

9. Participants from starting school to age 14: school experiences

9.1 Key findings

Box 9.1: Key findings for participants aged from starting school to 14: school experiences

- Based on the LF data, at baseline, 65% of participants attended school in a mainstream class, with 21% in a special school and 12% in a support class. The percentage in a mainstream class declines with school year, from 75% for K-2, to 64% for years 3-6, and 42% for years 7-10. The percentage also varies considerably by disability: for example, only 38% of children with an intellectual disability or Down syndrome attend school in a mainstream class, compared to almost 90% of children with a sensory disability, developmental delay, or global developmental delay. The percentage in a mainstream class declines with decreasing level of function.
- Parents and carers report that children attending a special school are more likely to feel genuinely included and happy at school. Parents and carers of children at a special school also report having better knowledge of their child's goals at school and tend to be more satisfied that the school listens to them in relation to their child's education.
- However, analysis of the impact of educational setting on other outcomes reveals that children enrolled in a support class or special school are less likely to be developing independence, to have a genuine say in decisions about themselves, to make friends outside the family, and to spend time with friends without an adult present. Hence from a broader perspective, participation in mainstream education confers benefits on independence, relationships, and social participation that are less likely to be experienced by children attending a special school.
- Longitudinal analysis of LF data reveals a significant improvement in the percentage of parents/carers who say they know their child's goals at school: from 69% at baseline to 80% approximately one year later. Improvement tended to be greater for children attending a special school.
- Longitudinal analysis of SF data reveals that the percentage of children attending school in a mainstream class has declined from 54.4% at baseline to 52.5% at review. Children with lower level of function, older children, those with an intellectual disability, and those living in public housing, were more likely to move out of a mainstream class. Conversely, participants in outer regional and remote areas were less likely to move out of a mainstream class compared to those in major cities. Children's experiences at school were also associated with moving out of a mainstream class: the more positive the child's experiences at school at baseline, such as learning at school and being involved in co-curricular activities, the less likely the child was to move out of a mainstream class.

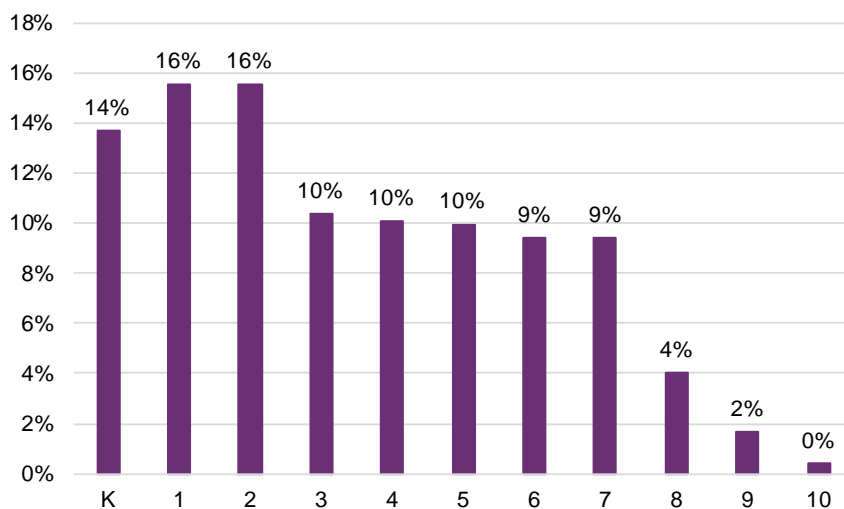
9.2 Baseline results

In this section we focus on results related to education and school experiences, concentrating mainly on the LF data. The LF 2016 and 2017 cohorts combined baseline for starting school to age 14 has 1092 participants.

9.2.1 School attendance and type of school/class

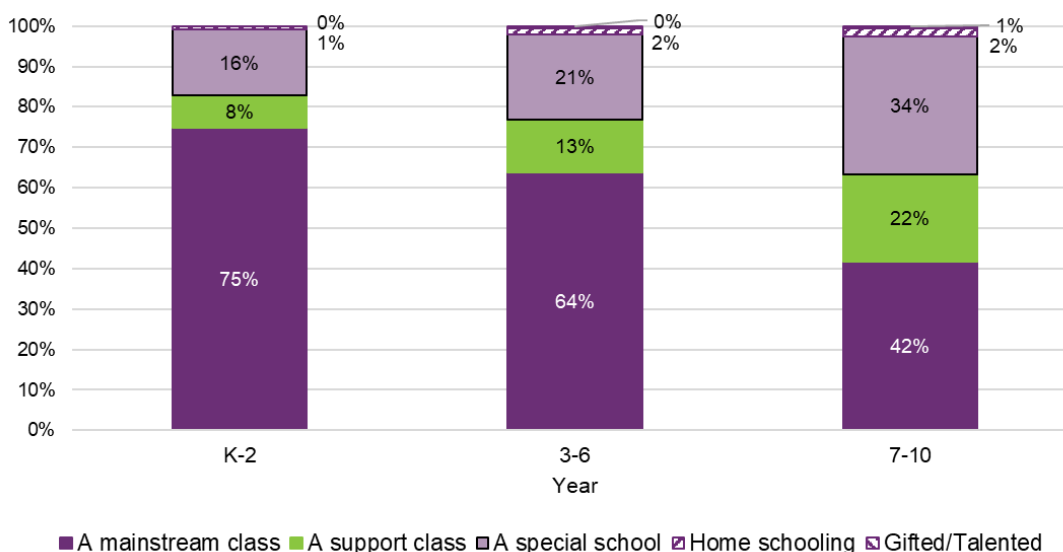
1026 participants, or 94% of the baseline cohort, were attending school at the time of the interview. 85% of those who attended school were in the primary school years of kindergarten (or equivalent) to Year 6, with 15% in the high school years 7 to 10. The distribution by year is shown in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Participants from starting school to age 14 – school attendance by Year



