

# Life in Lockdown:

Children and young people's views on the nationwide COVID-19 level 3 and 4 lockdown between March and May 2020

November 2020



MANAAKITIA Ā TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's  
Commissioner



## ***About us***

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) advocates for the rights, interests and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand’s 1.2 million children and young people under the age of 18 years. The OCC aims to ensure children and young people have their views heard on matters that affect them, and to share those views to influence positive change.

We hear and share the views of children and young people across both our monitoring functions and in our systemic advocacy. One of the ways we do this is through Mai World, which is a proactive approach to hearing children and young people’s views. We demonstrate best practice in child and youth engagement and give advice to other agencies and groups about how they can support children and young people to have a say.

## ***About this report***

This report shares children and young people’s reflections of COVID-19 during a seven-week lockdown at levels 3 and 4 during March-May 2020 in Aotearoa New Zealand. This report is intended to be useful for those focusing on COVID-19 rebuild efforts and developing new policy and services as a result. Given the rapidly changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the experiences children and young people shared with us about the lockdown reflect their feelings at a specific moment in time.

Throughout this report we use children and young people’s own words as much as possible. Some of the quotes contain grammar and/or spelling mistakes. Where the intent of the quote can be understood we have left these unedited. Where quotes are used, we reference the young person’s age, gender and any other characteristics they selected to identify themselves. Participants aged 0-12 years we refer to as ‘children’ or as ‘tamariki’ if they identified as Māori. Those aged 13 and over we refer to as ‘young people’ or as ‘rangatahi’ if they identified as Māori.

We believe in upholding children and young people’s rights, hearing the views of children and young people, and sharing those views to affect positive change in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## ***Acknowledgements***

Many people, organisations and schools contributed to making this report possible. This includes 25 schools and other community organisations from around the country that helped with the survey. We are grateful to the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families and Children (Awhi Rito) who gave us technical assistance and support. Most of all we are grateful to the children and young people who participated in the survey, for their time, wisdom and insights. Ngā mihi nui and thank you to everyone involved.

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# At A Glance

## ***We asked children and young people about their experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown***

Children and young people have a right to be heard in decisions that affect them.<sup>1</sup> They have unique perspectives and valuable ideas to contribute. Their views can inform policies seeking to address the negative impacts of COVID-19, as well as practitioners and communities wanting to make a difference for children and young people.

On Wednesday 25th March 2020, as part of Aotearoa New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government announced a nationwide level 4 lockdown. Schools closed and classes moved online, and everyone employed in work deemed 'non-essential' was required to stay home, and where possible, work from home. Five weeks later, at level 3, many students and workers continued to learn and work from home until the country entered level 2 on 13th May 2020. Schools opened for all students again on 18th May 2020.

On 19th May 2020, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) launched an online survey which invited children and young people aged 8-18 years of age to participate, with the support of their school or community youth organisation. We wanted to hear what children and young people's experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown under levels 3 and 4 were and how they rated their own wellbeing during this time.

*[One thing I will always remember is] "How the front line workers sacrificed their health for their community. They put themselves and their family bubble at risk."*

(13 year old girl)

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<sup>1</sup> Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

## ***We heard from more than 1,400 children and young people***

Over a three-week period, 1,373 children and young people participated in our online survey through their schools, and 29 through youth organisations; a total of 1,402 responses. We asked children and young people about their living situation, their relationships, their learning, their general wellbeing and how they spent their time during lockdown. We asked what they liked and didn't like about their experience of the lockdown and what they would always remember.

The survey reached a diverse group of children and young people. However, care must be taken when interpreting these views in isolation, as the sample is not representative of the whole population of children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, the survey did not include younger children; only included a few young people not in education; and included an over-representation of young people from high decile secondary schools. Where appropriate, we have provided weighted response to more closely reflect expected population results.

Where appropriate, we report findings based on different characteristics of the children and young people we heard from, such as age, gender and ethnicity.

Descriptions of the 1,402 children and young people that completed the on-line survey are included in Section Two. This section also contains details about their living situations, activities during lockdown, and access to technology.

## ***Children and young people had diverse experiences during lockdown***

From the survey responses we identified five insights:<sup>2</sup>

- 1.** COVID-19 lockdown had a range of different impacts on the children and young people we heard from – both positives and negatives.
- 2.** Relationships are critical – the impacts of lockdown on relationships with friends and family, both positive and negative, were significant.
- 3.** Children and young people enjoyed having control over their time, having more free time, and having opportunities for new activities.
- 4.** The changing nature of education during lockdown was unsettling for some and seen as an opportunity for independence by others.
- 5.** Improvements in wellbeing varied across the children and young people we heard from.

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<sup>2</sup> Each of these insights might look different for children and young people in different settings, but the overall sentiment remained consistent across groups.

## 1. **COVID-19 had a range of different impacts on the children and young people we heard from – both positives and negatives.**

The majority of children and young people who responded to the survey indicated life during COVID-19 lockdown was about the same as before lockdown (42%), followed by those who thought it was either better or much better (29%). Twenty three percent indicated that life was either worse or much worse than their life before lockdown.

*"I liked both because at school I get to see my friends and teachers and in online school I get to take breaks and spend time with my family."*

(9 year old child)

There were a range of different impacts identified by children and young people when asked about the negatives and positives of lockdown. These themes were repeated in the responses to the question asking, 'What was one thing you will always remember about COVID-19 lockdown?'

Children and young people reflected on relationships, on trying new activities and hobbies, or missing out on their usual activities and hobbies. While some young people talked about the benefits of lockdown on their mental health, others found it tough; feeling sad, anxious, or bored.

*"I loved spending time with my family because I feel I could relate to them more than I could before."*

(12 year old girl)

Some young people mentioned impacts they had observed on the environment such as seeing fewer cars on the road. Others spoke about experiences specific to the COVID-19 lockdown, like having to stay home, and not being able to spend time with friends or go to the shops.

*"How nice it was that there was no traffic noise and no waiting to cross the road when I went on my walks."*

(17 year old girl)

## 2. **Relationships are critical – the impacts of lockdown on relationships with friends and family, both positive and negative, were significant.**

We asked specifically about how relationships with family had changed, for better or worse as a result of lockdown. Most of the children and young people responded that their relationships had either improved (46%) or stayed the same (31%) during the lockdown period.

For some children and young people, lockdown strengthened family relationships.

*"They [family relationships] are better we spend way more time doing fun stuff because they didn't have to drive to work."*

(12 year old rangatahi)

For other children and young people, family dynamics were hard during lockdown. Fifty-three percent of responses identified missing friends, and arguments or tough family dynamics as their 'one negative' thing about the lockdown. Many gave examples of what was good, and some gave examples of when it was challenging. For example, when asked about 'one negative' of lockdown, we heard:

*"not getting the space from my family when i felt i needed it."*

(12 year old boy)

### **3. Children and young people enjoyed having control over their time, having more free time, and having opportunities for new activities.**

Children and young people appreciated being able to have more control over when they did things. They enjoyed being able to decide when they did school work and what school work to focus on. Having more free time, to focus on extending hobbies and interests which they wouldn't otherwise be able to do, was also seen as a positive experience of lockdown.

*"I loved lockdown. Specifically being able to choose when to do work, sort of popping in and out but still doing everything."*

(13 year old girl)

### **4. The changing nature of education during lockdown was unsettling for some and seen as an opportunity for independence by others.**

Learning online was a new experience for most children and young people who completed the survey, and this came with its own set of positives and negatives. The flexibility that online school provided, and being able to control how their day ran, when they did school work and what school work to focus on, were positives for many.

*"I could have free time when I wanted. I had more time to do school work and I learnt new thing."*

(10 year old tamariki)

Missing friends and the social side of school, or challenges with learning remotely were some of the negative aspects children and young people mentioned.

*"I didn't get to ... talk to teachers (like sewing where i need to ask qs in person)."*  
(16 year old girl)

## **5. Improvements in wellbeing varied across the children and young people we heard from.**

We asked children and young people to respond to a series of 18 statements relating to their wellbeing such as "I have a warm, dry place to live", "I feel safe in my neighbourhood", and "I can cope when life gets hard". These questions were those developed as part of the "What Makes a Good Life?" engagement in 2018.<sup>3</sup> In our May 2020 survey, the majority of responses to all 18 statements were positive. When compared to the responses to the same questions asked in 2018, the percentage of children and young people who agreed or strongly agreed with most of the statements in 2020 was greater than the 2018 responses. This was a surprising finding which requires more consideration. We have observed that although there was a general increase in the children's reported wellbeing, there was also noticeable decreases in some specific areas, such as, "I can cope when things get hard". This observation is further supported by the insights that respondents shared about mental health during lockdown.

## **Responses to COVID-19 should take children and young people's views into account**

Listening to, considering and incorporating the views of children into government responses to COVID-19 can improve policy and lead to better outcomes for all.<sup>4</sup> Elevating and amplifying the views of children and young people across government and community responses to COVID-19 will lead to better decisions and more effective outcomes. This report includes a section on further analysis of policy implications from the survey findings and other research, offering insights about how children and young people can be better supported through the COVID-19 recovery. It is our hope that this report will encourage policy makers in government and those focusing on rebuild efforts to consider children's views in their decisions in responding to the impacts of COVID-19.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/getting-it-right-are-we-listening/>

# Section One: Introduction

## ***We are experiencing unprecedented times during the COVID-19 pandemic***

The rapid spread of COVID-19 caused a global shock and continues to impact on all our lives. Words like social distancing and bubbles have become part of our everyday language.

