

# Life in residential special schools

A report of children's experience  
by the Children's Rights Director for England



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# About the Children's Rights Director



Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England

The law sets out my duties as Children's Rights Director for England. One of my main duties is to ask children and young people for their views about how children and young people are looked after in England. This includes children living in residential special schools. My duties also cover children and young people living away from home in boarding schools or residential further education colleges, in children's homes or family centres, in foster care or who have been placed for adoption, and children or young people getting any sort of help from council social care services.

As well as asking young people for their views and publishing what they tell us, I and my team also give advice on children's and young people's views, and their rights and welfare, to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector at Ofsted, and to the Government. We have a duty to raise any issues we think are important about the rights and welfare of children or young people living away from home or getting children's social care support. We do this both for individual young people and for whole groups of young people.

We have written reports about many things that are important to children and young people living away from home or in care, or being helped by social care services. These reports have often included the views of children living in residential special schools. But we have never written a report that simply says what it is like to live in a residential special school until now.

We are publishing reports about young people's experiences of living in different types of residential establishment.

*Life in children's homes* is about the experiences of children and young people living in children's homes; *Life in secure care* is about young people's experiences of living in secure children's homes; and *Life in residential further education* is about being a student aged under 18 living in a further education college. We have already published reports about the experience of being adopted, of living in foster care, of being a boarder in a boarding school, and of life in residential family centres.

For people who know about residential special schools, or who run or work in them, I hope this report will give a useful picture of what life is like for the children and young people who live in residential special schools across the country, so that any particular school can be checked against it. For those who do not know a great deal about residential special schools, I hope this report will give a fair picture of what it is like to live in one.

Like all my reports, this report is being published for everyone to read. You can find copies of all my reports on our website: [www.rights4me.org](http://www.rights4me.org).

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Roger Morgan'.



# How we asked for the views of children and young people

We asked pupils from different residential schools across the country to give us their views and experiences by using a secure web survey. The schools were picked at random from a national list of residential special schools. We sent each school its own survey username and password, to make sure as far as we could that only the children and young people could log on to it. Generally, each child had lived in only one residential special school, and so told us about their experience of just that one school. It is important to remember that there will be some children in residential special schools who are not able to give their views through a survey, and who therefore could not take part in this survey. Our team is working to find out their views in other ways in another of our consultations soon.

In all the survey questions asking for children's views, we asked for their views and ideas without suggesting any answers, and then analysed their answers afterwards for this report. The report therefore gives children's own experience, rather than saying how far they agreed with any suggested answers. Where we have listed their answers in a chart in the report, we have included all the answers that came from at least one in 10 of those answering that question. Numbers shown are the percentages of children giving that answer. Each of them could give more than one answer, so the percentages do not add up to 100.

In this report, we have not left out any views that we might disagree with, nor made our own comments on anything children and young people told us. We have not added our own views or ideas.

# The children who gave us their views

Altogether, we received answers from **338 students, from around 40 residential special schools**. The youngest person was nine, the oldest was 18. The middle age of all those who took part in the survey was 14. Out of the 325 who told us their views, 85% were boys and 15% girls.

Out of the 322 who told us their ethnic background, 89% said they were white, 4% that they were black, 4% that they were from a mixed ethnic background, and 3% that they were Asian.

Out of the 324 who told us about disability, 52% said they had a disability, 48% that they did not. Out of the 168 children who said they had a disability, 148 told us what sort of disability this was. The three disabilities we were told about the most were autism (27% of the children), ADHD (20% of the children) and hearing impairment (11% of the children). We did not suggest types of disability; children told us whether they would say they had a disability, and

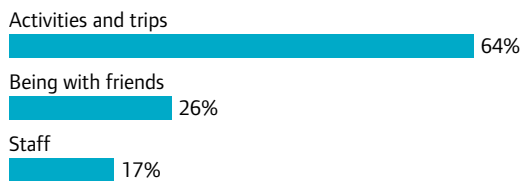
what they themselves saw as a disability. This was not always easy; one child wrote, 'I don't like to think I have a disability but I do have Asperger's.'



# The best things about living in a residential special school

Our first questions asked students what were the best, and the worst, things about living at their residential special school. The chart shows the most frequent 'best things'.