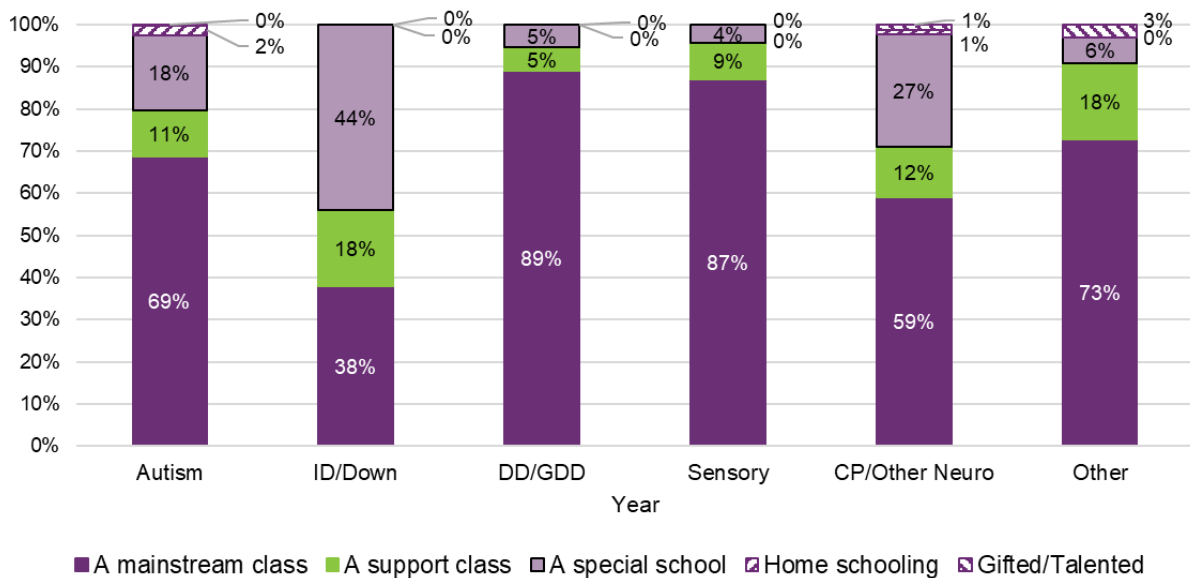
About two-thirds (65%) of participants attended school in a mainstream class, with 21% in a special school and 12% in a support class. Figure 9.2 shows how the percentage in a mainstream class declines with school year, from 75% in early primary years K-2, to 64% in later primary years 3-6, and 42% in high school years 7-10.

Figure 9.2 Participants from starting school to age 14 – educational setting by school year group



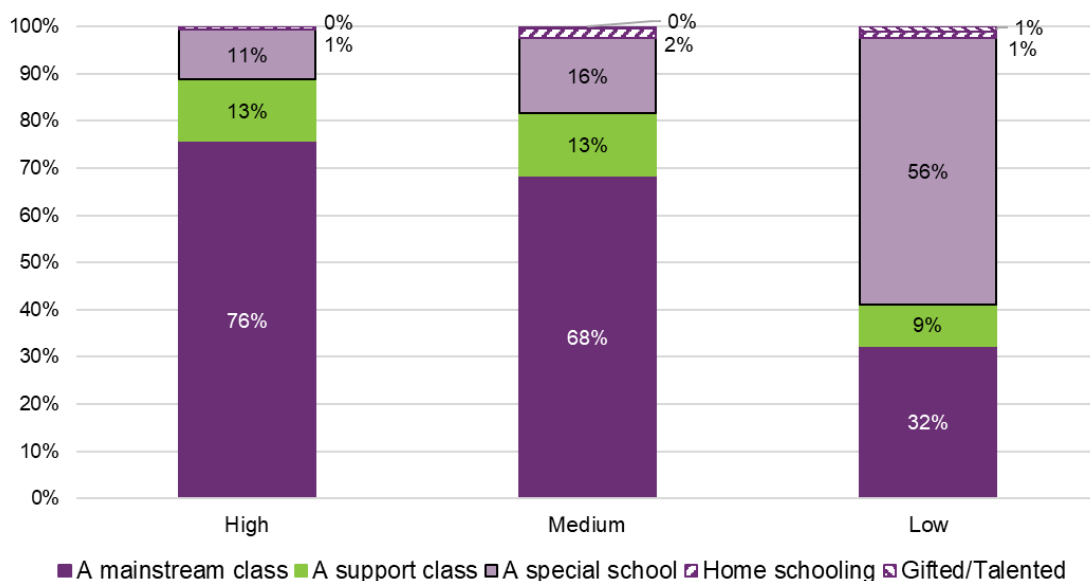
Attendance in a mainstream class also varies by disability, as shown in Figure 9.3. Almost 90% of children with developmental delay, global developmental delay or a sensory disability are in a mainstream class, compared to only 38% of children with an intellectual disability or Down syndrome. The percentage in a special school is higher than the overall percentage (21%) for children with an intellectual disability or Down syndrome (44%) and cerebral palsy/other neurological (27%).

Figure 9.3 Participants from starting school to age 14 – educational setting by disability



By level of function, there is a slight difference between participants with high and medium level of function, with 76% in the high function group attending school in a mainstream class compared to 68% in the medium function group. For participants with low level of function the percentage in a mainstream class (32%) is less than half of that for participants in the other two level of function groups. The distributions are shown in Figure 9.4.

Figure 9.4 Participants from starting school to age 14 – educational setting by level of function



9.2.2 Choice of school

The LF asks whether the child’s school is the parent/carer’s first choice, and whether there has been pressure to place the child in a particular class or school.