The initial lockdown period started on Saturday 21st March 2020, when Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern introduced a country-wide alert level system as part of Aotearoa New Zealand's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and moved the country into alert level 2. Similar to existing fire warning systems, alert level 1 indicated the lowest risk, and alert level 4 indicated the highest risk. On Monday 23rd March 2020, the alert level was raised to level 3, then to level 4 at 11:59pm on Wednesday 25th March 2020. Schools were closed, and everyone employed in work deemed 'non-essential' were required to stay home.

*"I have learned to appreciate adults more - especially my teachers, essential workers and also some things my parents do!"*

(15 year old girl)

The New Zealand Government's approach to stamping out COVID-19 was to move quickly – to 'go hard and go early'. This had the result of flattening the curve of infection quickly with low rates of infection and no deaths for children. As part of its response the Government put in place a range of measures and supports which included a \$25 increase in benefit rate, doubling of the winter energy payment, wage subsidies, a 12-week income relief payment for people who lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, and additional funding for community supports (for safety and food distribution, etc.). Iwi, hapū and whānau Māori took immediate measures to support their people and to reduce the spread of the virus to rural areas.

On child-specific policy, the Government prioritised resourcing at-home learning by increasing digital connectivity, delivering devices and hard copy school resources to those in need, and providing educational content on television. Parenting and mental health resources were also developed and shared nationally, for example the "Getting Through Together" toolkit<sup>5</sup> and the "Sparklers at Home" resources.<sup>6</sup>

*"I thought it was kind of cool to be a part of history. I'll always remember how different everything was (how we react to people in the streets, the supermarket rules etc) and I think it will be interesting stories to tell my kids in the future."*

(17 year old rangatahi)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.allright.org.nz/campaigns/getting-through-together>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sparklers.org.nz/parenting/>

Front line services and community organisations reported dramatic increases in the need for food parcels and helplines reported increased calls from children and young people who were experiencing family violence and discrimination while at home in lockdown. Stress caused by families being unable to visit whānau, participate in tangihanga, funerals, and other cultural practices was widely reported.<sup>7</sup> A move to online learning for children as a result of school closures revealed a 'digital divide' with internet connectivity and access to devices being a technical and financial barrier to participating in home learning.<sup>8</sup>

Children and young people's experiences of lockdown are influenced by many different factors, including:

- economic and social determinants of wellbeing such as household income and family financial security
- employment status of parents and caregivers and their ability to work and/or be paid during the lockdown
- child care arrangements and extended family support
- housing quality and
- their own and their family members' physical and mental health status.<sup>9</sup>

As the economic impact of COVID-19 continues to unfold, we are starting to see a broadening and deepening of inequity, bringing into sharp focus the existing challenges for children, including rates of child poverty and inequity, family violence, racism, and a lack of affordable and warm housing.<sup>10</sup> Preliminary evidence from schools, helplines, iwi, government services, non-government organisations, community groups, and academics points to a diverse range of experiences for children and young people in lockdown.

Children's rights to health, education, housing, safety, play, food, culture and financial security were, and will continue to be, affected as a result of the local and global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*"Going for walks with my Dad. I felt happy because we could walk and talk. It was fun because we got to spend more time together."*

(11 year old boy)

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<sup>7</sup> Reported in the media, this example is from 4th May 2020: <https://www.teaoMāori.news/another-whānau-miss-out-on-tangihanga-during-lockdown>

<sup>8</sup> <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Addressing-rangatahi-education.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/social-impacts-of-covid-19.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cpag.org.nz/news/covid-19-crisis-leading-to-potential-hunger/>

## ***We wanted to hear first-hand about children and young people's life in lockdown***

We wanted to hear the experiences of lockdown from a diverse range of children and young people. We knew other surveys were underway by other government and non-government organisations. Some of these particularly focused on the challenges of lockdown, and most were targeted to older young people. We therefore focused this survey on hearing about the personal experiences of primary and secondary school aged children and asked about positive experiences as well as negative.

*"I will remember how bored I got in the lockdown not playing with friends is the thing I will remember the most."*

(12 year old boy)

Children and young people were invited to participate in the survey via their primary, intermediate and secondary schools or through their connections with OCC Mai World community partners. Ara Taiohi also invited some youth organisations to participate. We heard from 1,402 children and young people with a mix of urban/rural, socio-economic status, ethnicity and age characteristics.

We found great diversity of experience across the children and young people we heard from. However, care must be taken in interpreting the findings in isolation, as the respondents themselves were not representative of children and young people across Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, we heard from very few young people not in school. We also had a larger than expected number of responses from young people in high decile secondary schools. An overview of the methodology is included in Appendix 1.

Our survey asked children and young people their perspectives on:

- Their living situations during lockdown
- Access to technology and data
- What they and the adults in their bubble did during lockdown (including working)
- Impacts of lockdown on their family relationships
- How their learning had been affected by lockdown
- The positive and negative aspects of life during lockdown, and what they would always remember from their time during lockdown
- Eighteen elements of wellbeing, drawn from the 'What Makes a Good Life?' 2018 survey of wellbeing that informed the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.

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## Section Two: About the children and young people who participated

### ***The survey was completed by a diverse group of children and young people***

In total 1,402 children and young people from across the country completed an online survey. They included children and young people aged between 8-18 years, with a mix of characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, living arrangements, region and school decile.<sup>11</sup>

While this provided a diverse range of experiences, it does not provide a representative sample of all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, the survey:

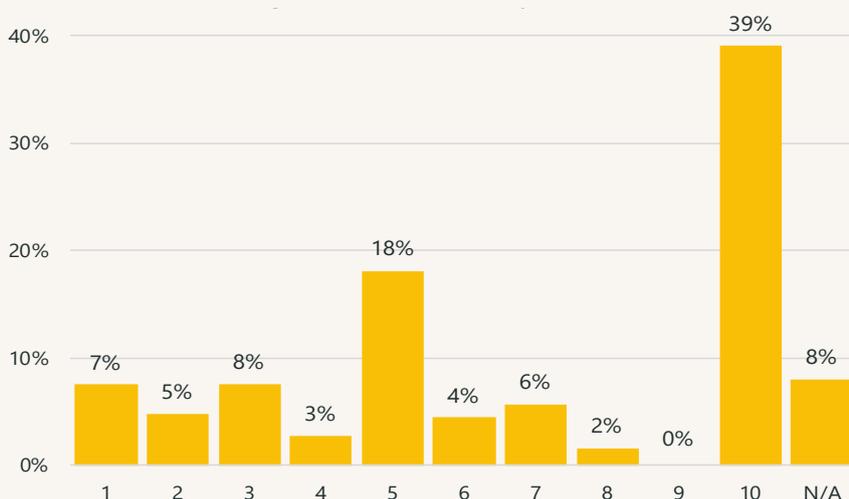
- did not include younger children under the age of eight;
- only included a small number of young people not in education;
- did not include young people who did not return to school after lockdown; and
- included an over-representation of young people from high decile secondary schools.

The over-representation of young people from high decile secondary schools requires further consideration when interpreting results. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by school decile. Students who did not give a school name, and those who attended a school without a decile ranking are listed as 'N/A'. Deciles are calculated so that approximately 10 percent of the student population are distributed to each decile. Even considering the low representation in decile 9, when combined the decile 9 and 10 students are over-represented by approximated 20%.

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<sup>11</sup> School deciles are a measure of the socio-economic position of a school's student community relative to other schools throughout the country. See <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/funding-and-financials/resourcing/operational-funding/school-decile-ratings/>

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents by school decile.



### ***Weighted responses helped us understand our survey responses in relation to other children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand***

Having a larger than expected number of young people from decile 10 schools completed the survey means the responses to this survey differ somewhat from the general population of the children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. We can assume that generally, students in decile 10 schools live in more socio-economically advantaged communities and their experience would reflect this.

We applied decile weighting so the responses better reflect New Zealand school decile distribution and assessed responses to determine if there were significant differences between responses, before and after weighting. We determined that it was most appropriate to include the weighted values for responses to the questions on:

- What adults in the home did during lockdown
- Access to a device during lockdown
- Access to data during lockdown
- Elements of wellbeing

The weighted responses more closely reflect expected population results and are provided for comparison with the unweighted results. Where there are large contrasts between the unweighted and the weighted responses we have noted this in the text. Unless specified, all graphs are unweighted.

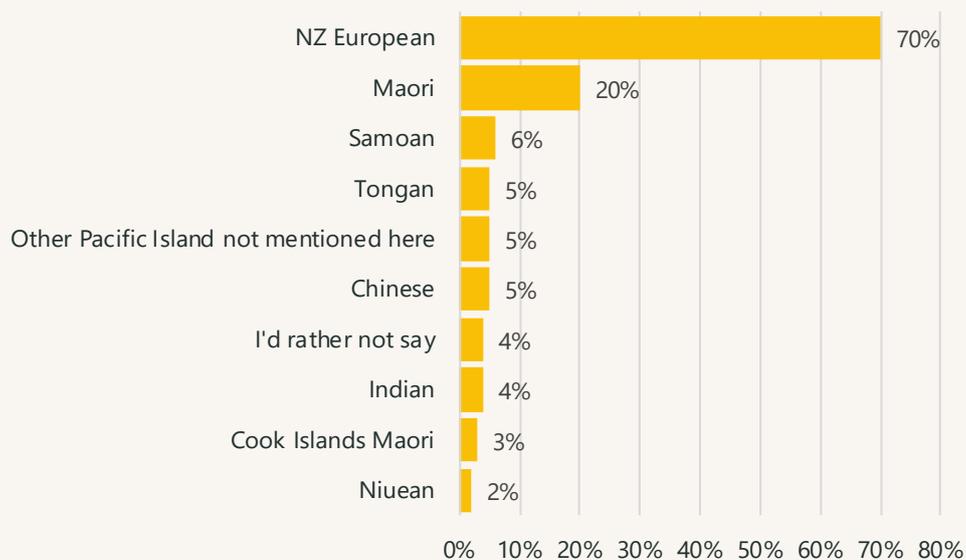
The intention of the survey was to hear a range of views, and we share these views without reservation.

