

Building Fife's Future: Creating New Schools

Report of Pupil Survey

October – November 2008

Abstract

*An on-line questionnaire was used to obtain views of pupils about school buildings. It found that pupils in the newest schools use more positive language to describe their school than pupils in school buildings in need of attention. The results suggest that pupils highly value their **school sports facilities, dinner halls, locker areas, libraries, playgrounds, common rooms and social areas**, and that **toilets** cause them some concern. It is recommended that these areas of school design be examined in-depth at a creative engagement event and in a design brief to be prepared for new and refurbished secondary schools in Fife.*

Background

Over the next ten years, Fife Council intends to build three new Secondary Schools and to refurbish others. A design brief will outline the minimum standards expected of these buildings and include suggestions and ideas to ensure that Fife's future schools are ideal for 21st century education and the curriculum for excellence. The users of schools – primarily pupils – have valuable insights about their current buildings and may also have ideas for what would create an excellent learning and teaching environment.

Methodology

Eight secondary schools in Fife were invited to take part in an on-line survey. Of the schools invited, 2 had been re-built within the last 5 years (Beath High, Queen Anne), 1 had been re-furbished within the last 5 years (Bell Baxter), and 4 had been deemed by Fife Council to be currently in need of re-build or re-furbishment (Auchmuty, Dunfermline, Madras and Viewforth). The final school invited to participate - Kirkcaldy High - was substantially refurbished in 1994. Kirkcaldy High chose not to participate in the pupil survey.



The on-line survey was attractively web-designed in order to be eye-catching and more engaging for young people. Meetings were arranged with each participating school to discuss how they would make class time available for pupils to log on and complete the survey. The survey ran from 6 October until 15 November. Due to the 2 week October holiday, this gave schools a four week period to take part.

Illustration from on-line pupil survey by Joanna Boyce reproduced courtesy of Lunaria Design

Response rate

Overall, there was a 32% response rate to the pupil survey. With a target population of around 10,000 pupils, a 20% response rate would have given us a high level of confidence that the results accurately reflect the views of pupils. We have exceeded this and so can have a high level confidence in

the results of this survey. When we break the results down into the seven participating schools, we can have a high level of confidence that the results for Auchmuty, Beath, Dunfermline and Viewforth are representative of the views of pupils at those schools. We should be more cautious about the results for Bell Baxter, Madras and Queen Anne, where the results might only be indicative of the views of some pupils.

School	No. pupils	No. respondents	Response rate
All 7 schools	9495	3079	32%
Auchmuty High	1236	604	49%
Beath High	1201	533	44%
Bell Baxter High	1817	270	15%
Dunfermline High	1607	1065	66%
Madras College	1621	167	10%
Queen Anne High	1673	221	13%
Viewforth High	340	214	63%

Table 1

Description of the respondents

As Chart 1 shows, pupils who took part in the survey came from across all years, with the largest number (679) being from S2.