Where the child is in a mainstream class, the school is much more likely to have been the parent/carer’s first choice amongst multiple options (69% of cases) than if the child is in a support class (46%) or special school (44%). Pressure to place the child in a particular class or school is more likely to have been felt where the child is in a support class (28%) or special school (29%) than when they are in a mainstream class (19%). These results are illustrated in Figure 9.5 and Figure 9.6.

Figure 9.5 Participants from starting school to age 14 – my child’s school is my school of first choice

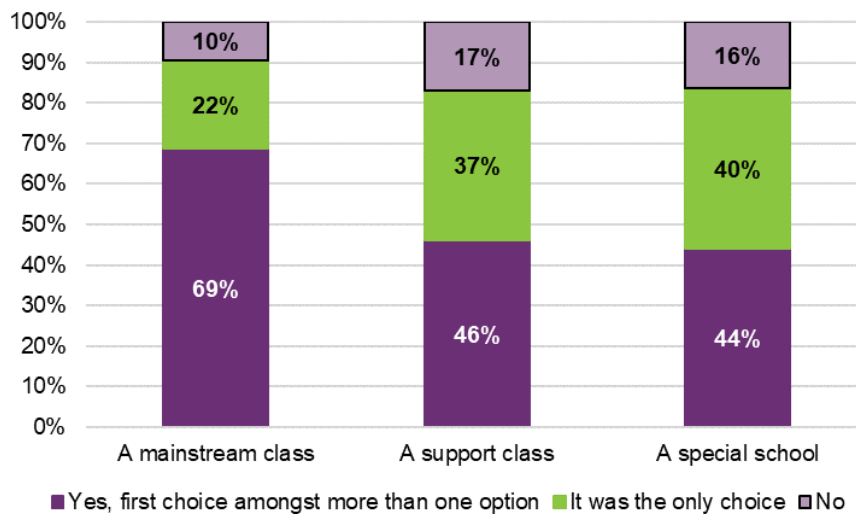
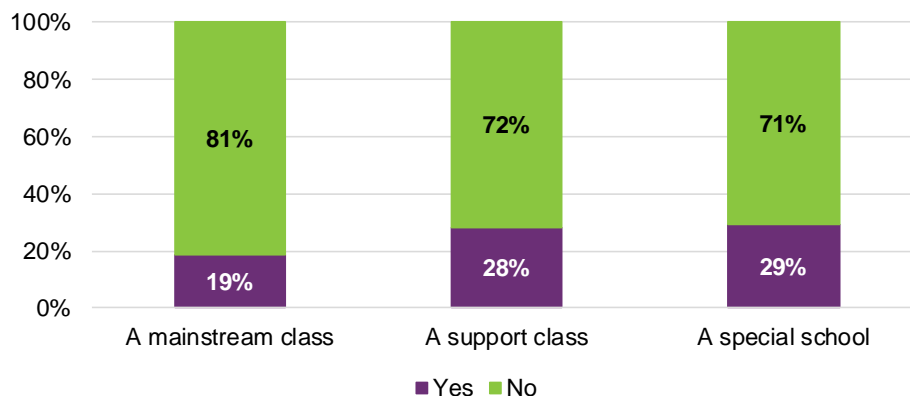


Figure 9.6 Participants from starting school to age 14 – have you had pressure to place your child in a particular class or school?



9.2.3 Children’s goals at school

The LF asks whether the parent/carer knows the child’s goals at school, and if they do, whether they think their child’s education is matched to those goals.

In this area, children attending a special school seem to fare better than those in mainstream settings. Figure 9.7 shows that 85% of parents/carers of children in a special school know their child’s goals at school, compared to 74-75% for children in a mainstream class or

support class³⁵. This may reflect that in a regular class, discussion of goals is less likely. Figure 9.8 shows that amongst parents/carers who know their child's goals, the proportion who think their child's education is matched to those goals is higher where the child is in a special school (45%) than where they are in a mainstream class (31%) or support class (32%). The differences are statistically significant.

Figure 9.7 Participants from starting school to age 14 – do you know your child's goals at school?

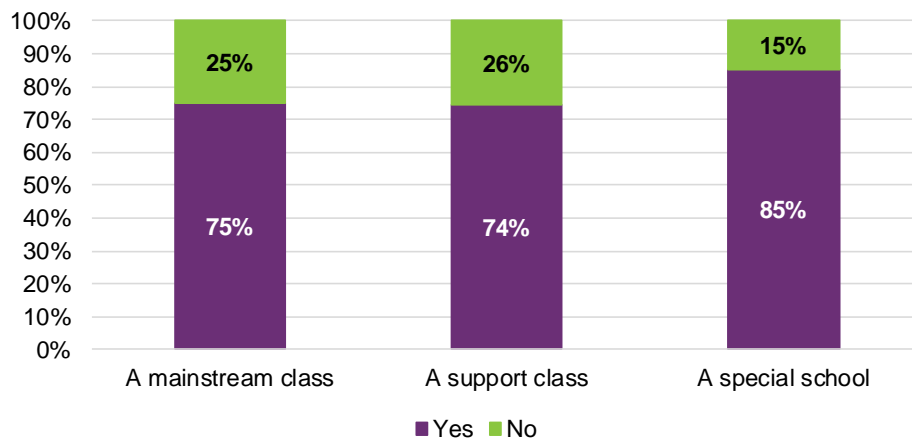
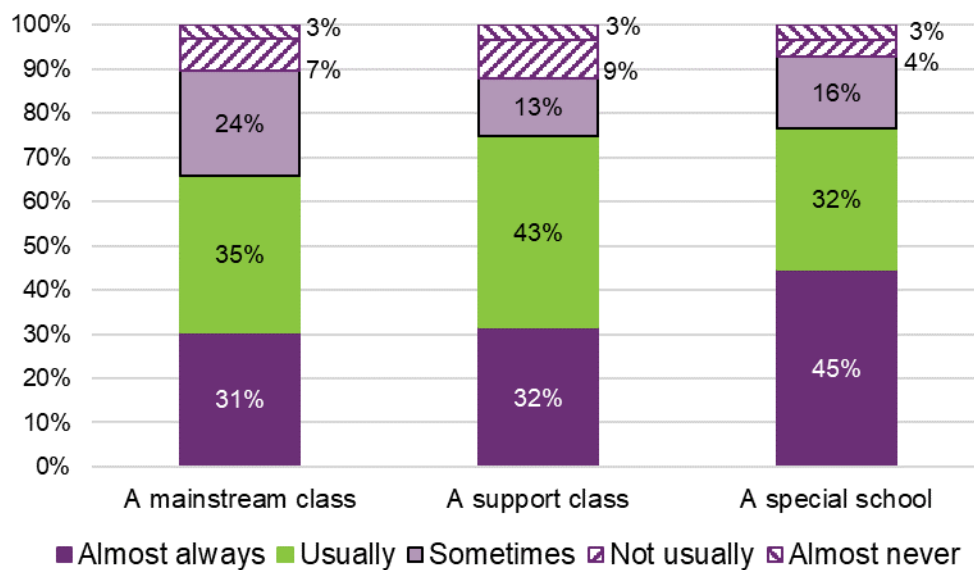