## Ethnicity

The children and young people could select which ethnicity they identified with, using standard Statistics NZ categories. We gathered responses from a diverse range of ethnicities, which is largely comparable to the ethnicities across New Zealand's total youth population.

More than one ethnicity option could be selected, so results in figure 2 add up to more than the total number of respondents. A total of 222 children and young people also selected the free text option, 'I belong to another ethnicity' and provided a range of other ethnicity responses including Filipino, Japanese and South African, among others. Many also used this opportunity to provide additional explanation to their selection of the New Zealand European category, such as "British", "Canadian" or "South African". For those who selected Māori as their ethnicity we also asked if they knew their iwi affiliation.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 2: *Ethnicity of respondents.*

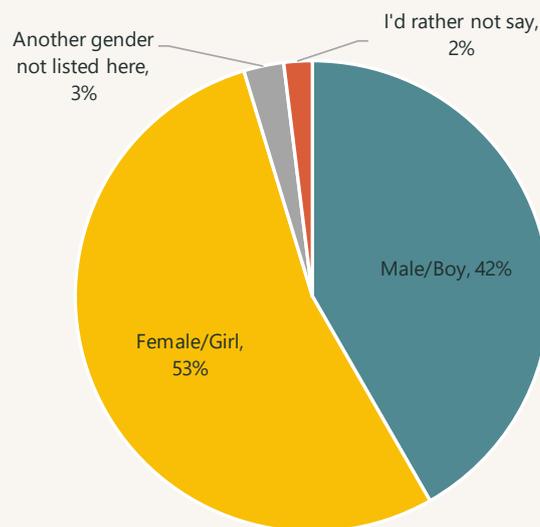


<sup>12</sup> 21 of those who identified as Māori identified their iwi.

## Gender

Just over half those participating in the survey identified as girls, and 42% as boys. Consistent with other surveys we have run, 5% identified with another gender or preferred not to answer.

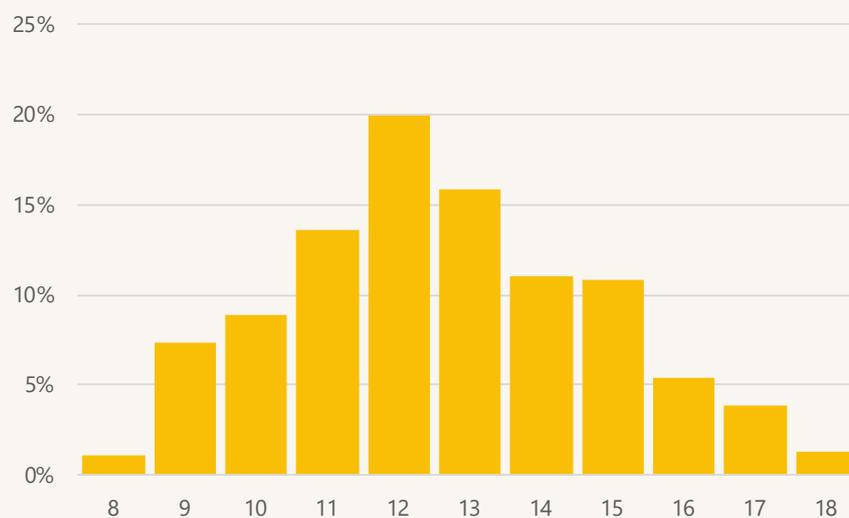
Figure 3: Gender respondents most identify with



## Age

The distribution by age shows about half of those participating were children (aged 12 and under) and half were young people (aged 13 to 18).

Figure 4: Age of respondents.



### Location

The survey was completed by children and young people from 24 schools across 16 towns and cities. The majority of schools were located in urban areas, while three schools were either located in rural areas, or served students living rurally.

Figure 5: Location of survey respondents.



### ***Other descriptors self-identified by the children and young people we heard from***

We know that the experience in lockdown could vary significantly due to the range of needs and challenges children and young people live with. We asked them to tell us which, if any situations in figure 6 applied to them. From the responses to these categories, alongside ethnicity, region and age, we are confident we heard from a diverse range of children and young people.

The children and young people were asked if they identified with any of the below descriptors as part of the demographic information gathered.

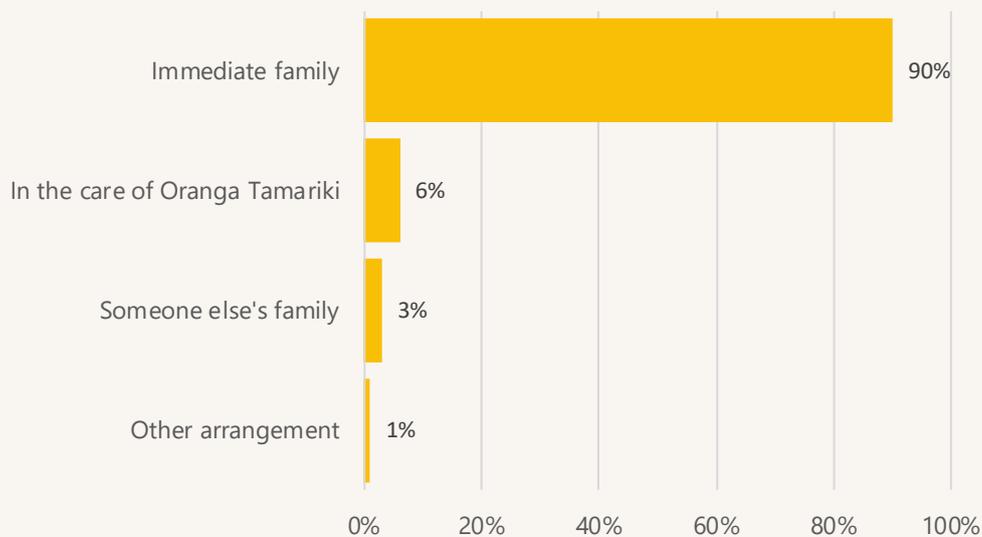
Figure 6: *Self-identified descriptors of survey respondents.*

<b>Do any of the following describe you?</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of all</b>
I have a disability	74	6%
I am LGBTQI+ and/or part of this community	156	13%
I live in a rural part of New Zealand	276	22%
Me or my family have a refugee background	66	5%
Oranga Tamariki have a say about where I live	45	4%

### ***Most of the children and young people we heard from were living with immediate family or whānau during lockdown***

When asked who they lived with during the COVID-19 lockdown, 90% of the children and young people indicated they lived with immediate family or whānau. Six percent indicated a living situation consistent with being in the care of Oranga Tamariki (ie. living with a caregiver, in a care and protection residence, in a group home or in a youth justice residence, or living with family or whānau but in the care of Oranga Tamariki). A further 3% indicated they were living with someone else's family (e.g. with friends, boyfriend/girlfriend's family). The remainder were either living alone or in another arrangement (such as living with grandparents).

Figure 7: 'Who did you live with during COVID-19 lockdown?'



## ***We heard about children and young people's activities, and whether the adults in their lives were working during lockdown***

We asked children and young people to select the activities they did during lockdown, including activities they did with the adults in their household, and whether the adults in their "bubbles" were able to work during lockdown levels 3 and 4. They were able to choose more than one activity, so responses add up to more than 100%.

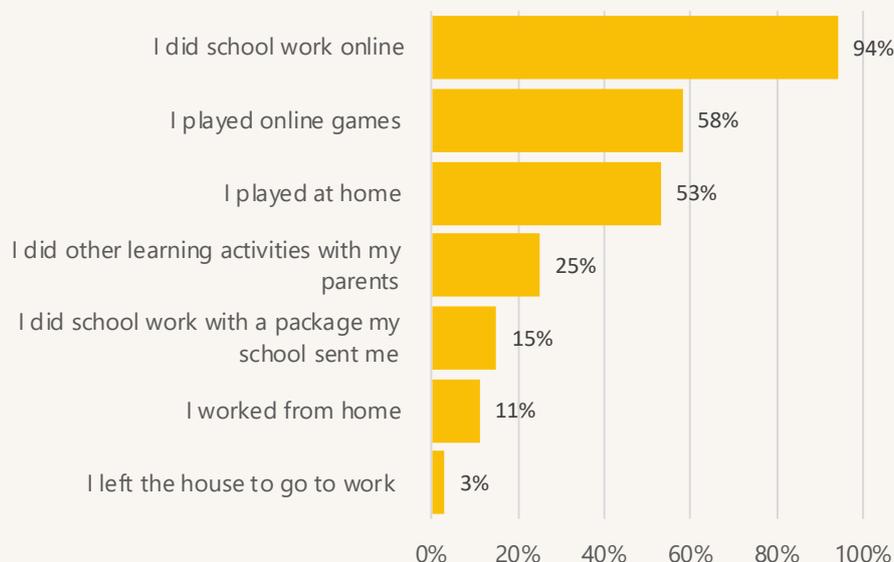
*"Being happy with my family."*

(10 year old boy)

### ***Children and young people's activities during lockdown***

On comparison of the unweighted and weighted survey responses, the unweighted estimates indicated children from higher decile schools were more likely to do school work online and to play games online during COVID-19 lockdown, compared with the weighted estimates.