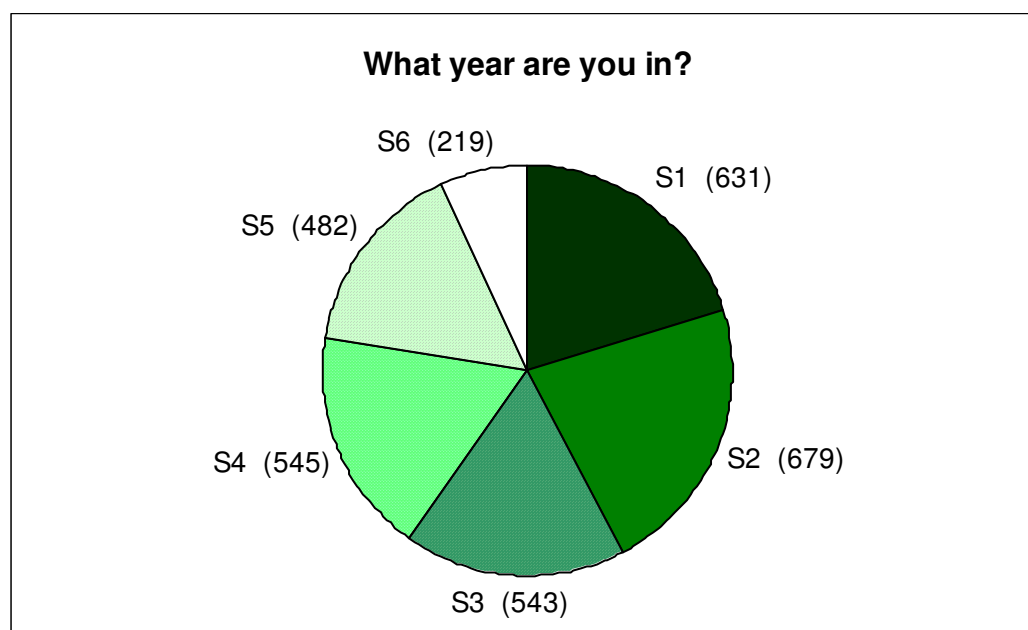


Chart 1

Chart 2 shows the responses by year group in each of the seven participating schools. Auchmuty, Beath and Dunfermline had a good spread of participants across the years. Bell Baxter had very low participation from S2 and S6, Madras had no participation from S1, Queen Anne had no participation from S4, S5 or S6 and Viewforth had very low participation from S5 and S6.

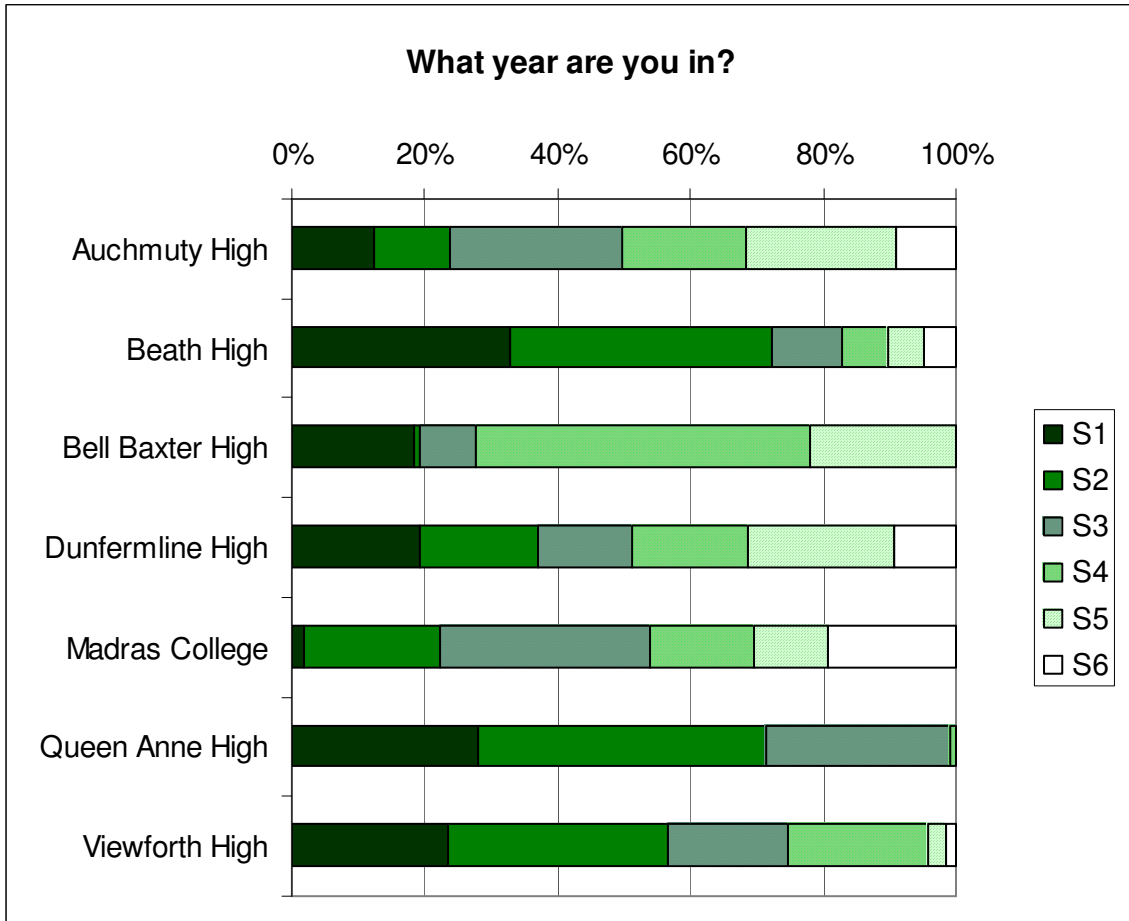


Chart 2

Gender of respondents

There was a fairly even split of males and females taking part in the survey, as Chart 3 shows. This is true of all the schools participating.