Figure 9.8 Participants from starting school to age 14 – do you think that your child's education is matched to those goals?



Whether these findings reflect a feature of mainstream schools that would be experienced also by students without a disability, or whether they reflect a different experience for students with a disability in mainstream schools, is unknown. Data on the experience of students without a disability would be required to distinguish between these possibilities.

³⁵ See Section 9.2.6 for multiple logistic regression analysis of this question.

9.2.4 Children's experiences at school

The LF includes a number of questions aimed at discovering how positive the school experience has been for the child, and levels of inclusion in different areas.

Figure 9.9, Figure 9.10 and Figure 9.11 summarise response distributions for the three questions seeking parent/carer views on whether the child is learning, genuinely included and happy at school.

Figure 9.9 Participants from starting school to age 14 – I think that my child is learning at school

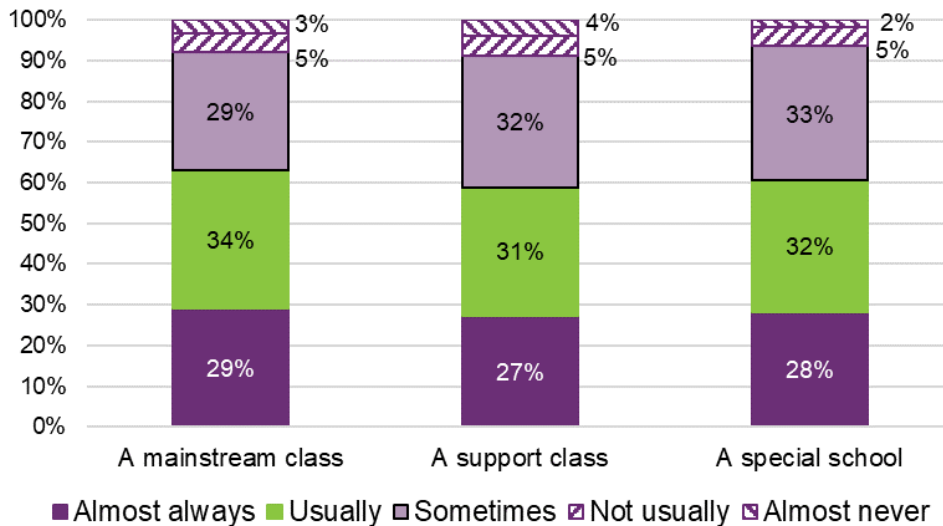


Figure 9.10 Participants from starting school to age 14 – I think that my child is genuinely included at school

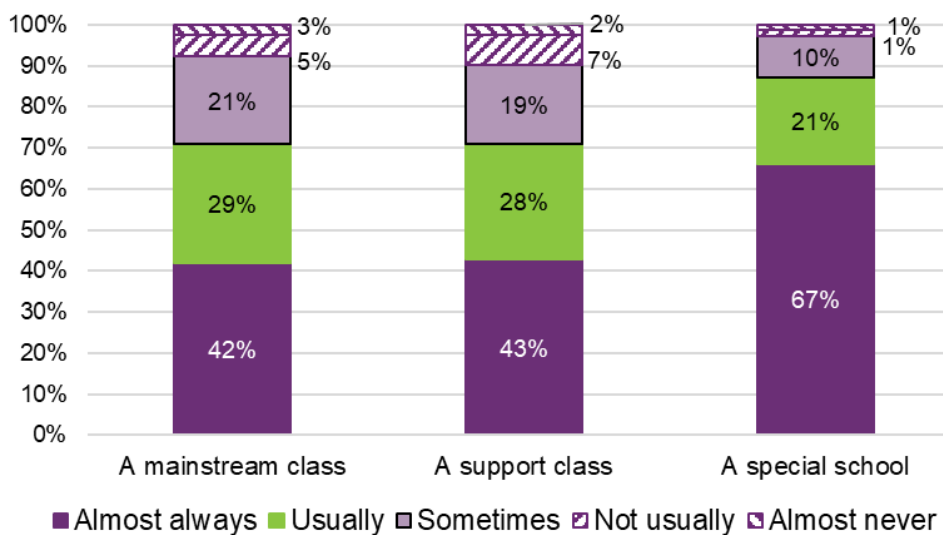


Figure 9.11 Participants from starting school to age 14 – I think that my child is happy at school