Figure 8: 'What did you do during lockdown?'



Those who identified as Māori or Pacific were much less likely to do school work online (74% and 74% respectively) and were instead more likely to do school work with a package their school sent them (23% and 28%). Primary school aged students were more likely than secondary school students to say they played at home or online during lockdown. Secondary aged students were less likely to do learning activities with their parents (10%).

### **How did the adults in the household work over lockdown?**

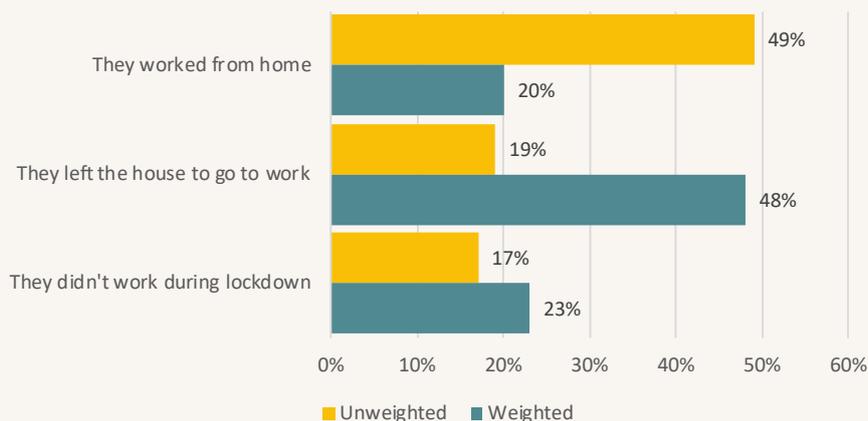
*“Step mum had to look after 10 kids while dad had to work.”*

(11 year old Pacific girl)

Figure 9 below shows if, and how, the adults in the household worked over lockdown. Responses to this question were significantly impacted by the high response from decile 10 students, so weighted responses are shown.

In our unweighted results, about half the adults worked from home. When we weighted the sample to reflect expected distribution, the result flipped so that about half the adults left the house to go to work as essential workers, just 20% worked from home and 23% didn't work. The difference between the unweighted and weighted results are an indication of the different lived-experiences for children and young people based on their socio-economic status.

Figure 9: 'What did adults in your home do during COVID-19 lockdown?' (weighted vs unweighted).



While 23% of children and young people (weighted responses) indicated their parents didn't work during lockdown, this was higher for those who identified as Māori, Pacific or who lived rurally (29%, 26% and 26% respectively).

## ***Not all children and young people had access to technology and data***

For many of the children and young people we heard from, being online was central to their lockdown experience. It was a way to connect with family and friends through apps, ordering things, doing schoolwork, playing games or accessing the news about the global pandemic.

*“Meeting with friends/family on the Zoom app for games or quizzes.”*

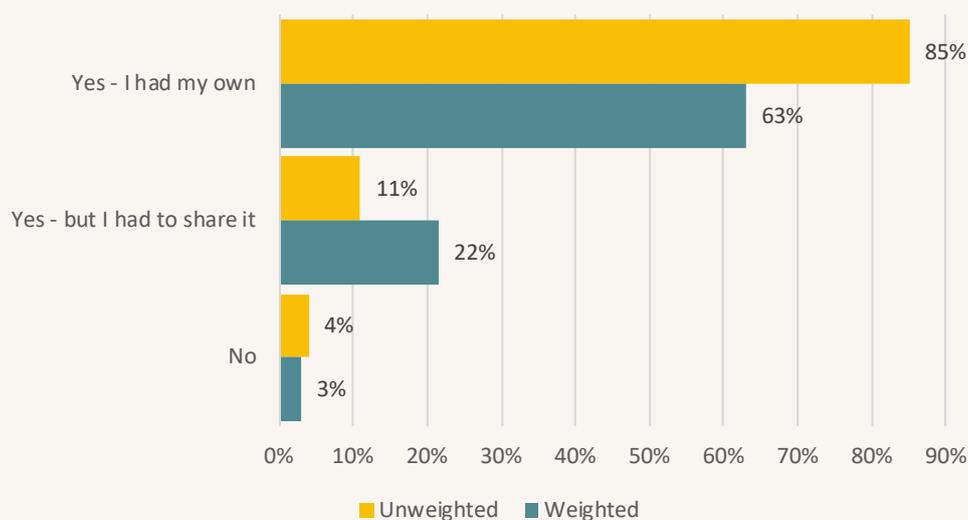
(17 year old boy)

We asked questions about access to data and a device (figures 10 and 11). Most of the children and young people who responded had access to a device and to adequate data. These responses were also skewed by the over-representation from high decile schools. When weighted responses showed that access to a device during lockdown was about 63% and 22% indicated they had to share a device.

This ‘digital divide’ in access to technology and data existed before COVID-19, but the lockdown event heightened awareness of its impacts.

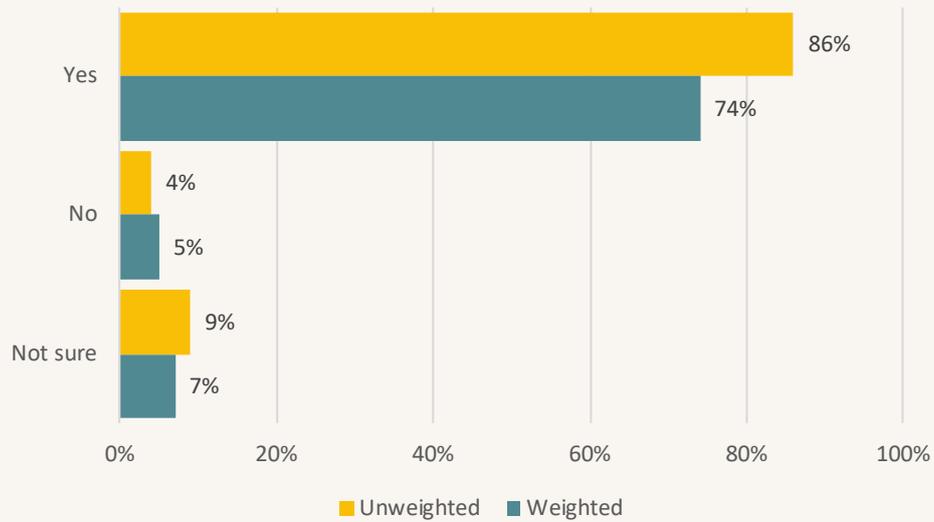
The difference in the unweighted to weighed responses is an indication of how children and young people growing up in a higher socio-economic household are more likely to be able to participate more in life online.

Figure 10: ‘Did you have access to a device during lockdown?’ (weighted vs unweighted).



Māori and Pacific children and young people were less likely to have their own device. Tamariki and rangatahi Māori were more likely to not have any access to a device.

Figure 11: 'Did you have access to sufficient data during lockdown?' (weighted vs unweighted).



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## Section Three: Survey findings

We asked children and young people to think back to lockdown levels 3 and 4 and answer a combination of closed and open-ended questions which helped us understand how children and young people experienced lockdown. Respondents had the choice to answer or skip any questions in the survey.

From analysing the survey responses, we have drawn these five overarching insights.

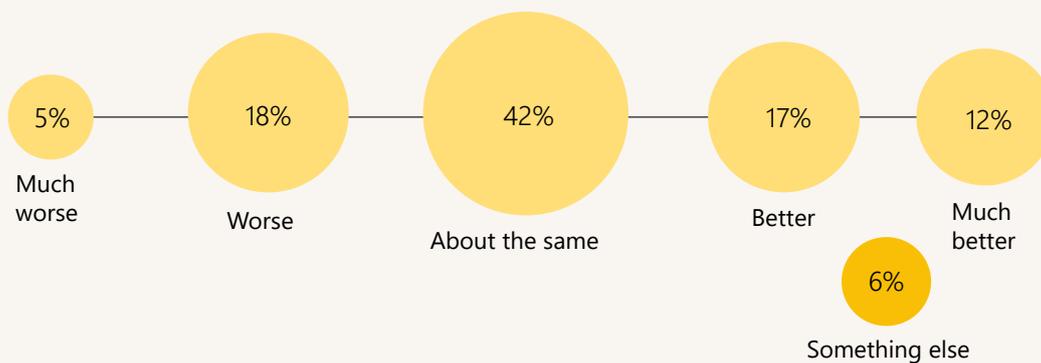
1. COVID-19 lockdown had a range of different impacts on the children and young people we heard from – both positives and negatives.
2. Relationships are critical – the impacts of lockdown on relationships with friends and family, both positive and negative, were significant.
3. Children and young people enjoyed having control over their time, having more free time, and having opportunities for new activities.
4. The changing nature of education during lockdown was unsettling for some and seen as an opportunity for independence by others.
5. Improvements in wellbeing varied across the children and young people we heard from.

These insights are drawn only from the perspectives of the children and young people who were in class on the day the survey took place or participated through our community partners. While the views shared captured a wide range of experiences and insights, we recognise this may not reflect the experiences of all of Aotearoa New Zealand's children and young people.

# 1. COVID-19 had a range of different impacts on the children and young people we heard from – both positives and negatives.

In order to understand some of the different impacts on children and young people, we asked them about the positives, negatives and what one thing they would always remember about lockdown would be. We also asked participants if life during COVID-19 lockdown was better or worse than their life before. Their responses are represented in the following graphs:

Figure 12: Was life better or worse during COVID-19 lockdown?