The best things about living in a residential special school (percentages of the 328 children answering the question)



The children said that the **best thing about residential special schools was the range of activities, and the trips out** organised by the school. The people they lived with, **both staff and friends among the other children, were reported as 'best things' by more than one in 10 children.** One person summed things up as 'activities and boarding with friends', while another said 'good teachers, nice people to make friends with' and another said, 'I really love all of the staff and I love staying with my friends.' Some others added education and learning to their list of the best things: 'activities and learning'; 'get an education, having fun, playing with friends, activities'.

Some children wrote more detail of how friendships could be made in residential units: 'The best thing about residential school is the friends you make, in school you're worst enemies but over the residential unit you are best friends.' Others told us more about the help they had personally from members of staff: 'The staff help you mix with others and help your behaviour problems.'

Although activities, friends and staff were the top best things about living in a residential special school, some children wrote about some other ways this had helped them: 'it keeps us out of trouble so we won't be arrested'; 'it's good and mum can have a break'; 'it keeps u off the streets'; 'it also helps me get used to being away from home (at first I felt really scared)'; 'I feel more safe'; 'it gives me a chance to be independent'; 'I could not read or write when I came here and I can now and am improving all the time'.

'I could not read or write when I came here and I can now and am improving all the time'

# The worst things about living in a residential special school

We always ask about the worst things, as well as the best things, about life in different types of placement. When we asked children to tell us what the worst things were about living in a residential special school, something interesting happened. Out of 303 children who answered the question, **18% said that nothing was a 'worst thing' about living in their residential special school.** This meant that the answer that nothing is a 'worst thing' came second out of all the answers to this question. Compared with this, less than 1% of children had said in the last question that they could think of nothing good to tell us as a 'best thing' about living in a residential special school.

Altogether, **children told us more good things than bad things about living in a residential special school. We were told 457 'best things' and 270 'worst things'.**

**The most usual 'worst thing' about life in residential special school was feeling homesick** living away from parents and family. As many as 41% of the 303 children who answered this question said this was the worst thing for them. 'The worst thing is being away from my mom.' **The one other 'worst thing' that came to us from at least one in 10 children was having so many rules at school and sanctions when rules were broken.** Ten per cent of children told us this was a 'worst thing' for them. People wrote about rules to do with not smoking, not swearing, using mobile phones, restrictions on using the internet, not having body piercings, and about having salt on their food. One person wrote that their 'worst thing' was 'having to do what everyone else wants and having to follow school rules 24/7', while another wrote: 'There are a lot of rules that can be quite hard to follow at first, I found it quite hard to follow them.'

One person wrote us this summary of their view: 'The worst things about living at a residential school are: not seeing your family, your mates, your girlfriend, you miss all the things you really enjoy doing, you have less freedom, everywhere you go you've always got a member of staff with you.'

One 'worst thing' that didn't quite make the list of answers that came from at least one in 10 people was **living with other children and young people with problems.** One person wrote that their particular worst thing was that 'I live with some irritating kids'.

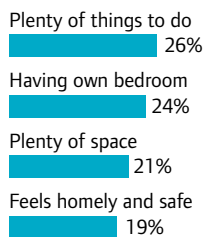
**'The worst thing is being away from my mom'**



# Residential special school buildings

We asked children and young people to tell us what were the best and worst things about the school buildings they lived in. The chart shows the most frequent answers.

The best things about residential special school buildings (percentages of the 303 children answering the question)



The top answer was about the activities there were to do in the buildings, rather than the buildings themselves. **Activities and having plenty of things to do made the buildings good places to live in.** The most liked thing about school buildings themselves was **having your own bedroom.** Not all children did have their own bedroom, but when they did, this was very much appreciated. It is also clear that children liked living in **school buildings that were spacious rather than feeling cramped or overcrowded, and that felt homely as well as safe.** People wrote: 'it's big and warm and comfortable'; 'you can get around it easily'; 'secure, safe, warm'. As well as space, having a building that was easy to move around and had good facilities for disabilities was important to children with mobility problems: 'it's very accessible and safe, and the corridors are wide and easy to move'; 'I have a special shower, one that allows me to sit down'.

**Some children liked the fact that their particular school was in interesting buildings which often had an interesting history:** 'I love living in the building, it is warm and cosy and it is an interesting building'; 'it's got a lot of history in the building'; 'the building is big and old and very posh, and it used to be a hotel'; 'the building that I live in is massive and it was the home of the first man to build [a particular machine]'; 'it has an old history'.