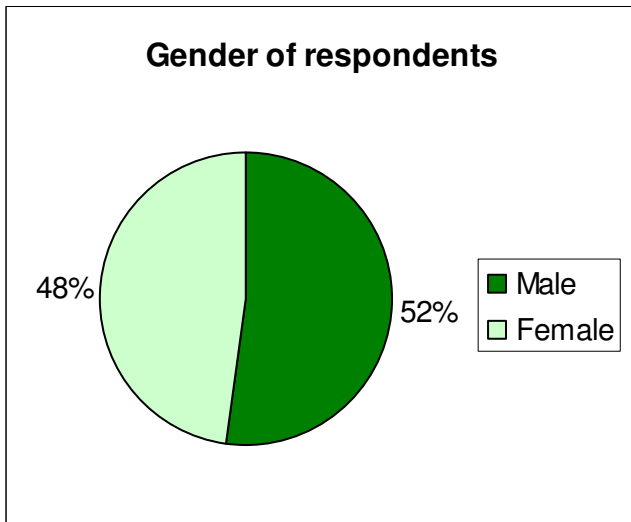


Chart 3

Results

Do you like your school building?

Overall, 47% of pupils said that they liked their school building. This varied from 15% at Auchmuty to 93% at Queen Anne. Chart 4 shows the results for all schools.

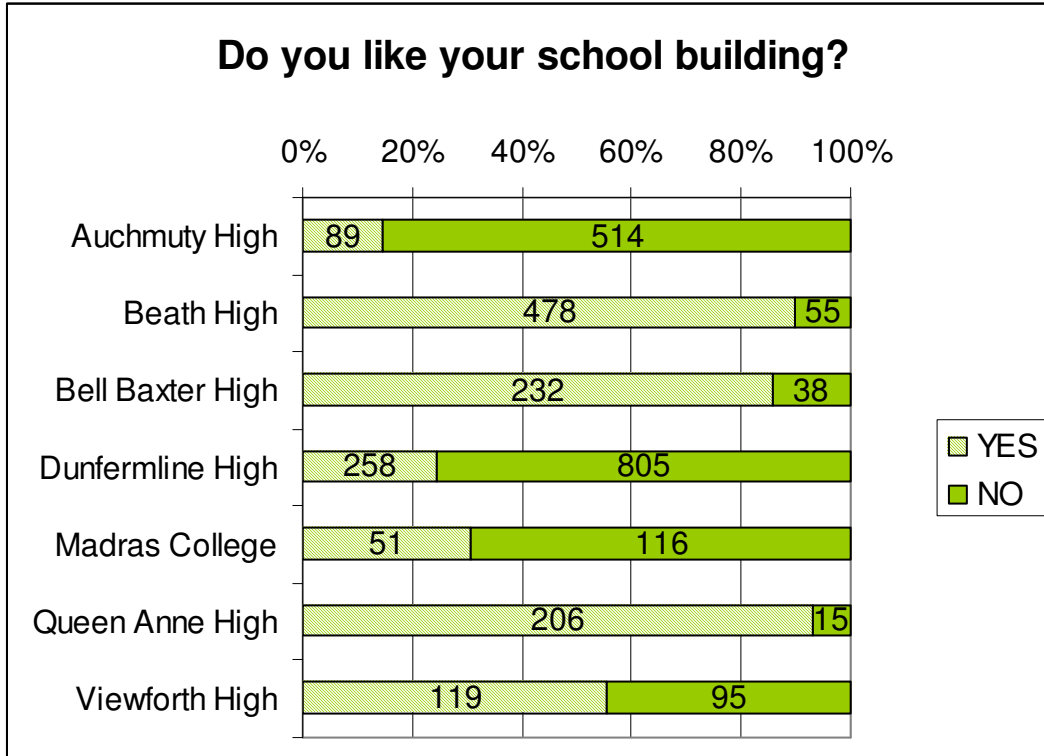


Chart 4

Words to describe the school building

Pupils were asked to choose three words from a list that they thought best described their school building. There were equal numbers of positive and negative adjectives and a number of neutral adjectives.

The results are shown in Table 2. Pupils in the newest schools in the sample (Beath, Bell Baxter and Queen Anne) were more likely to choose positive words. In contrast, pupils in the older schools (Auchmuty, Dunfermline and Viewforth) were more likely to choose negative adjectives. Pupils from Auchmuty and Madras chose the most negative words.