Most (42%) of children and young people who responded to the survey indicated life during COVID-19 lockdown was 'about the same' as before. A slightly larger group thought it was 'much better/better' than those who thought it was 'worse' or 'much worse' (29% compared to 23%). The remaining 6% chose the "something else" option and gave examples of it either being better or worse, or containing elements which made it both better and worse, for example:

*"Being able to stay home was good, but I missed my friends ... So it's sort of in the middle."*

(13 year old boy)

Those who identified as Māori, Pacific or as having a disability were more likely to think life was better or much better during COVID-19 lockdown (35%, 39% and 38% respectively) compared to 29% of overall responses. Those who identified as LGBTQI+, and those from refugee backgrounds were slightly more likely to think it was worse or much worse (33% and 31%).

### ***The good, the bad and the memorable***

Figures 13-15 illustrate the range of answers we heard from children and young people in response to the open-ended questions:

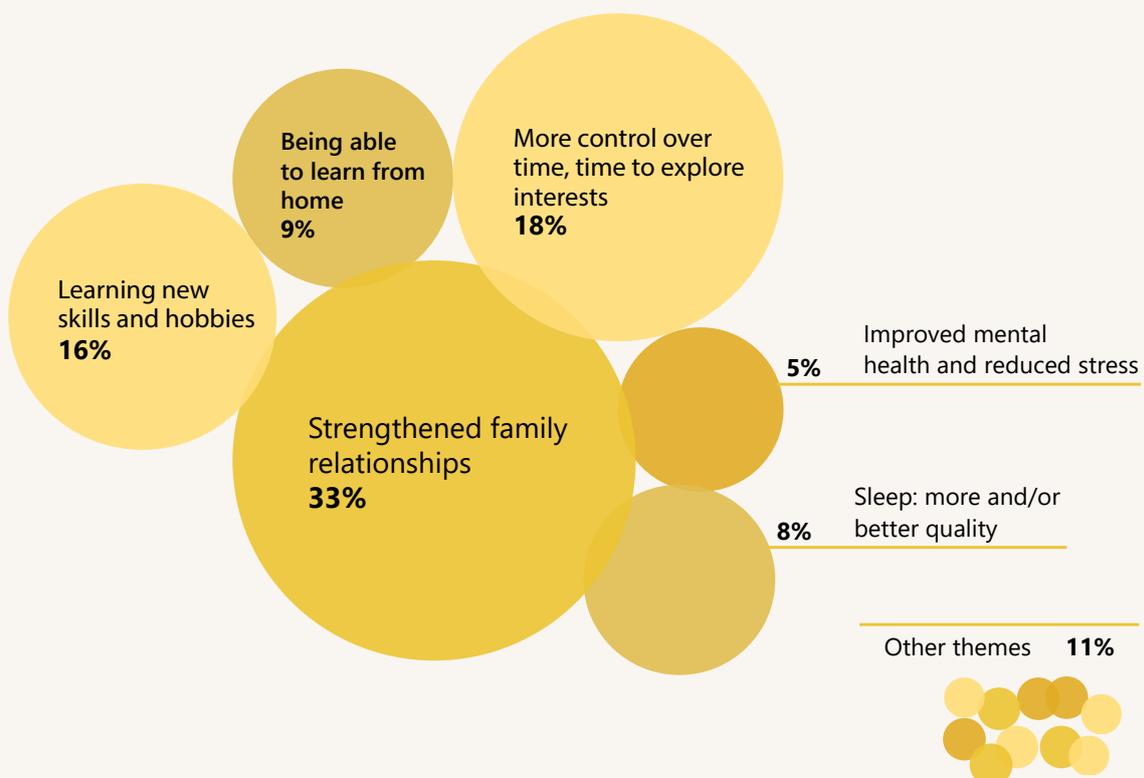
- What was one positive thing about COVID-19 lockdown?
- What was one negative thing about COVID-19 lockdown?
- What is one thing you will always remember about COVID-19 lockdown?

We make some comment separately on each figure below. We also reflect on the combined themes from these questions in the Insight 2 and Insight 3 that follow.

Children and young people placed more emphasis on positive experiences when responding to what their enduring memory was.

### ***Positive things about COVID-19 lockdown***

Figure 13: *Themed responses to "What was one positive thing about COVID-19 lockdown?"*



The one positive thing children and young people most commonly talked about was spending time with family. Other things discussed included having freedom to choose what they did and when they did it, feeling more relaxed with a slower pace and time to unwind, getting to have sleep-ins, having more time for school work, and learning new skills or hobbies with others.

*"I liked spending my time alone and was able to indulge in hobbies that I wouldn't normally do because I normally don't have the time."*

(15 year old boy)

*"I loved spending time with my family because I feel I could relate to them more than I could before."*

(12 year old girl)

Children and young people also identified the break in their usual activities and the slower, relaxed pace of life in lockdown as something they would remember about COVID-19 lockdown.

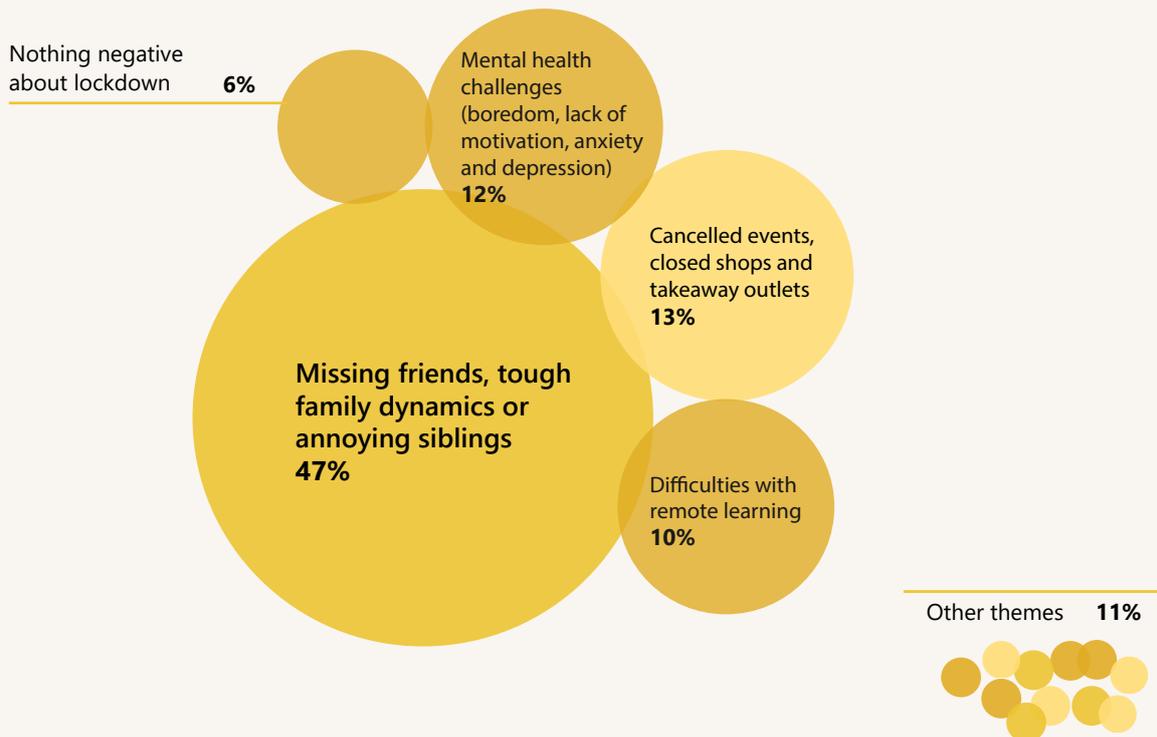
*"How nice it is to have some "me" time and not worry about being able to do something, when you have all the time in the world to do it."*

(17 year old girl)

The 'other themes' category included responses about appreciating everyday life, observations on the environment (e.g. more birds), and more generic responses ("fun and ok", or "not sure").

## Negative things about COVID-19 lockdown

Figure 14: Themed responses to 'What was one negative thing about COVID-19 lockdown?'



When asked what one negative thing about their experiences of COVID-19 lockdown was (figure 14), children and young people most commonly talked about missing and not seeing their friends and feeling lonely. They also talked about tough family dynamics or interactions due to being around their family all the time. Some had online learning challenges such as teachers having to work out how to run online school sessions.

*"I really missed my friends, and when I got to see them, we weren't able to hug etc."*

(12 year old girl)

Others shared that they missed not being able to go out, and to places such as shops and take-away outlets, and the cancelling of events or trips they were looking forward to.