Some said that even though the buildings were old and historical, their school still felt safe: 'it hasn't fallen down yet' and 'it's not haunted'. However, **being an old building that felt creepy, had old-fashioned decoration and smelt old, was disliked.** Old buildings had to be interesting, not creepy.

Of course, sometimes some children in the same school liked how old it was, while others disliked it. Disliking the way the building felt old was the most common 'worst thing' that children wrote about their schools. Nearly one in three children, 32%, of the 296 who told us about worst things about their school buildings, said they didn't like them being so old: 'it's an old building and has aged a lot'; 'the part where we sleep is old and creepy'; 'it gets very spooky when it's dark'; 'it's cold, old, smells claustrophobic'.

Some said that **some of the problems with old buildings are to do with bathrooms,** which can suffer from a lack of hot water, poor water pressure in the showers, or sometimes floods or queues for the bathrooms and toilets: 'baths and showers not hot enough and either too much water pressure or not enough'; 'flush the toilet and the water pipe vibrates and makes a racket'. **Old buildings could have heating and other problems too:** 'It's either too hot or too cold and things don't work.' Old buildings could be a problem if you needed special aids for your mobility too: 'it is a listed building so we cannot have ceiling hoists which makes it difficult for staff because manual hoists are hard to manoeuvre'; 'it's got a lift that I can't use'.

Just as children liked buildings where they had their own bedrooms and plenty of space, so they didn't like sharing bedrooms and being in cramped or overcrowded buildings: 'having to share a room, I think all should have their own room'; 'it can get crammed up very quickly'; 'having bed spaces that are a bit small and also you can't really have any privacy'; 'having people keeping you awake at night'.

Some children told us they liked being able to **choose their own decorations,** even though the building was old, and this helped to make it feel homely: 'You are allowed to decorate your room.' However, one person said that there was not a completely free choice of colours: 'If you want you can have your walls painted. I wanted pink but the boys said I couldn't have pink, boys don't have pink bedrooms.'

Overall though, **children liked their school buildings more than they disliked them.** We were told 375 'best things' about school buildings, compared with 206 'worst things'. Thirty-two per cent of children said there was 'nothing' they could say was a 'worst thing' about their school buildings, but only one child said they could think of no 'best thing' to tell us.

# How is life in a residential special school different from life in a children's home?

We asked whether the children answering our survey about life in residential special schools had ever lived in a children's home. Just over one in 10, 11%, out of the 318 children who answered this question, said they had lived in a children's home at some time.

**There was no one way that children told us life was different in a residential special school compared with a children's home. It depended on the school, and the children's home.** Some said that in their children's home there had been bullies, some had enjoyed later bedtimes, others had earlier bedtimes, and some had liked their children's home because it was smaller and had fewer children than their residential school. Some liked being able to go home at weekends from school, which they hadn't been allowed to do from children's homes, while others had liked living all the time at a children's home. Some liked children's homes simply because they weren't part of school, and you could do more activities in the local

community rather than in school. A few children had been in respite care children's homes, and had enjoyed having better facilities for children with disabilities than at school. Others said that they preferred their special school to a children's home because it was more fun, or they could be more independent.

We couldn't say whether children generally preferred to be in a residential special school or a children's home. We found we could mark 24 of the answers to our question as in favour of either living in a residential school or living in a children's home. Fourteen preferred children's homes and 10 residential special schools, but for very different reasons.

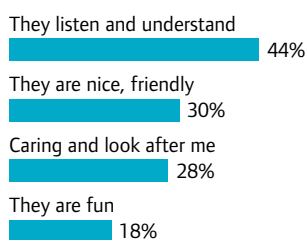


# Special school staff

We asked children to tell us the best, and the worst, things about the staff who looked after them at school. **Children were very positive about their staff. Out of the 580 comments about staff, 70% were positive. The most usual answer when we asked children to tell us the worst things about staff was 'nothing'; this answer came from 38% of the 279 children who answered that question.** Compared with this, only two children (about 1%) had said 'nothing' when we asked for the best things about staff.

The next chart shows the best things children and young people told us about staff, showing the most frequent answers.

The best things about residential special school staff (percentages of the 318 children answering the question)



It is clear that children and young people care most about what kind of person a member of staff is. **Good staff are kind, understanding, nice people, friendly and fun.** After the sort of person a staff member is, **the next most important thing is that they do their job of caring and looking after the children and young people** they are responsible for.