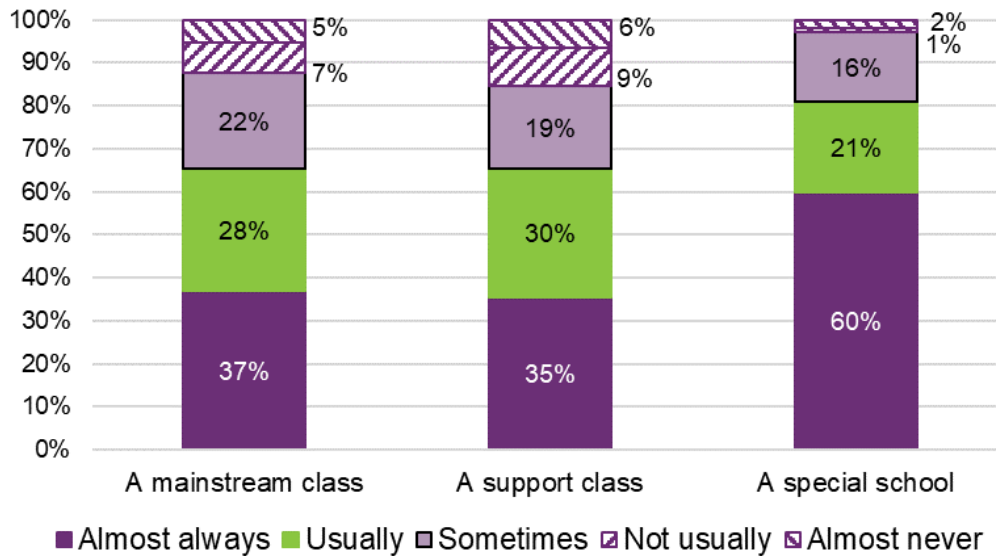


Figure 9.9 indicates that experiences of learning at school are similar across educational settings, with 27-29% thought to be almost always learning and 31-34% usually learning at school. Statistically there is no significant difference.

By contrast, Figure 9.10 and Figure 9.11 reveal that children attending a special school are more likely to be genuinely included, and to be happy at school, than those in mainstream settings. For example, 67% of children in a special school are thought to be almost always genuinely included compared with 42-43% of children in a mainstream or support class, and 60% of children in a special school are thought to be almost always happy compared with 35-37% of children in a mainstream or support class. The differences are highly statistically significant³⁶.

The LF also asks whether the child has ever sat a NAPLAN test, and if not, the reason for not sitting. 36% of children had not sat a NAPLAN test simply because they had not yet been in a NAPLAN test year. Excluding these participants, Figure 9.12 shows the percentages sitting the test and those not sitting due to exemption, absence, or the parent/carer or school not wanting the child to sit, by type of class/school.

³⁶ See section 9.2.6 for multiple logistic regression analysis of these questions.

Figure 9.12 Participants from starting school to age 14 – has your child ever sat a NAPLAN test?

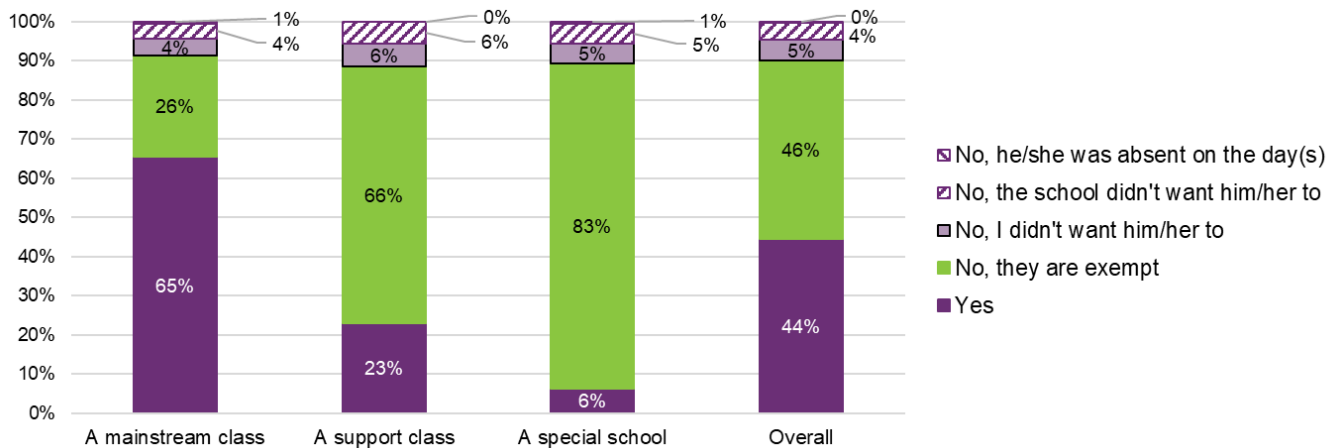
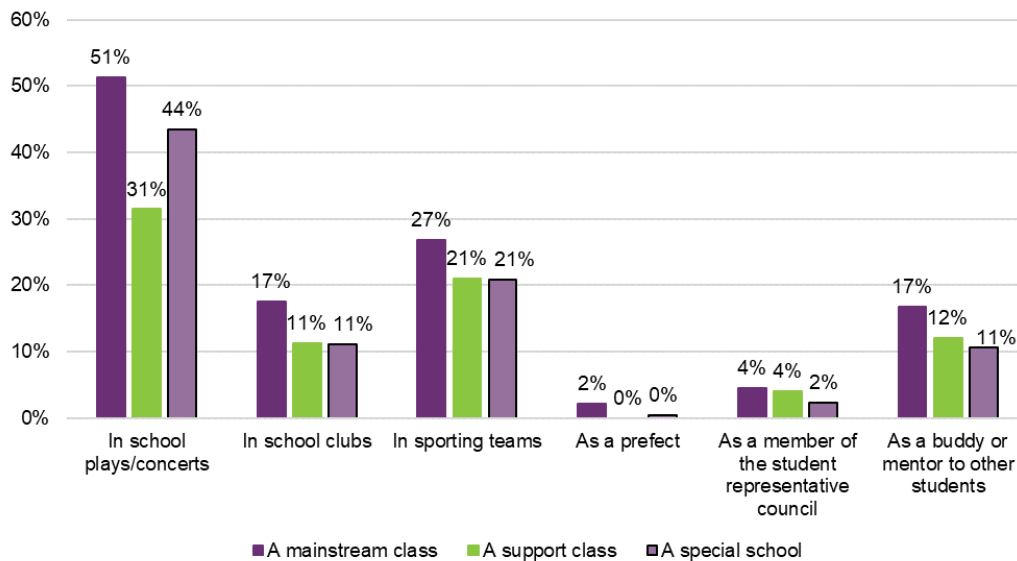