*"I was meant to be doing a lot of travelling with dance, which I was very disappointed to miss out on."*

(16 year old female)

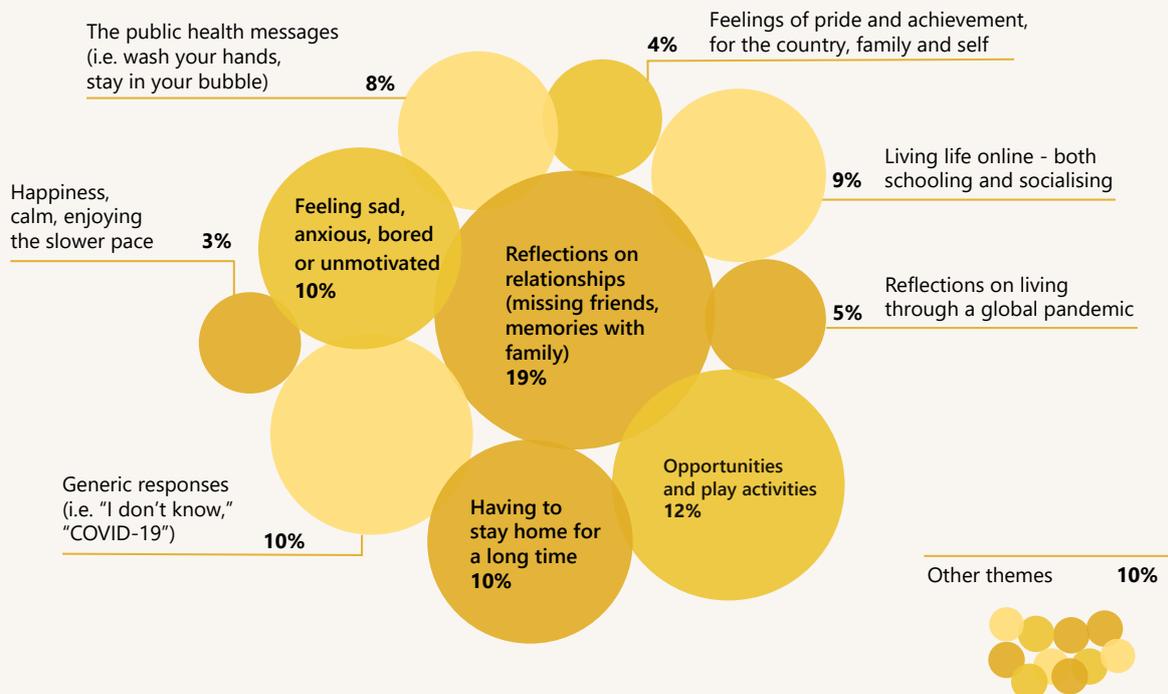
*"I will remember how bored I got in the lockdown not playing with friends is the thing I will remember the most."*

(12 year old boy)

The 'other themes' category included responses about eating too much food, as well as more personal negatives, such as having a birthday while in lockdown, or the loss of pets.

### **Biggest memories from COVID-19 lockdown**

Figure 15: *Themed responses to 'What is one thing you will always remember about COVID-19 lockdown?'*



Similar themes were raised in response to what was the 'one thing you will always remember about the COVID-19 lockdown?' and the previous questions about the positives and negatives of lockdown.

Many of the responses to the 'one thing' they would always remember about COVID-19 lockdown related to making memories with family through having opportunities to do activities and spend time with family.

*"As weird as it was I did make a lot of funny memories with my family and a big highlight was doing workouts with my dad and sister almost everyday, also going on long walks with my whole family in the weekend was a big highlight and I enjoyed it a lot because we're all growing up now and don't always get to spend quality time together doing something we all like to do."*

(17 year old girl)

Ten percent of children and young people said having to stay home will be something they would remember. Some young people enjoyed it, and others really noticed what they were missing out on by having to stay home.

*"Not really being able to do lots of stuff that I would normally want to do."*

(12 year old boy)

*"Fun for me, but also a very sad time for other familys and everyone that got effected."*

(12 year old boy)

The many public health messages which respondents had heard over the previous seven weeks were also memorable, as was the global nature of the pandemic, and how New Zealand responded compared with other countries.

*"Wash your hands, cough into your shoulder. Be careful when going shopping only grab what u need and are buying and to be careful of courier delivery's wash ur hands after handling items."*

(9 year old girl)

*"I will definitely remember lockdown as it was a huge deal for not only nz, but the world."*

(13 year old boy)

Of the other themes, many reflected on the strangeness of the whole situation, the impact of lockdown on the environment, while others gave more personal examples.

*"how new zealand handled it really well and i am really proud to be a new zealander."*

(12 year old girl)

*"Staying inside and drinking tea as the world basically collapsed outside."*

(16 year old boy)

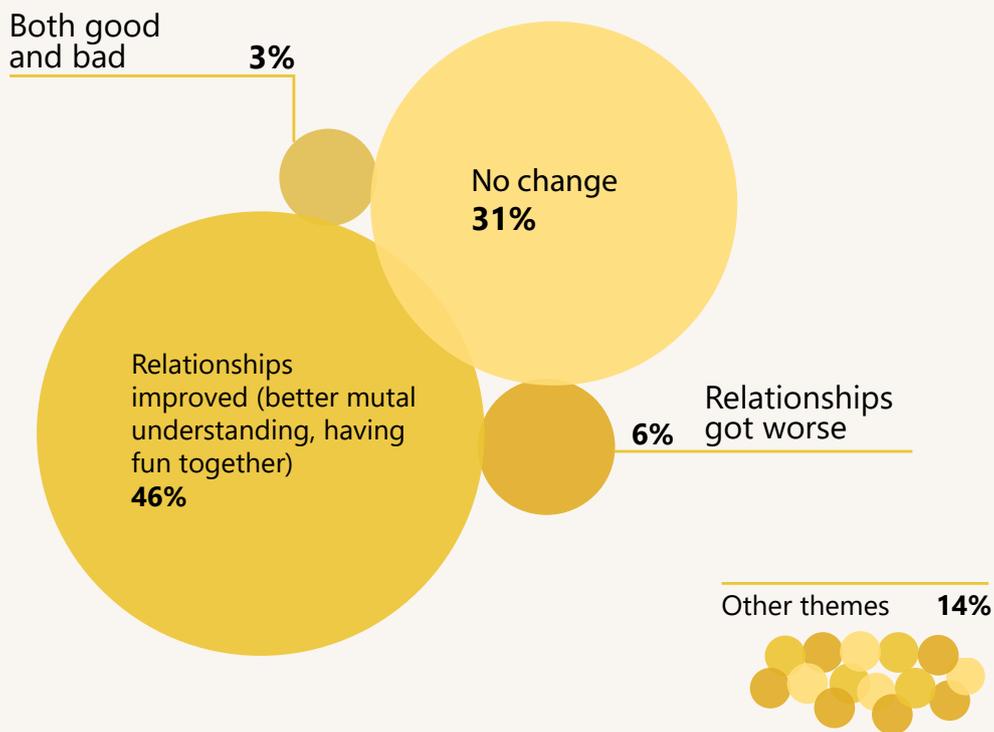
*"COVID19 itself and the learning curve it gave us including that we let the earth repair itself as humans are somewhat destroying the earth."*

(15 year old girl)

## 2. Relationships are critical – the impacts of lockdown on relationships with friends and family, both positive and negative, were significant

We asked the open-ended question, ‘How have your relationships with your family changed, for better or worse, as a result of lockdown?’ (figure 16). Nearly half (46%) of responses indicated their relationships with their family got better, and 6% felt it got worse. About a third felt it hadn’t changed, with some saying they felt their relationships were already good beforehand.

Figure 16: Themed responses to ‘Did your relationship with your family change, for better or worse, as a result of COVID-19 lockdown?’



Interestingly, better relationships did not necessarily mean never disagreeing with each other, with many commenting that there were more arguments. Responses suggested that even though there were more arguments, and the experience of lockdown was stressful on the whole family for many reasons, having the time together meant grievances could be taken to a resolution.

*“Spending a lot of time together was stressful at times but we worked things out so I suppose our relationships are better.”*

(13 year old boy)

*"During lockdown, my relatives and I argued more often than usual which was expected but I think that it was good to have the time to reflect and I think I understand what I can do to help this and I think it will improve from here. Lockdown has taught me valuable lessons regarding maintaining relationships."*

(16 year old girl)

Connections and relationships with family and friends featured heavily in the responses to all of the open-ended questions, including those summarised in figures 13, 14 and 15.

Developing stronger relationships with siblings and parents and having time to spend with parents/caregivers who weren't working all the time, were seen as a positive for 35% of respondents. For young parents, it was an opportunity to spend time with their child, without having competing commitments.

*"I got to spend more time with my child. Instead of always going to school or running small jobs for home or always cleaning when free."*

(17 year old rangatahi)

While many students enjoyed this time at home with family, it was challenging for many. Fifty-three percent of responses identified missing friends and tough family dynamics or arguments as their 'one negative' thing about the lockdown

*"I felt very lonely lots and missed all my friends. I also missed my Mum when she was on work calls all the time."*

(11 year old girl)

*"not getting the space from my family when i felt i needed it."*

(12 year old boy)

*"i can be quite introverted (sometimes) so not having to socialise with anyone other than my parents during lockdown was fun, but i did miss my friends and other family members."*

(13 year old, doesn't identify as male or female)

Connection and relationships featured again when sharing the 'one thing they'd always remember about the COVID-19 lockdown', with about one-fifth saying time spent with family was a positive. Missing family and friends as they were not able to see or connect with them was also something children and young people felt they would remember from COVID-19 lockdown.

*"... I also learnt that I can learn by myself and that its easier to ask questions and generally feel more connected with my friends family and teachers."*

(17 year old girl)

*"My roommates and I got together for dinner, so I built a lot of relationships and became closer to them. I think this is the only time in my life to spend a lot of time understanding family and friends, getting along with each other, and feeling life."*

(16 year old girl)

### 3. **Children and young people enjoyed having control over their time, having more free time, and having opportunities for new activities.**

Aspects of 'more time' featured heavily in the responses to all of the open-ended questions, including those summarised in figures 13, 14 and 15.

More than one-fifth of the responses about their 'one positive' during lockdown focused on having more free time. Respondents appreciated being able to have more control over when they did school work, what school work to focus on, as well as more free time to focus on extending hobbies and interests which they wouldn't otherwise be able to do. Comments were made about the absence of time spent commuting, meaning even if parents/caregivers were still working the same number of hours from home, they had more free time as they weren't spending it commuting.