After 'nothing', the two most common 'worst things about staff' were that they are often **too strict about rules and punishing people** (22% of the 279 children answering the question said this), and that **some of them do a lot of shouting or moaning at people** (17% told us this). There were no other 'worst things' sent in to us by more than one in 10 children. Later in the survey we asked a question about how restraint is used in residential special schools, but here only nine children (3%) said that one of the worst things about staff was that they used restraint.

Very many children sent us comments about their particular staff. Here are some examples of what they said.

'They make you safe at all times'

'They are kind, loving, respectful, good personality'

'They are the best, they're just legends'

'Some are awful'

'Nothing wrong with the staff apart from some of the staff don't listen sometimes'

'The staff are nice, they care about me and support me when I'm sad and frustrated. They make sure I am safe and well fed. They always help me in my hour of need and they help me with my homework'

'I sometimes have a different carer. I don't like having [different] carers because they don't know me like my key workers'

'Too many agency staff who don't know enough about me and what they are doing'

'They calm me down sometimes, they stop me from bullying'

'They are soft with me and they understand my autism'

'They help me to communicate, they help me with my needs and achieve my goals'

'They are funny and you can have a laugh and a great time with them'

'They are all really sorted'

'They have the power to restrain you'

'Do lots of activities, they are good to talk to'

'Sometimes staff can be annoying and they make me angry'

'The best thing about the staff at our school is that they are all very caring, although very firm at times; they help us in hard times; and if you need someone to talk to they are always there to listen'

'Carers sometimes help me when I don't need help'

'Some carers don't know what I want when I point'

'They shout at us'

'Moany, grumpy and strict'

'The staff are very kind, there are no worst things about the staff'

'They listen to you if you want to talk. They say things you might not like (challenge you), but it's for your own good. They make you laugh'

'They keep an eye on your medication'

'The worst thing about the staff at school is when they shout because when they shout it is quite scary, although they are doing it for our own good'

'I like it when staff give you a little bit of leeway. I don't like it when it goes too far'

'Some staff should be physically disabled so we can relate to them better'

'The worst thing about staff is that I don't think they get paid enough'

# Help with problems



We asked children to say how their school helped them with any personal problems they had. **By far the most usual answer was that the staff talked through problems and gave advice.** Over half (59%) of the 280 children who answered this question said this. No other answer came from as many as one in 10 children. Sixteen children (6%) said they didn't have any personal problems, and another two (1%) that they didn't tell anyone about their personal problems. One person wrote: 'No help because I have got no personal problems, I am a normal person.'

Some examples of other sorts of help, each from fewer than one in 10 children, were help with behaviour problems, personal care and hygiene, medical treatments and appointments, or school work, and arranging therapy and counselling outside the school.

**'You can talk to staff and they help you to sort it out'**

Examples of how children described the way staff talked through problems and gave advice were: 'you can talk to staff and they help you to sort it out'; 'to understand my feelings'; 'they try to see the good side of things and make me understand that mum sometimes shouts at me because she has lots of other children to look after and not because she is angry at me'; 'they set targets with cleaning my teeth'; 'they make referrals to CAMHS, Social Services etc'; 'they are helping me with my dyslexia, they are helping to calm me down'; 'helps me with my anger issues and helps me control it and give access to my intelligence and good sense of humour'.

When we asked if there was other help children wished their school could give them, we had answers from 282 children. A large majority (**70%**) **told us there was no other help they wished their school could give them.** Here is what some children wrote: 'they do enough and do everything they are able to do to help me'; 'not really, I think that maybe we are a little bit spoilt'; 'already given me loads and I know it's there if I want it'; 'continue to help me in the same way'. Only one person wrote that they would not want the school to help them if they needed help: 'Not really, I don't trust them.'

Here are some quotes about the extra help children would like, from the 30% who said they would like more help from their school.