Figure 9.12 shows that overall 44% of participants had sat a NAPLAN test and 46% were exempt. There are two main reasons for a child to be granted exemption from sitting a NAPLAN test: either a language other than English or a disability. Students granted exemption on the grounds of disability are those “with significant intellectual disability and/or those with significant co-existing conditions which severely limit their capacity to participate in the tests”. Hence it is unsurprising that the exemption rate increases from 26% for children in a mainstream class, to 66% for those in a support class, and 83% for those in a special school. By contrast, the nationwide percent exempt in 2017 is around 2%.

Looking at the percentage not sitting NAPLAN for reasons other than exemption, in around 5% of cases the parent/carer did not want the child to sit, and in another 4% of cases the parent/carer reported that the school did not want the child to sit. Very few children were reported as being genuinely absent on the day, although presumably these other reasons were recorded as absences (or possibly withdrawals, where the parent/carer objects to the testing on religious or other grounds). Altogether, 10% of children missed the test due to reasons other than exemption – 9% for those in a mainstream class and 11% for those in a support class or in a special school. Nationally in 2017, the percentage absent or withdrawn averages around 5% for the primary school years 3 and 5, around 5.5% for year 7, and around 8.5% for year 9.

Participation in co-curricular activities is also investigated in the LF. As shown in Figure 9.13, participation was lower across all activities for children in a support class or special school, compare to those in a mainstream class. The low participation in school leadership positions may partly reflect the relatively young age distribution of participants.

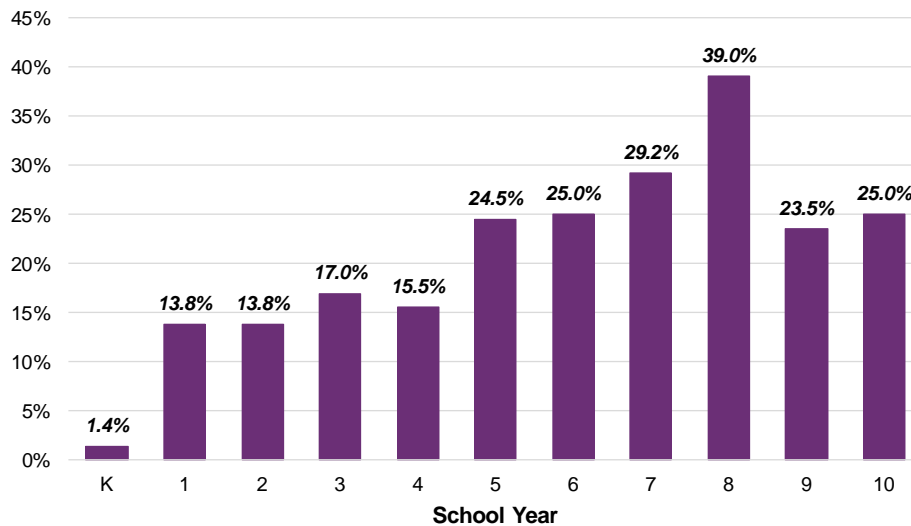
Figure 9.13 Participants from starting school to age 14 – has your child been involved in the following co-curricular activities at school?



The LF asks whether the child has ever been suspended from school.

Overall, 17% of participants had ever been suspended. Figure 9.14 shows the percentages ever suspended by school year.

Figure 9.14 Participants from starting school to age 14 – ever suspended by school year



The percentages shown in Figure 9.14 seem high. Even in the early primary years 1-2, approximately 14% of parents/carers report that their child has ever been suspended, and this rises to 39% for year 8 students³⁷. Available State/Territory benchmarks report statistics on a calendar year basis, and most only report on a number of suspensions, rather than a number of students suspended, basis. Since the same student can be suspended more than once, number of suspensions will be higher than number of students suspended. The NSW

³⁷ Only 21 children are in year 9 or 10 – for the combined year 8 to 10 group, the percentage ever suspended is 34%.

Department of Education reports public school statistics on both bases, yielding an average of 1.55 suspensions per student suspended for 2016.

Data on short (up to four school days) or long (five to 20 school days) suspensions and expulsions for NSW public schools in 2016 are shown in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Suspensions and expulsions in NSW public schools, 2016

Year	Total enrolments in mid-year census	Number of students suspended	Percentage of student enrolment	Number of suspensions	Suspensions per student suspended
K-6	477,098	10,320	2.2%		
7-10	217,065	27,864	12.8%		
11-12	87,267	4,096	4.7%		
All Grades	781,430	42,280	5.4%	65,612	1.55
K-10	694,163	38,184	5.5%		
Including expulsions, all Grades					
	781,430	42,603	5.5%		

Since the NSW statistics are on a school (calendar) year basis, it is not possible to directly compare them to the NDIS results, which are on an “ever suspended” basis. However, the early primary years should be roughly comparable, and the 14% for NDIS participants in years 1 and 2 does seem high compare to a 2.2% yearly suspension rate for K-6 students. Rates may vary by State/Territory also, and this has not yet been fully investigated.

Figure 9.15 shows suspensions by year grouping and type of class/school, including home schooled children.