*"Had more downtime to do the other things that I would've liked to do at home."*

(17 year old, does not identify as male or female)

*"I could have free time when I wanted. I had more time to do school work and I learnt new thing."*

(10 year old tamariki)

The activities children and young people did, as well as both the new and missed opportunities, were some of the things children and young people would most remember about lockdown. For some, that meant doing more of what they enjoy, for others it meant trying new things, for many it was exercise.

*"I enjoyed doing the things i dont have time for like cooking, drawing, painting, etc."*

(8 year old girl)

*"[...] I am also a competitive runner so another positive was being able to go for longer runs!"*

(15 year old girl)

Children and young people enjoyed being able to decide how they spent their time. They liked having the freedom to choose when they would do things, and being able to spread their schoolwork out between other activities.

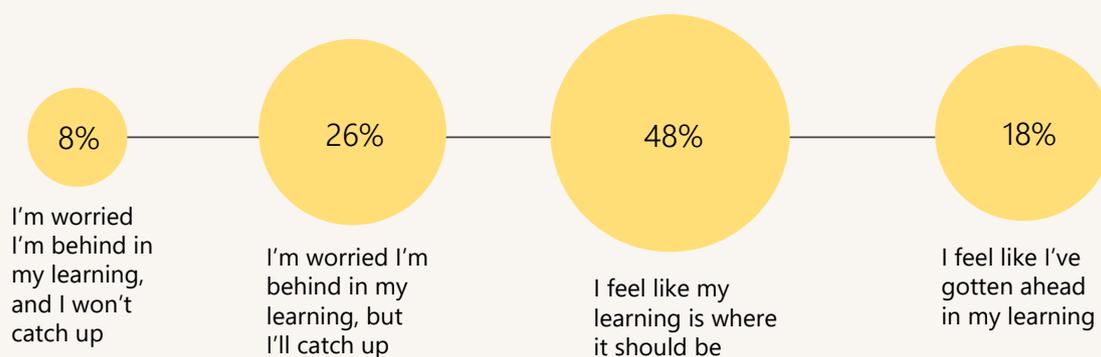
*"I loved lockdown. Specifically being able to choose when to do work, sort of popping in and out but still doing everything."*

(13 year old girl)

## 4. *The changing nature of education during lockdown was unsettling for some and seen as an opportunity for independence by others.*

We asked whether children and young people felt their learning was on track after being in lockdown and physically not attending school for 7 weeks.

Figure 17: Children and young people's self-assessment of their learning after COVID-19 lockdown.



Positively, the majority of the students who completed the survey felt their learning was either where it should be (48%), or ahead of where they thought it would be (18%). While around a third were concerned their learning had fallen behind, most felt they would catch up with only 8% feeling their learning had fallen behind to the point they wouldn't be able to catch up.

There were no significant differences for those who identified as Māori or Pacific compared to the overall responses. However, secondary school aged students were slightly more likely to feel their learning had fallen behind and they wouldn't be able to catch up compared to the primary school aged students (14% secondary compared to 8% primary). Younger students were more likely to feel their learning had gotten a head start over lockdown (18% primary compared to 14% secondary).

Education was a common theme in the responses to all the open-ended survey questions. Learning online was a new experience for most children and young people who completed the survey and it came with its own set of positives and negatives. Twenty-one percent of the responses to the 'one positive' question (figure 13) focused on having more free time. Respondents appreciated being able to have more control over when they did school work and what school work to focus on. Of those who mentioned it as a positive experience, it was most commonly because these young people appreciated the flexibility that online school provided, and the ability to be able to control how their day ran, rather than this being directed by the school.

*"I got to do what school work when i want and i didn't have to do stupid surveys."*

(10 year old boy)

*"Sleeping in was great, i never have to get up at 6 for school it was awesome and i did school at 10 not 830."*

(11 year old girl)

Another positive for some children and young people was being able to stay in a quieter environment without the distractions of their peers. These young people talked about how much easier it was to focus on their work without the distractions, and how much they appreciated being able to study in a quiet place.

*"It was much easier to focus and study."*

(13 year old girl)

*"How lucky I am and that I have things that other people might not have eg. my own computer to do school work."*

(13 year old girl)

For those who found remote learning more challenging, responses were commonly related to missing friends and the social side of school, or challenges with learning remotely.

*"I didn't get to ... talk to teachers (like sewing where i need to ask qs in person)."*

(16 year old girl)

*"Online school was hard at sometimes when we were learning about something new and the teacher couldn't really explain to us that well."*

(12 year old tamariki)

Many children and young people talked about the enduring impact COVID-19 had on how they did school. For some the freedom to do school work when it suited them was the thing they would most remember from lockdown.

*"How good learning from home is compared to learning from school and having to waste time and money to travel to and from school."*

(15 year old boy)

*"I'm pretty sure it was one of the most significantly distinctive experiences of my life, i loved it, got scared at times, and made me want to continue online school forever. but i do miss my friends so much."*

(14 year old girl)

## **5. Improvements in wellbeing varied across the children and young people we heard from.**

We knew many New Zealanders experienced lockdown differently. But we wanted to understand how it had impacted children and young people's wellbeing specifically. In October 2018 we had asked more than 5000 children and young people about their wellbeing as part of our "What Makes a Good Life?" study.<sup>13</sup> We used the same questions in this survey, asking how much children and young people agreed or disagreed with a series of 18 statements to gauge how they were experiencing wellbeing. We compared these results to the 2018 results see if wellbeing seemed better or worse.

In order to be able to compare the 2018 to the 2020 data, we used children and young people's school decile to weight responses based on their representation in the sample compared to the national representation of school decile enrolment.<sup>14</sup> This means the 2018 graph below has been presented differently to the graph featured in the "What Makes a Good Life?" report.

The Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families and Children (Awhi Rito) analysed the two sets of questions from 2018 and 2020, identifying statistically significant differences in responses to the questions we asked. The surveys do not track the same students over time and required additional adjustments due to over-representation of high-decile secondary students in 2020. The results should be interpreted taking these limitations into consideration.

Figures 18 and 19 represent the weighted response of the 2018 and 2020 surveys, respectively. Both sets of responses generally paint a positive picture, with the majority of children and young people agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

<sup>14</sup> A more in-depth explanation of our methodology is available in Appendix 1

## Elements of Wellbeing

Figure 18: Children and young people's self-assessment of selected elements of wellbeing in 2018, (weighted responses)