'Send us home'

'Counselling'

'To be able to see my mum more'

'Be stricter with things that are said about our personal problems'

'Help me plan for life when I leave school'

'Maths 1:1'

'I would like help getting into shape physically and to improve my diet'

'Listening to music to calm down'

'Give up smoking and drugs'

'To be trusted more but for this I know I need to behave better sometimes'

'To help me to stop bullying'

'To help me make more friends and good ones'

'I would like to have 1:1 reading'

'I would like to have a 16+ unit for me and for others that need help beyond school when over 16'

'Anger management'

'Job advice'

'I would like school to help me have a more stable life outside of school'

'More advice'

'Yes, I wish they could make my special needs go away'

'The school could arrange something for me to do on a weekend so I stay out of trouble'



# Dangers to children living in residential special schools

In all our reports on living in different kinds of residential establishment, we ask children and young people what they see as the biggest dangers to them, and what most helps to keep them safe. In our survey for this report, 304 children and young people answered our question about the biggest dangers to children living in residential special schools.

**The answer given most often, which came from 21% of everyone who answered this question, was 'nothing'. They did not think there were any big dangers to children living in residential special schools.**

**The two biggest dangers the children told us about were fire and bullying.** Out of the 304 who answered the question, 19% saw fire as a big danger. The danger of bullying came next, with 12%.

Many gave details of why they thought fire was a big danger: 'it is an old building so a danger is fire'; 'if someone smokes in the building'; 'the school being set on fire in a fight'. Some were worried that the school might be difficult to get out of in a fire: 'the windows don't open completely so if there is a fire how can you jump out of the window?'; 'there are bars on your bedroom window and if there is a fire it is a health and safety hazard'.

One of the reasons that fire came out as such a big danger in our survey was that children with a disability would have special difficulty in escaping a fire safely: 'fire, because some of us can't walk'; 'someone in a wheelchair needs to be pushed in a fire'; 'if there is a fire we cannot use the lift and the stairs are awkward'; 'children might have fits when they hear the fire alarm'. **Children with disabilities worry about fire, because they know they can't easily get to safety without help.**

Here are some examples of what children said about **bullying and fighting** being dangers in residential special schools: 'aggression from other boys'; 'kids that gang up on you and think they are tough'; 'someone may get beaten up'; 'when someone loses their temper'; 'the biggest danger in the school is that if u have a fight and the staff aren't there then u can get put in hospital'; 'the 7 boys that have behavioural difficulties do get a bit much at times so we fight each other'.

Apart from fire and bullying, not enough children agreed about other dangers for any one danger to be mentioned by at least one in 10 people. Some people wrote about the danger of **accidents** in the building or grounds or on the road, some about **dangers to people if they ran away** from the school, and others about the dangers of **other people 'kicking off'**. Some wrote about **dangers from themselves and their own behaviour**, such as climbing on the roof, not listening to staff warning them about things, or simply getting angry and out of control.

Some told us about the **dangers of running away**: 'children running away from school or houses and doing dangerous stuff'; 'if the doors are not locked I could run away'; 'running away is a danger; if you get lost you might not find your way back'; 'people might run away and get run over on the motorway'; 'when someone says something to do with their family then you go off site when it is dark... there might be a nasty man out there'.

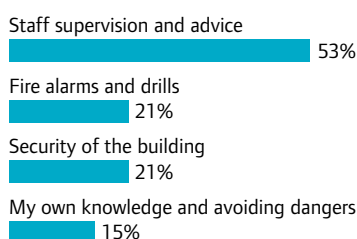
Examples of some other dangers were: 'if we don't listen we could be unsafe'; 'I used to climb on roofs when I was annoyed'; 'falling down the stairs when sliding down the bannister'. One person who had a disability wrote that they were worried about 'dying in their sleep, bullying'.

**'Running away is a danger; if you get lost you might not find your way back'**

# Keeping children safe in residential special schools

The next question after asking about dangers is what children and young people see as the main things that keep them safe at school. The next chart gives the most frequent answers from our survey.

What keeps children safe in residential special schools? (percentages of the 315 children answering the question)



Given how important children had said their staff were to them, it is not surprising that staff came top of the list of what keeps children safe in residential special schools. **Over half the children and young people in our survey told us that staff supervision and advice kept them safe.** As one person put it, 'There is not anything that is dangerous about it – the staff do their utmost to keep us safe.' Another told us how risk assessments are done around

the school to keep children safe: 'It is checked out by two men who do health and safety'.

We already know from the last question that fire is something that children in residential special schools see as a big danger, and so **fire drills and fire alarms came second only to staff in keeping children safe at school.**

Although not many children had told us they thought they were in danger from people getting into their school, 21% said that the security of the school buildings kept them safe. **Security of buildings in residential special schools is good enough to stop many children feeling that people getting into the school is a danger to them.**

Some children had told us that one of the big dangers at school was what might happen because of their own behaviour. From the chart we can see that 15% of children and young people thought that one of the main things keeping them safe was **their own knowledge of dangers and being responsible for keeping themselves out of danger.**





Here are examples of what children wrote about things that keep them safe at their residential special school.