Which words would you use to describe your school building?				
School	1	2	3	4
Auchmuty High	Old	Ugly	Boring	Depressing
Beath High	New	Okay	Safe	Fine
Bell Baxter High	Okay	Safe	New	Fine
Dunfermline High	Old	Run-down	Okay	Dirty
Madras College	Old	Run-down	Neglected	Dirty
Queen Anne High	New	Safe	Okay	Interesting
Viewforth	Old	Okay	Safe	Ugly & Fine (equal)

Table 2

Pupils were then asked to use their own words to describe their school building. The most common words are shown below, in order. The range of words reflects the survey response rate within each school.

Auchmuty High	Fish tank, rubbish, boring, old, dull, big, crap, horrible
Beath High	Cool, big, okay, modern, clean, alright, fantastic, good, safe
Bell Baxter High	Modern, big, okay
Dunfermline High	Scaffy, dull, boring, old, horrible, okay, smelly, run-down, cold
Madras College	Rubbish, old, crap
Queen Anne High	Big, cool, good, modern, okay, clean, new, amazing, nice
Viewforth High	Old, small, alright, big, boring, cool, okay

Table 3

Most liked spaces in school

Pupils were also asked about spaces they most liked in their school. Table 4 shows that sports facilities, dinner halls, locker areas, libraries and playgrounds tend to be pupils' favourite spaces.

The most liked spaces in the school		
School	1	2
Auchmuty High	Cafeteria / Dinner hall	Sports hall
Beath High	Sports hall	Sports pitches
Bell Baxter High	Sports hall	Cafeteria / Dinner hall
Dunfermline High	Library	Sports pitches
Madras College	Locker areas	Outside / playground
Queen Anne High	Sports hall	Locker areas
Viewforth	Sports pitches	Sports hall

Table 4

Pupils were asked if they had a favourite place to relax and socialise at school. Table 5 shows the most commonly mentioned places in each school.

Favourite places to relax			
Auchmuty High	dinner hall	quad	cage
Beath High	crush area	outside	dinner hall
Bell Baxter High	outside	dinner hall	library
Dunfermline High	dinner hall	benches	library
Madras College	locker area	quad	cafeteria
Queen Anne High	crush area	concourse	astroturf
Viewforth	pupil area	common room	blue room

Table 5

The ideal social space in school

Pupils were asked to describe an ideal social space for a school. By far the most common thing that pupils described was comfortable seating. The following list shows the main items that pupils would like in their ideal school social area:

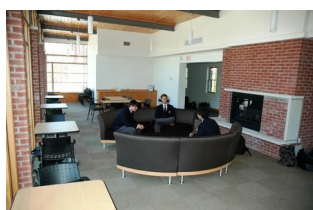
Comfy seats
Bean bags
Nice design
Food
Computers

Games /gaming room
Video games
Sport
Television
Books

Music, CDs
Sofas
Outdoor shelter
Tables

Another very popular request was for a separate social area for the different year groups, especially for seniors.

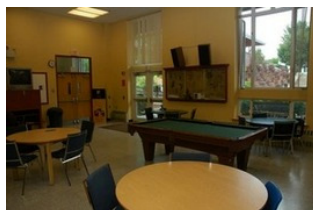
Here are some examples that typically illustrate pupils' ideas:



It would have to be a lounge area where we can decorate ourselves and write what we want on the walls to help cut down on vandalism

It would be a mixture of the cafeteria and the library. Somewhere we could talk.

Light, airy, beautiful, and inspiring.



Nice seating areas, vibrant colours and just a place to generally relax. (Fish are relaxing maybe a big fish tank full of fish.)

It would be a common room, with lava lamps and velvet cushions, HD TVs, surround sound, BluRay, a PS3, an XBOX 360, posters, cards, and a buffet.



Stereos, CDs, computers, easels, paints, big stereo speakers, wide screen TV with lots of DVDs and videos

Tasty food. Lots of comfortable seats and areas where tables aren't all together so you can have privacy but not isolation.

TVs, sofas, soothing lights, a quiet area, games, groovy wallpaper, lava lamps, heaters, a selection of art equipment



Some seat, tables, a computer that didn't block ever single thing fun about the internet. And only people that would respect it would get in.

It would be a shelter giving a nice view over natural land that lets air in but gives decent shelter from the rain.



Least liked spaces in school

When asked what space in school they liked least, the overwhelming majority in every school chose toilets. Table 6 shows that the percentage of pupils in each school that stated the toilets are their least favourite space in school ranged from 33% in Beath up to 54% in Madras. The results suggest that the newer schools have gone some way towards improving pupils' views of the toilets.