Figure 9.15 Participants from starting school to age 14 – ever suspended by year and type of class/school

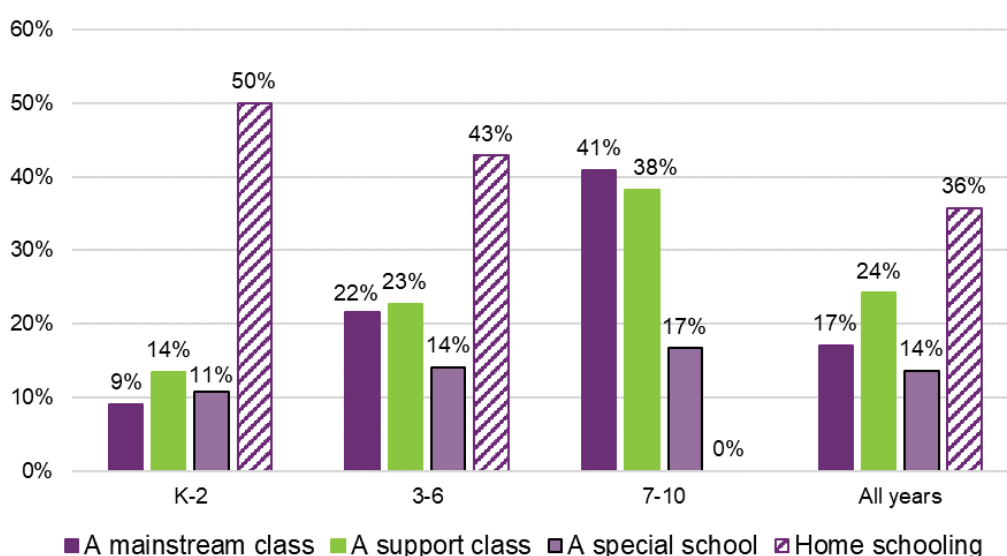


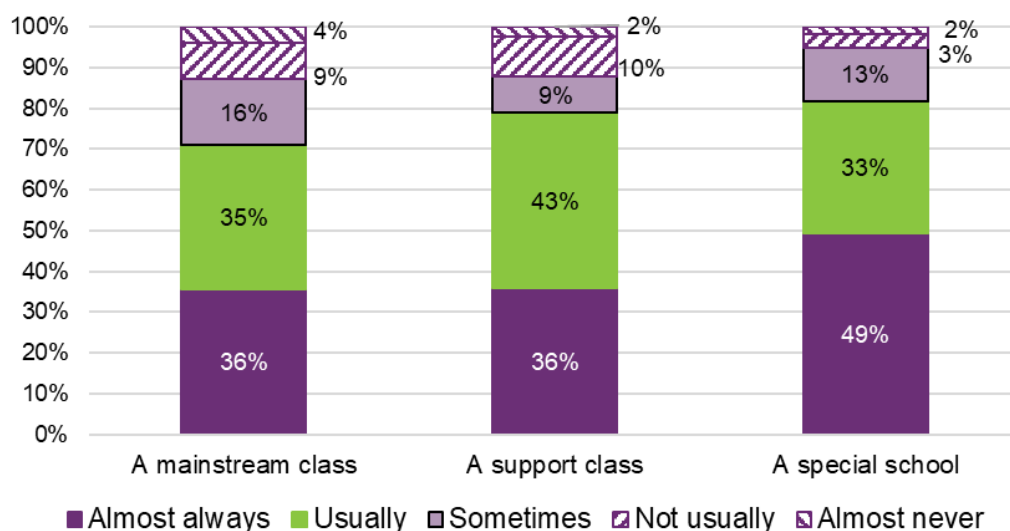
Figure 9.15 shows an overall higher rate of ever being suspended for children in a support class compared to other school settings (24% compared to 17% for mainstream class and 14% for special school), due largely to the higher rate in K-2. For children in a special school, in K-2 the rate is intermediate between a mainstream class and a support class, but for years 3-6 and 7-10 the rate is much lower. The high rate for home schooled children

perhaps reflects the reason why they are being home schooled, but the numbers are very small (only 14 children).

9.2.5 Having a say in child’s education

Figure 9.16 shows how satisfied respondents are that their child’s school listens to them in relation to their child’s education.

Figure 9.16 Participants from starting school to age 14 – I am satisfied that my child’s school listens to me in relation to my child’s education



Again there is a significant difference between special schools and mainstream settings. For parents/carers of children in a special school, 49% think the school almost always listens to them, compared to 36% of parents/carers of children in either a mainstream or support class.

9.2.6 Factors associated with inclusion and happiness at school, and knowledge of child’s goals: multiple regression modelling

As noted above, children attending a special school were more likely to feel genuinely included, and to be happy at school, than those in mainstream settings. Parents/carers of children attending a special school were also more likely to know their child’s goals at school. Multiple logistic regression was used to investigate other factors that might impact on feelings of inclusion and happiness, and on knowledge of child’s goals. This also allows the impact of educational setting to be assessed after controlling for other factors in the model.

For inclusion and happiness, the probability of answering “Almost always” or “Usually” was modelled, whereas for knowledge of goals, the probability of answering “Yes” was modelled.

The models were selected using stepwise regression³⁸. Key drivers for these indicators are summarised in Table 9.2.

³⁸ R function “step” with default settings.

Table 9.2 Key drivers of positive school experiences and knowledge of child's goals

My child is genuinely included at school		My child is happy at school		Do you know your child's goals at school?	
Variable	Relationship	Variable	Relationship	Variable	Relationship
Participant attends a special school	↑	Participant attends a special school	↑	Participant attends a special school	↑
Participant has autism	↓	Participant has autism	↓	Child is at high school	↓
Participant has cerebral palsy or other neurological disability, developmental delay or global developmental delay, or a sensory disability	↑	Age	↓ with increasing age	Participant has low level of function	↑
Participant has high level of function	↑	CALD	↑		
		Child lives with people not related to them	↑		
		Child is developing functional, learning and coping skills	↑		
		Child is able to manage their emotions	↑		
		Child is learning at school	↑		
		Child participates in co-curricular activities	↑		
		Child has been suspended from school	↓		
		Child has no siblings	↓		

My child is genuinely included at school		My child is happy at school		Do you know your child's goals at school?	
Variable	Relationship	Variable	Relationship	Variable	Relationship
		Child does not get along with siblings	↓		
		Child fits into everyday family life	↑		

Key findings from Table 9.2 are discussed below.