'The cameras and the staff watching me, and the staff always give me advice'

'Fences, cameras, lights, pupil support team'

'Swipe codes on doors'

'No one will get you or take you away because of the gates'

'We have lots of fire exits and we are told what to do if there is a fire. We have security doors and cameras so people can't get in'

'Fire alarms, signs, lots of staff'

'Non-bullying'

'Restraining us to stop us hurting ourself'

'Risk assessments. Staff talk to us about these'

'Staff and mates'

'I always have a carer with me to keep me safe'

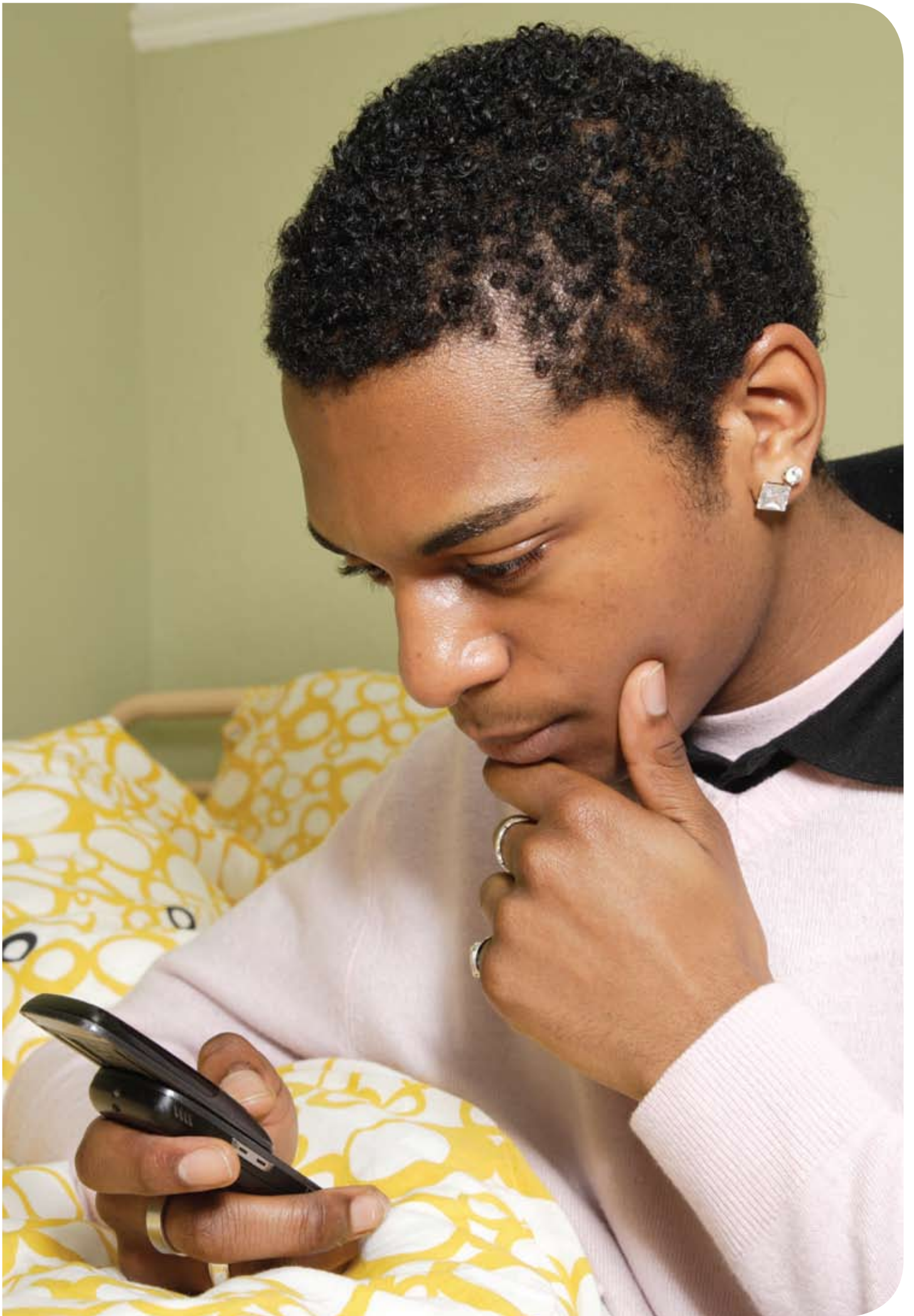
'The staff stay by you'