% of pupils who said the toilets were their least favourite space in the school	
Auchmuty High	54%
Beath High	33%
Bell Baxter High	38%
Dunfermline High	44%
Madras College	55%
Queen Anne High	34%
Viewforth	50%

Table 6

The second least liked space in three of the schools in need of refurbishment is the classrooms. In Madras, the second least liked space is the sports hall. In the two newest schools, corridors appear not to be well liked. Pupils at Bell Baxter seem to have polarised views about the cafeteria / dinner hall, with 43 choosing it as their favourite space and 36 as their least favourite.

Second least liked spaces in school	
Auchmuty High	Classrooms
Beath High	Corridors
Bell Baxter High	Cafeteria / Dinner hall
Dunfermline High	Classrooms
Madras College	Sports hall
Queen Anne High	Corridors
Viewforth	Classrooms

Table 7

Vandalism

Pupils were asked if their school got vandalised. The results suggest that of the school taking part, the one most vandalised is Auchmuty, then Dunfermline, then Madras. Of the schools surveyed, pupils at Queen Anne were the most likely to report no vandalism, followed by those at Beath. The responses from Bell Baxter and Viewforth were reasonably alike.

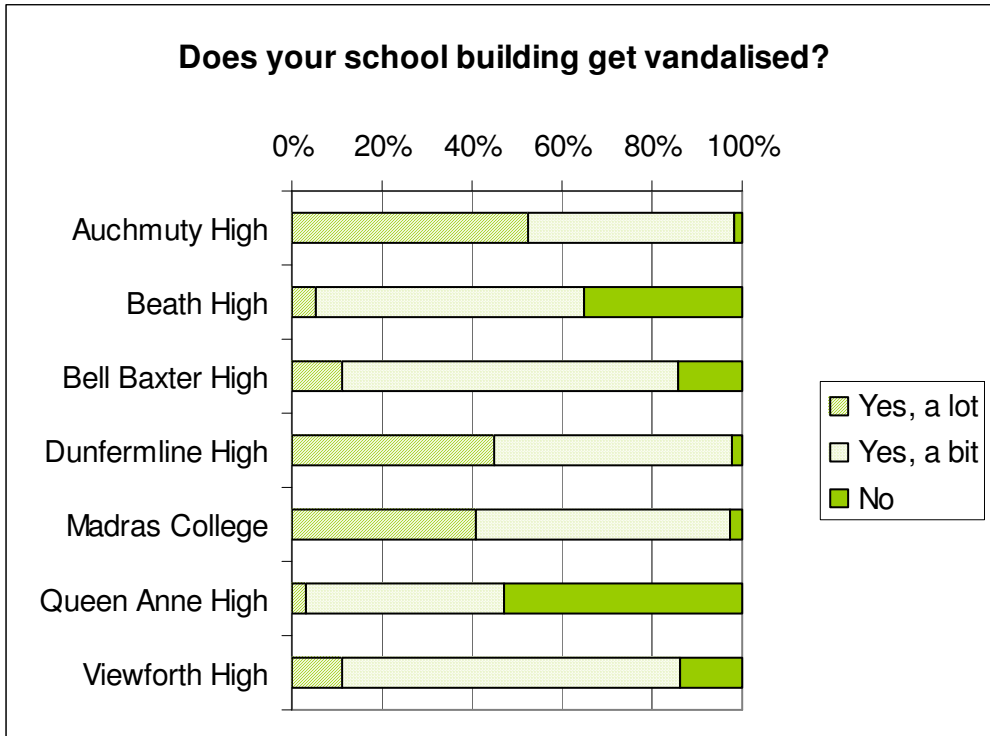


Chart 5

Eating lunch in school

When pupils were asked if they usually stay in school for lunch, 65% said they did not.

