discrepancies between what school staff and pupils think regarding LGBTQ+ in the school environment. Generally, most school staff feel as though the school environment is supportive of those who identify as LGBTQ+, whereas fewer pupils feel the same way. It might, therefore, be worthwhile to further explore why pupils feel differently to staff, and to better understand the experiences of pupils who identify as LGBTQ+ in school.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Level of support from staff for LGBTQ+
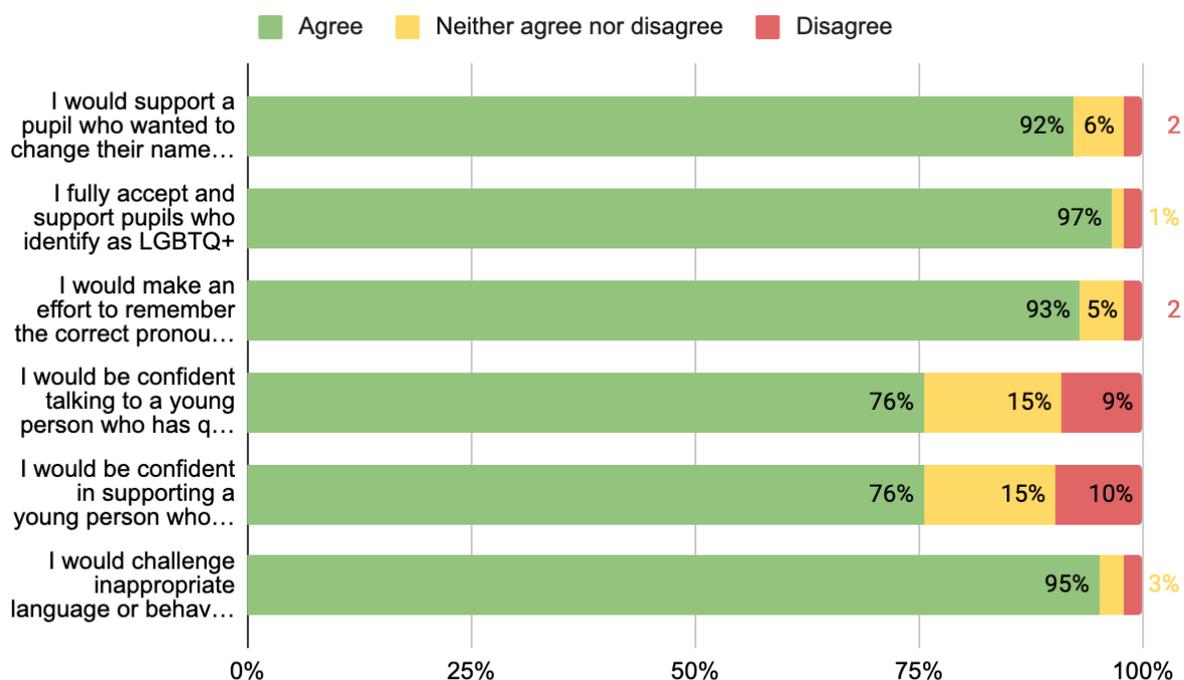
Appendix B. Support for LGBTQ+ in the wider school environment (staff)