'Travel training. I am taught how to use the underground and who to ask if I need help, and how to explain I am deaf but can write questions'

'The staff make sure the building is secure, which is good'

'If you feel like walking off, staff intervene to try and stop you'

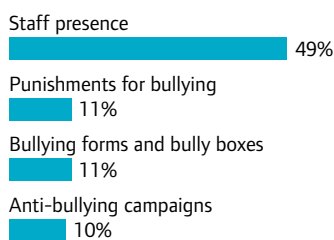
**'There is not anything that is dangerous about it – the staff do their utmost to keep us safe'**



# What stops bullying in residential special schools?

After fire, bullying was the biggest danger children in residential special schools told us about. Here are the top answers to our question about what really works to stop bullying in residential special schools.

What stops bullying in residential special schools?  
(percentages of the 306 children answering the question)



Almost half the children told us that **staff being around is one of the main things that stops bullying** at a residential special school: ‘staff constantly monitor both bullies and the victims and try to help both’; ‘there is a good staff to pupil ratio and staff are always on the lookout for bullying’; ‘my carers talk to me about hurting people and will not let other people hurt me’; ‘when you tell the teacher and they write it down on a bullying form and then they deal with it the next day’. Part of what staff do is to **punish people for bullying**; ‘severe punishments like exclusion’.

**Ways for children to report bullying**, like bully boxes and forms, are important, as are schools holding **anti-bullying projects and campaigns**. Some children wrote about the special systems their school had set up to deal with bullying: ‘we have an anti-bullying thing that stops bullying’; ‘anti-bullying week and the staff always listen to anything you say’; ‘anti-bullying programme, bully form, talking to somebody, bully boxes for ideas’; ‘kicking them out and anti-bullying survey’; ‘school council, bullying slips, buddy group’; ‘the bullies get put in front of a bullying committee’; ‘stoppers look out’; ‘pink bullying sheets’.

A few children did tell us that bullying was a problem and that the staff hadn’t managed to deal with it enough yet: ‘nothing works in this school to stop bullying’; ‘the children wait until the staff are not looking’. One told us that help needed to come from outside their school: ‘The police can help if you’re bullied.’

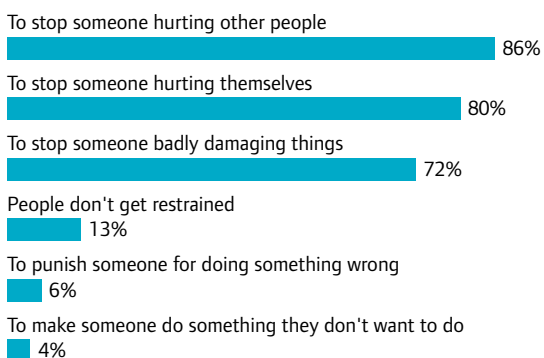
‘Staff constantly monitor both bullies and the victims and try to help both’

# Restraint

Children in residential special schools can be physically restrained by staff if this is to stop them injuring themselves or other people, to stop them doing serious damage to property, or to stop a breakdown in control in the school. The national minimum standards for residential special schools – the rules the schools have to follow – say that restraint is not to be used to punish, nor to make children do what they are told, nor to control bad behaviour if injury to someone or serious damage to property is unlikely.<sup>1</sup>

We asked the children and young people to tell us about what restraint was used for in their schools. This time we listed possible answers from the national minimum standards, so that we could check what children told us against what the rules say about using restraint.

When is physical restraint used in residential special schools? (percentages of the 327 children answering the question)



**The three main uses of restraint were the ones the rules say are OK – to stop a child injuring themselves or someone else, or to stop them badly damaging property.** Thirteen per cent of the children told us that restraint hadn't been used in their school at all while they had been there.