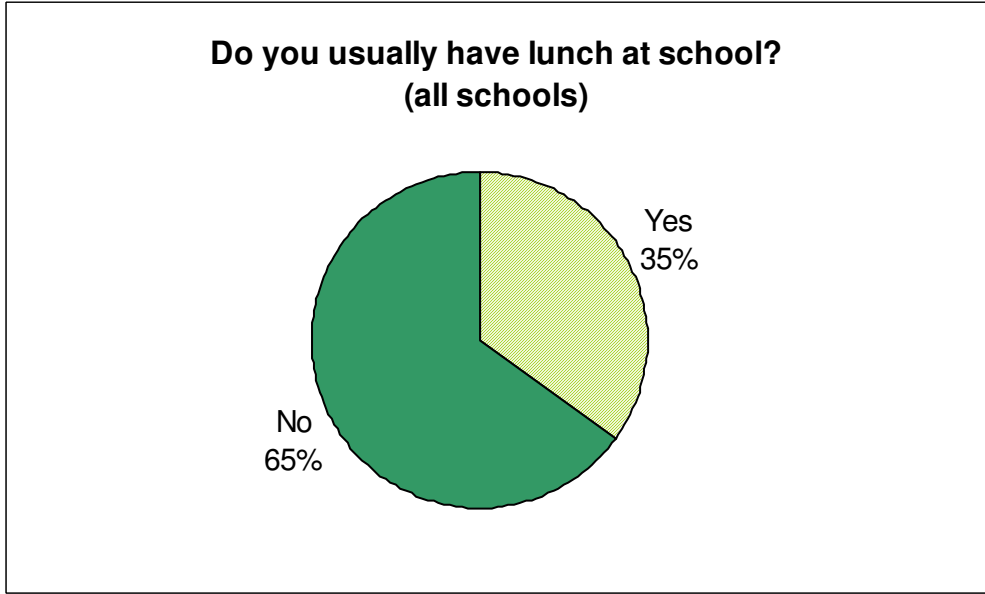


Chart 6

As Chart 7 shows, of the schools sampled, Madras College had the lowest proportion of pupils staying in school for dinner, and Beath had the highest.

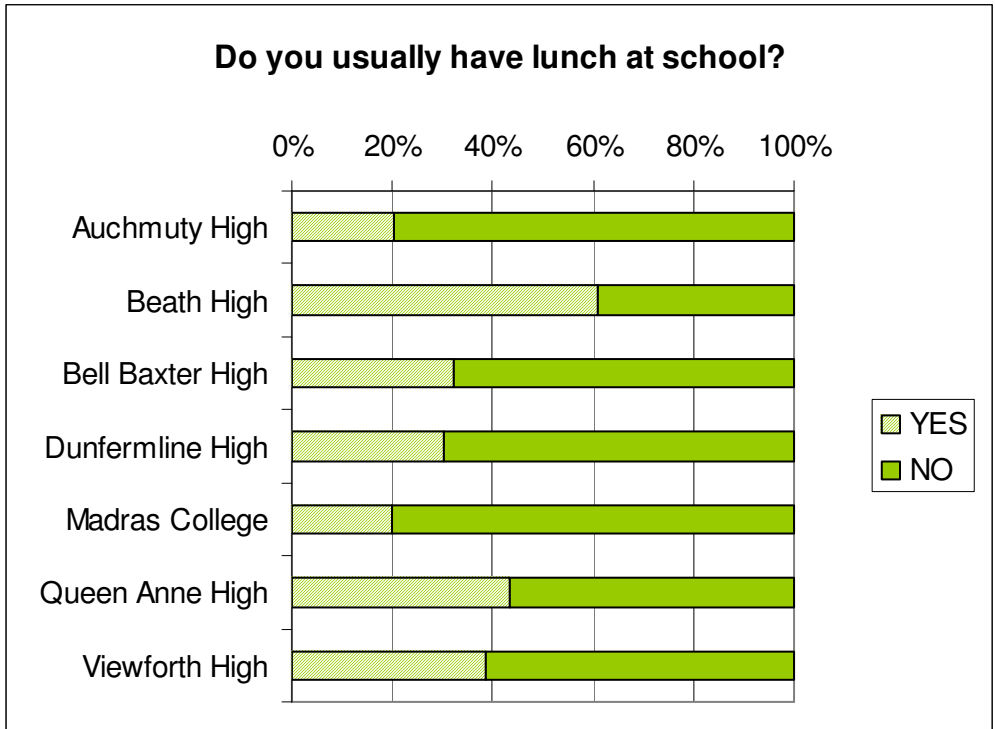


Chart 7

When asked why they don't stay in school for lunch, by far the most common reason given is that they don't like the food. Other common reasons are: long queues, not enough choice, too expensive, prefer to go elsewhere.

Feeling safe in school

When asked if they felt safe in school, 59% of all pupils surveyed said "yes". When analysed by gender, a greater percentage of girls (62%) than boys (57%) said they felt safe in school.