Genuinely included at school

According to the final model, the probability of feeling genuinely included varies by educational setting, disability, and level of function. Controlling for other variables in the model, the estimated effects of each variable were:

- Educational setting: Children in a special school were significantly more likely than those in a mainstream class to feel genuinely included.
- Disability: Children with autism were the least likely to feel genuinely included. Children with cerebral palsy/another neurological disability, developmental delay/global developmental delay, or a sensory disability, were significantly more likely than children with autism to feel genuinely included.
- Level of function: Children with high level of function were the most likely to feel genuinely included, and those with medium level of function were least likely to feel genuinely included.

Happy at school (SF responses)

The item “I think my child is happy at school” is also included in the SF, allowing more in-depth regression modelling to be conducted for this question due to the larger quantity of data.

An ordinal logistic regression model fitted to the SF data revealed the following key findings:

- Educational setting: Children in a special school were significantly more likely than those in a mainstream class to feel happy at school.
- Age: Children aged five years or younger were much more likely to feel happy at school. There was a generally decreasing trend for participants aged six and over.
- Disability: Children with autism were the least likely to feel happy at school. Children with all other disabilities apart from the “other” category were significantly more likely than children with autism to feel genuinely included.
- Children from a CALD background are more likely to be happy at school;
- Children who live with people not related to them are more likely to be happy at school;
- Children developing functional, learning and coping skills, and those able to manage their emotions, are more likely to be happy at school;
- Children who are learning at school, and those who participate in co-curricular activities, are more likely to be happy at school. However children who have ever been suspended from school are less likely to be happy;

- Being happy at school is related to the child's family life. Those without siblings, and those who do not get along with their siblings, are less likely to be happy, and those who fit into everyday family life are more likely to be happy.

Knowledge of child's goals at school

According to the selected model, the probability that a child's parent or carer knows their goals at school varies by educational setting, school year group, and level of function. Controlling for other variables in the model, the estimated effects of each variable were:

- Educational setting: Parents/carers of children in a special school were significantly more likely than parents/carers of those in a mainstream class to know their child's goals at school.
- School year group: Parents/carers of year 7 to 10 high school children were significantly less likely to know their child's goals than parents/carers of children in years 3 to 6 of primary school.
- Level of function: Children with low level of function were significantly more likely to know their child's goals at school than children with high level of function.

9.3 Longitudinal results

9.3.1 LF

Reinterviews of the LF 2016 baseline cohort contribute to the analysis of longitudinal change. Of the 559 participants who contributed a "starting school to 14" questionnaire at baseline, 386 contributed a second questionnaire at review, a reinterview rate of 69%.

Changes in the "lifelong learning" domain

For the LF, a significant³⁹ change was observed for only one of the "lifelong learning" questions: "Do you know your child's goals at school?".

Overall this indicator improved between baseline, where 69% said they knew their child's goals, and review, where the percentage had increased to 80%.

Looking at transition rates for those who said "No" at baseline, the percentages changing to say "Yes" at review were:

- 68% overall;
- 66% for those in a mainstream class;
- 54% for those in a support class; and
- 88% for those attending a special school.

Some care should be taken in interpreting these results due to the small numbers in a support class and at a special school, however they do suggest greater improvement for children attending a special school.

³⁹ Using a test for marginal homogeneity and a significance level of 0.05. Includes participants who responded at both baseline and review (n=370 for this question).

9.3.2 SF

The percentage of children attending school in a mainstream class has declined by 2% between baseline and review. Multiple logistic regression was used to investigate how this change varied by participant characteristics and other measured outcomes.

The model found that children with lower level of function, older children, those with an intellectual disability, and those living in public housing, were more likely to move out of a mainstream class. Conversely, participants in outer regional and remote areas are less likely to move out of a mainstream class compared to those in major cities (possibly influenced by the lack of availability of special schools/support classes in more remote areas).

Children's experiences at school were also associated with moving out of a mainstream class. The more positive the child's experiences at school at baseline, such as learning at school and being involved in co-curricular activities, the less likely the child was to move out of a mainstream class.

9.4 Impact of type of school/class on other outcomes

The analysis presented in Sections 9.2 and 9.3 suggests that the educational experiences of children attending a special school are better in many respects than the experiences of children in a mainstream or support class. Children at a special school are more likely to feel genuinely included and happy at school and their parents/carers have better knowledge of their child's goals at school and tend to be more satisfied that the school listens to them in relation to their child's education.

However, this is not the full picture. Multiple regression analysis of the impact of educational setting on other outcomes reveals the following:

- Parents/carers of children enrolled in a support class in a mainstream school, or in a special school, are less likely to say that their child is becoming more independent.
- Parents/carers of children enrolled in a support class in a mainstream school, or in a special school, are less likely to say that their child has a genuine say in decisions about themselves.
- The percentage of children who can make friends with people outside the family is lower for children enrolled in a support class in a mainstream school, or in a special school.
- Children enrolled in a support class in a mainstream school, or in a special school, are less likely to spend time after school and on weekends with friends and/or in mainstream programs.
- Children enrolled in a support class in a mainstream school, or in a special school, are less likely to spend time with friends without an adult present.

Hence children enrolled in a support class or special school are less likely to be developing independence, to have a genuine say in decisions about themselves, to make friendships, and to participate in mainstream activities. Taking a broader view then, participation in mainstream education confers benefits related to independence, relationships, and social participation that are less likely to be experienced by children attending a special school.