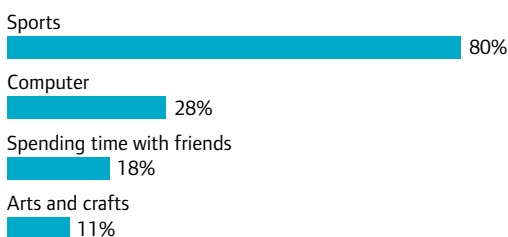
It is worrying, though, that **6% of the children said that physical restraint had been used as a punishment, and 4% that physical restraint had been used to make children do something they didn't want to do.** The national minimum standards say that restraint shouldn't be used for these things.



# Hobbies and activities

Children told us about the hobbies and activities they did at their residential special schools. The chart shows the main answers.

What hobbies or activities do children do at school?  
(percentages of the 317 children answering the question)



**Sports of various kinds were the main spare time activity at residential special school.** Sports included football, swimming, bowling, dodge ball, rugby, skating, trampolining, cycling, horse riding, cricket and archery.

**Using the computer** included two main activities: using the internet and playing computer games. **Spending time with friends** included being part of a formal group such as scouts, guides or cadets; group activities like Laser Quest; playing games together like board games or hide and seek; as well as just 'hanging out with friends'. Other activities, which were listed by fewer than one in 10 children, included music and drama.

We asked children whether there were any other hobbies or activities that they would like to do while living at school, but could not do at the moment. **Over a third of the 288 children who answered this question said there was nothing more they wanted to do as a hobby or activity at school.** They were happy with what they were already able to do at school. As one person wrote, 'I am happy enough with all the things that I can do at school.'

The children who did want to do extra hobbies or activities gave us a mixed list of suggestions. **There was no one activity that was popular enough to be suggested by as many as one in 10 children.** Examples of the extra activities that children mentioned were quad biking, go-karting, cycling, paintballing, more outings to places like cinemas and theme parks, fishing, motor biking, ice skating, swimming and rock climbing. Some suggestions were for activities that children wanted to do more often, others

were for activities – like swimming or horse riding – that were available in some schools but not theirs.

Some children simply wanted to try something new and interesting: 'singing club would be cool'; 'paintballing because I have never had the chance to do it before'. A few had a special reason for wanting to do a particular activity, for example: 'kick boxing to let out my anger by punching a bag instead of a person'. One wrote about how they had not been able to carry on their hobby when they moved to a new unit in the same school: 'golf, because I have moved to the older residential unit and they do not do it there'. A few told us about things they would like to try, but thought the school might not be able to let them do. One person said they would like to go bike riding but thought the school wouldn't allow this 'because of health and safety, knee pads and helmet'. Another wrote: 'I would like to go to a concert but I don't know whether they could take me or not.'

**'I would like to go to a concert but I don't know whether they could take me or not'**

# Keeping healthy

There were two main answers to our question about what keeps you healthy in a residential special school from the 324 children who answered this question. **Top came eating a healthy diet, which 86% told us kept them healthy, followed by exercise, which 51% told us kept them healthy.** No other answer came near these two, and no other answer came from as many as one in 10 children. The third most usual answer only came from 2% of the children – that was drinking plenty of water.

Children described the combination of a healthy diet and plenty of exercise: ‘we have lots of fruit and veg and lots of exercise’; ‘we have games and exercise and we have healthy food’; ‘I am healthy, I keep healthy by playing and eating spaghetti bolognese’. Some were not quite so happy with their diet though: ‘the council banned us from eating junk food’; ‘vegetables I don’t like’.

We went on to ask children if there was anything at their residential special school that stopped them being healthy. We had answers to this question from 251 children. **The top answer, from 63% of the children, was that nothing stopped them being healthy at their school.** The only other answer that came from more than one in 10 children was about diet. **One in four children (25%) said that eating junk food stopped them from being healthy at school.** In some schools, although the main diet was healthy, children accepted that they added unhealthy junk food to it themselves: ‘junk food when I go down to the shop’; ‘the easiness of buying sweets and drinks (basically junk food)’.

A few children wrote about other things that they thought sometimes stopped them being healthy at school. This might be about not doing exercise sometimes ‘when it is raining and we can’t go outside’ or on ‘snowy days because you can’t get out to play football and other games’, or just ‘being lazy’. Very few children wrote about things other than diet or exercise. Smoking was mentioned by just 2% of the children, and two children wrote about risks from other people’s poor hygiene: ‘other people not washing their hands’.

‘The council banned us from eating junk food’





### **Staff of the Children's Rights Director**

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