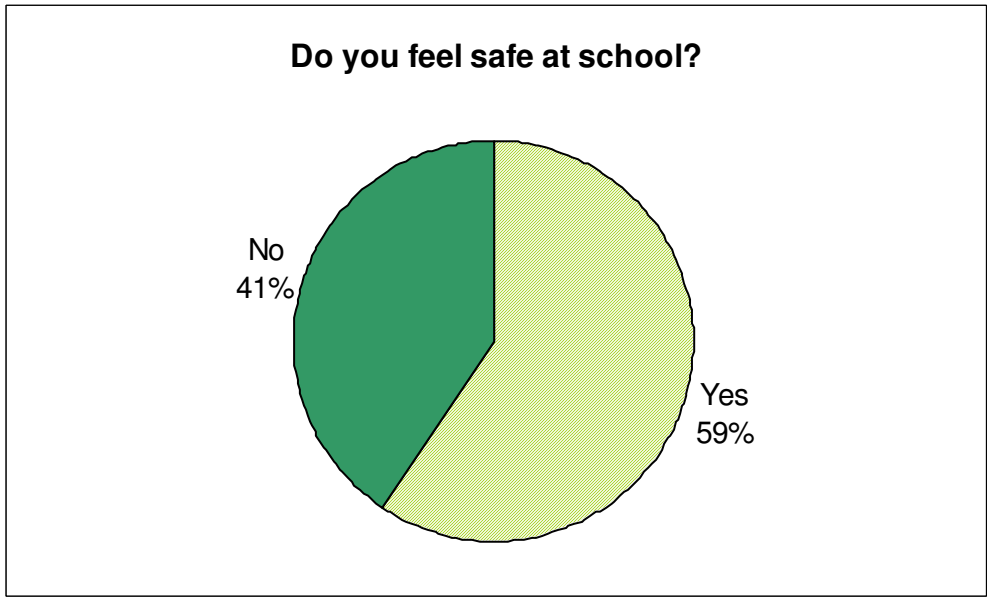


Chart 8

Looked at by school, the results ranged from 79% at Viewforth who said they felt safe at school down to 49% at Auchmuty. Chart 9 shows the results by school.

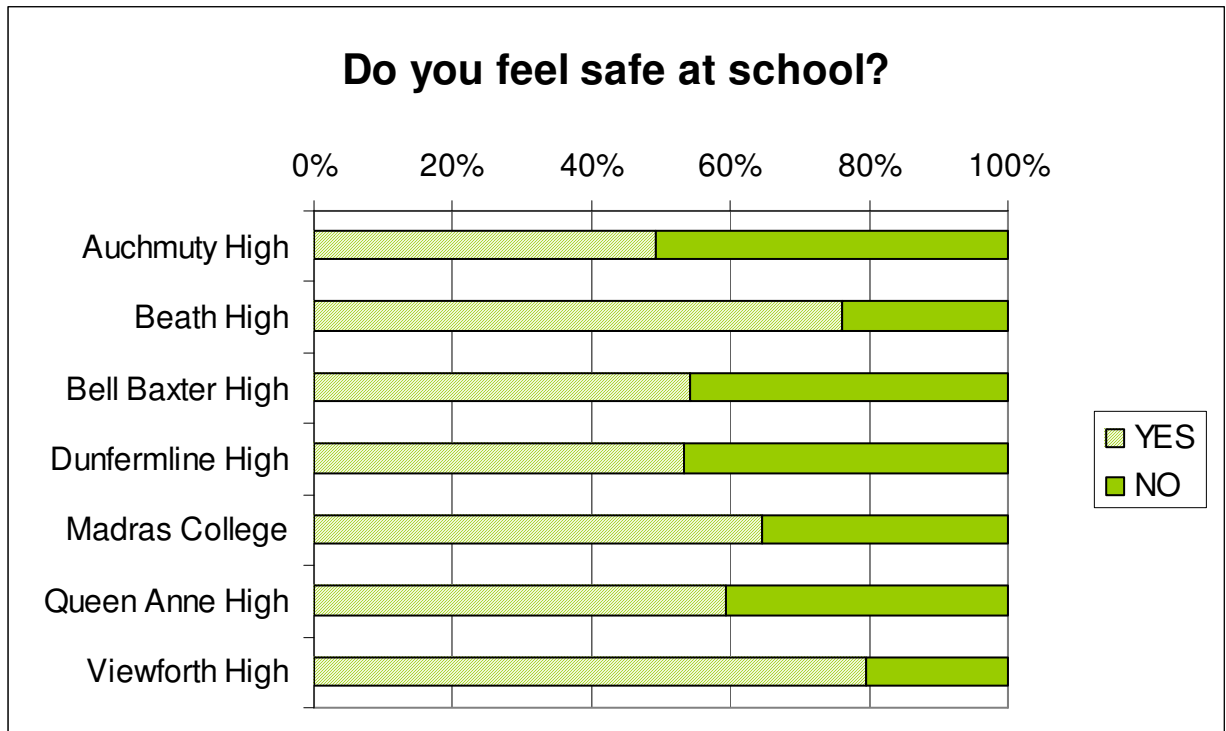


Chart 9

Pupils were asked to say where, if anywhere, they felt unsafe in school. A number of pupils at Auchmuty (52) and Dunfermline (54) said “everywhere”. In Madras, no specific place was mentioned by more than 3 pupils. The places that were named by a number of pupils are listed in Table 8. Toilets are the most common.

Places pupils are most likely to feel unsafe			
Auchmuty High	back gates	corridors	toilets
Beath High	stairs	toilets	round the side
Bell Baxter High	toilets	corridors	outside
Dunfermline High	tunnel	toilets	outside
Queen Anne High	toilets		
Viewforth	classrooms	toilets	

Table 8

Community use of school buildings

Finally, pupils were asked if their school was used out of hours by the community, and for their ideas of how the community could use the school.

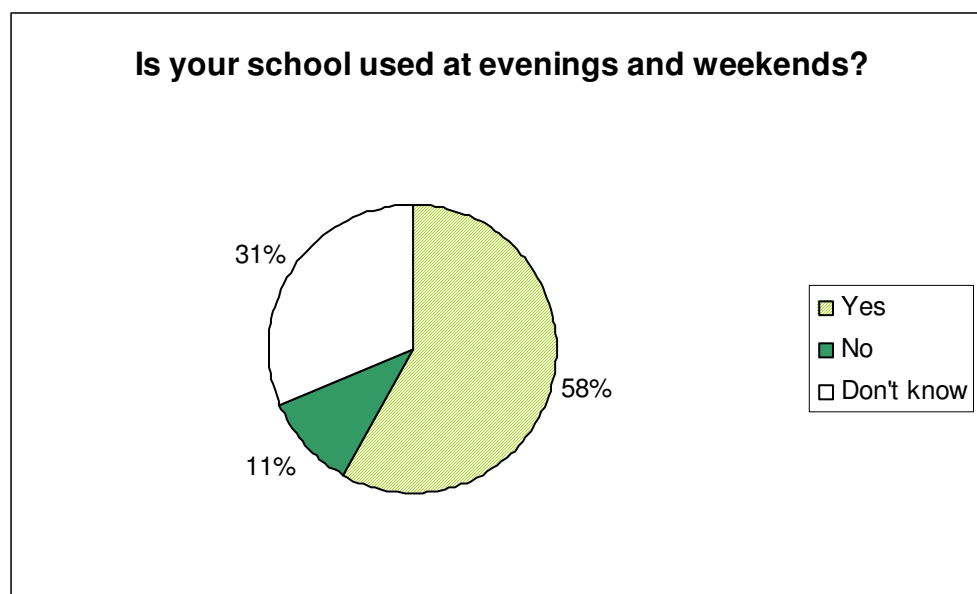


Chart 10

Over 1800 pupils made suggestions for using their school out of hours.

The most common suggestion – by around 400 pupils – was for sports. Many more suggested specific sports, especially football, athletics, badminton, basketball, gym and swimming.

Dance and dance classes was also a very popular suggestion, as was youth clubs.

In addition to sports, dance and youth clubs, the most popular suggestions were:

After school clubs	Art clubs	Bands
Concerts	Cookery classes	Discos
Drama club	Evening classes	Homework clubs
Library	Meetings	Music lessons
Revision and study classes	Parties	Social clubs

Conclusion and recommendations

This was a substantial survey of pupils at 7 Fife secondary schools, a mix of the newest buildings and those most in need of attention. It illustrates the views pupils hold about their buildings, and in particular reveals the contrast between the positive views of pupils in newer buildings and the negative views of pupils whose buildings need attention. This was striking in relation to the adjectives pupils chose to describe their school.

The research suggests that pupils particularly value their school sports facilities, dinner halls, locker areas, libraries and playgrounds. Other valued

spaces, where they often choose to relax, include benched areas, quads, concourses, and Astroturf. Pupil common rooms area also highly valued and often request, especially by senior pupils. The research also suggests that toilets are a source concern for pupils, and are often associated with feeling unsafe.

Pupils have a range of ideas for social areas in school, with comfortable seating coming through strongly as being very important, along with access to computers, music, televisions, books and food. Many would also like to see their school building used for community activities, especially sports, dancing and youth clubs.

It is therefore suggested that the design of the following areas of school space be explored in dialogue with pupils using creative methods of engagement:

sports facilities
dinner halls
locker areas

libraries
playgrounds
common rooms

toilets
social areas