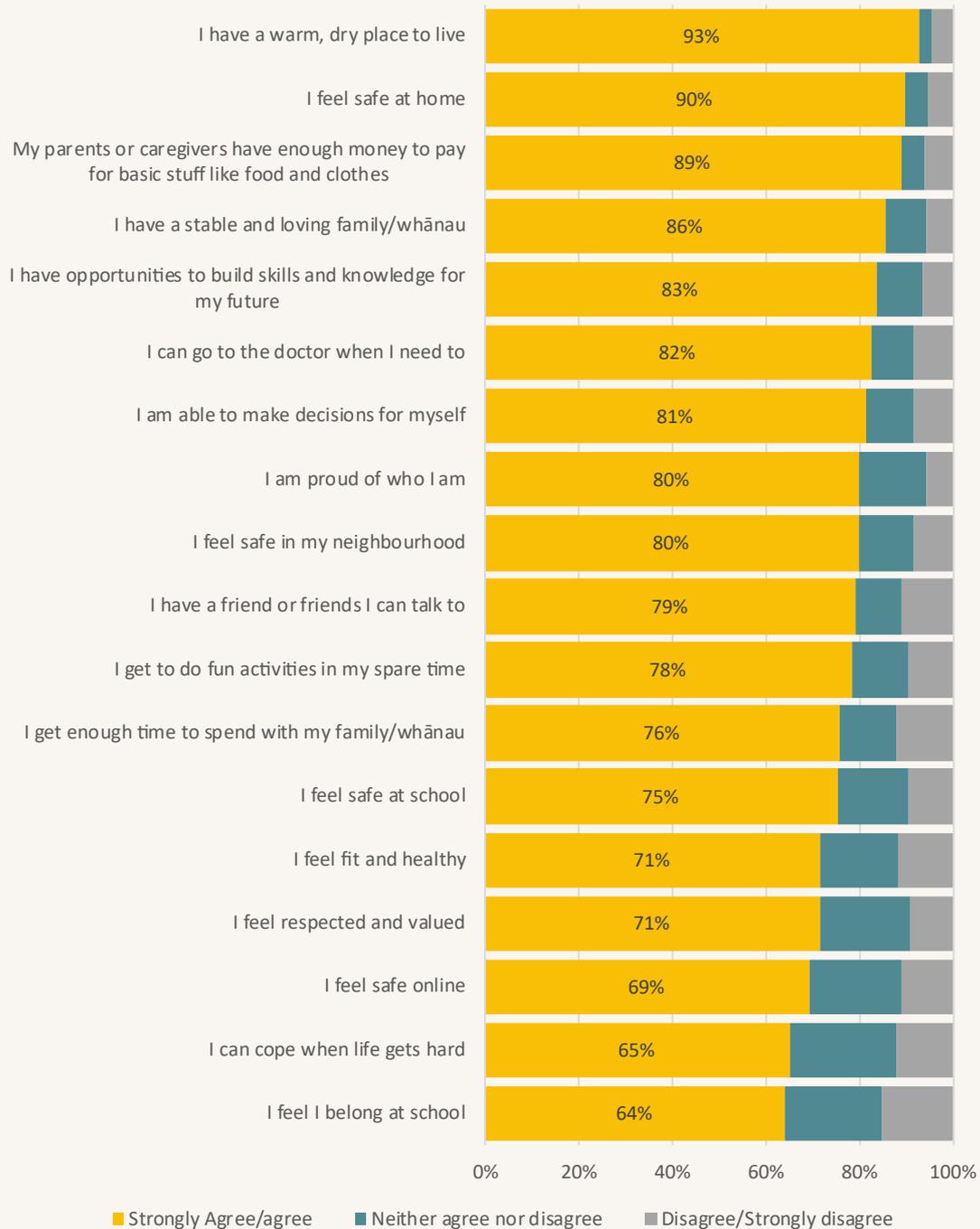
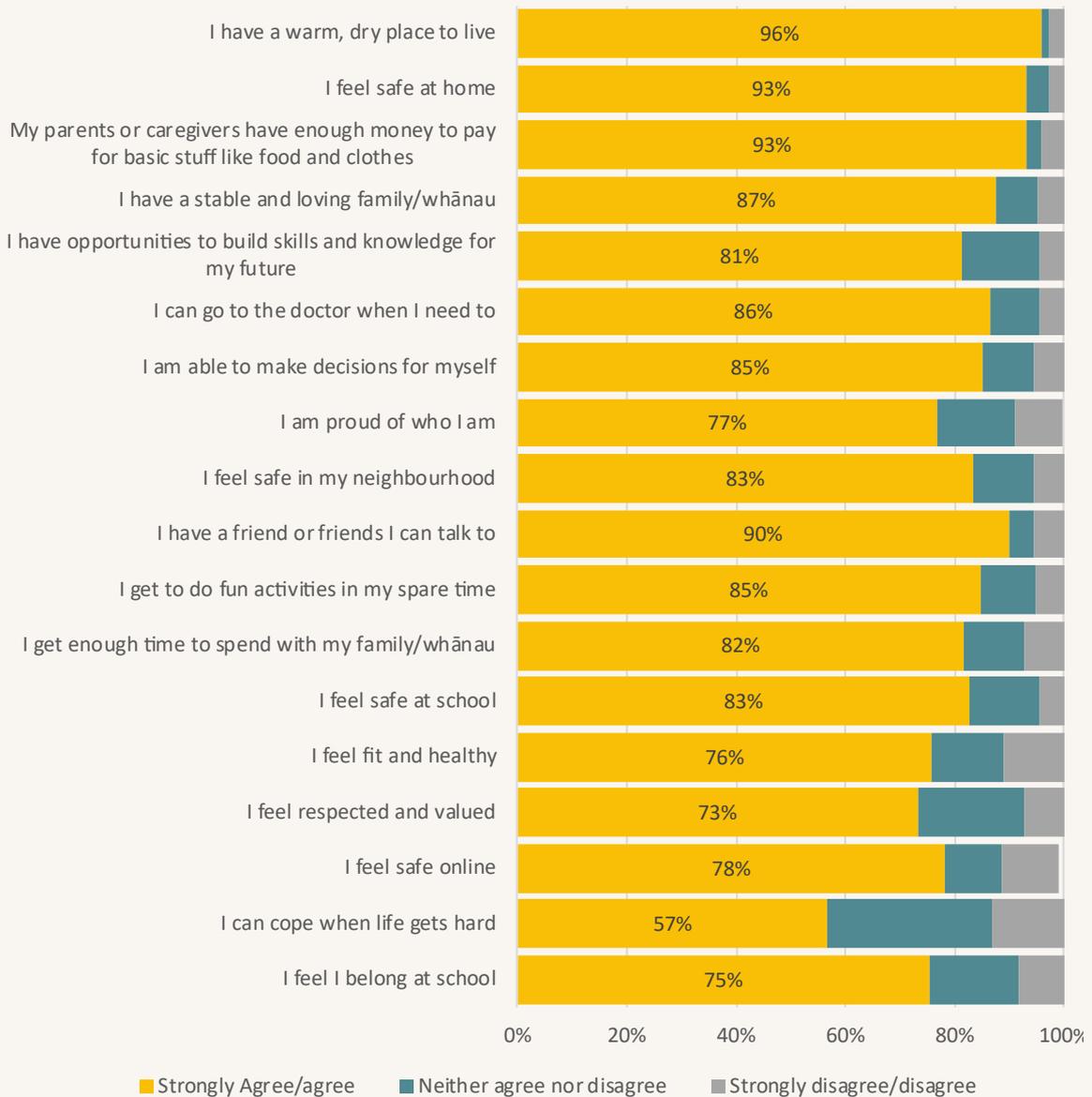


Figure 19: Children and young people's self-assessment of selected elements of wellbeing in 2020, (weighted responses)



### ***Differences in responses to the 'Elements of Wellbeing' questions***

The 2020 responses generally paint a positive picture, with the majority of children and young people agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements. For 17 of the 18 elements of wellbeing, between 73% and 96% of children and young people either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the statements were true to their own life experience. However, these results, coupled with the responses we received to the open-ended questions, highlight the diversity of experience for children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

There were many elements of wellbeing that showed significant<sup>15</sup> differences between 2018 and 2020, in the number of children and young people who either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. Of the 18 elements of wellbeing, 15 had higher rates of those who either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed', two had lower rates and one had no significant change. There was often significant variation between primary aged children (aged between 7 and 13 years, including students attending intermediate schools) and secondary school aged young people (aged 14-18).<sup>16</sup>

Some of the largest differences in the percentage that either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' between 2018 and 2020 related to how safe children and young people feel, as well as having friends and feeling they belong at school:

Figure 20: *Positive differences in 2020 wellbeing, compared to 2018 responses.*

	<b>Primary school aged children (8-13 years)</b>	<b>Secondary school aged young people (14-18 years)</b>
'I feel safe online'	+4%	+11%
'I feel safe at school'	+6%	+9%
'I feel safe in my neighbourhood'		+6%
'I feel safe at home'		+5%
'I have a friend or friends I can talk to'	+11%	+11%
'I feel I belong at school'	+6%	+16%

<sup>15</sup> Chi<sup>2</sup> tests were conducted, with all differences noted in this section statistically different at least  $p < .05$

<sup>16</sup> Appendix 2 provides full information on the range of the differences reported

While overall the results showed positive differences in most areas, there were a couple of elements where the 2020 results were lower.

Figure 21: Negative differences in 2020 wellbeing, compared to 2018.

	Primary school	Secondary school
'I have opportunities to build skills and knowledge for my future'	-6%	
'I can cope when life gets hard'		-13%

We also explored whether these patterns in wellbeing varied for children and young people across different school deciles. We broke the responses into two broad decile groups (those in decile 1-5 schools vs. decile 6-10 schools) and into primary or secondary school. The weighted findings illuminate some key differences between the two groups.

There were a number of differences in the data for the children and young people who attended a lower decile school. This was particularly obvious when comparing the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses for secondary school aged young people across decile. Some of the largest differences for secondary schools were:

Figure 22: Divergent differences in 2020 elements of wellbeing compared to 2018, by school decile.

	Secondary decile 1-5	Secondary decile 6-10
'I feel fit and healthy'	-5%	+22%
'I have opportunities to build skills and knowledge for my future'	-11%	+9%
'I get to do fun activities in my spare time'	-6%	+17%

These results seem to point to higher inequalities among the 2020 respondents and require further investigation.

### ***Lockdown had impacts on children and young people's mental health***

When responding to the statement, "I can cope when life gets hard", just 57% of children and young people 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that this reflected their own experience in 2020. This was the lowest rated element of wellbeing, and is 8% lower than responses to the same element in 2018. While there was no significant difference in this element for primary aged children, there was a significant change for young people at secondary school, with this highest for those in high decile schools.

Figure 23: Differences in "I can cope when life gets hard," 2020 compared to 2018, by school decile.

	Secondary decile 1-5	Secondary decile 6-10
'I can cope when life gets hard'	-8%	-16%

This is a real concern pointing to our growing youth mental health challenges. Mental health challenges were also reflected in the responses to other questions. For example, 12% of responses to the 'one negative' question (figure 14) were related to mental health. They described it as loneliness, nervousness, boredom and poor motivation, and missing the daily stimulation and routine of school.

*"I was just really lonely man, I felt like I couldn't talk to people."*

(15 year old girl)

*"I felt overwhelmed almost all the time and struggled to keep up with my school work."*

(14 year old girl)

*"Time to reflect on my mental health, which helped me decide to go to the counselor."*

(14 year old rangatahi)

For 10% of the children and young people we heard from, their lasting memory of the lockdown period (figure 15) centred on feelings of sadness, anxiousness, feeling alone, bored, worried for themselves, their families, and the wider community nationally and globally, and having low motivation to do things.

*"I was worried a lot and I would research a lot on the vaccine."*

(16 year old boy)

*"The blur of the days all together and anxiety with actually socialising during it."*

(14 year old girl)

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# Section Four: Policy implications and next steps

## ***The views of children can help guide our policy responses to COVID-19 and beyond***

This report explores how the children and young people who responded to our survey experienced COVID-19 lockdown in levels 3 and 4. There are clear and recurring themes which point to important policy implications.

While the survey results provide insights into the extent and type of challenges faced by some children and young people, they do not provide in-depth insights into how those challenges are experienced, especially by different groups of children.

Understanding the lived experience of children and young people and the impact COVID-19 has had on their lives and wellbeing is critical to providing supports and services that will better meet their needs. This is an area which requires further work. In particular, face-to-face engagements such as interviews and focus groups to provide an increased depth of response, and efforts to reach children and young people who may not wish or be able to complete an online survey.

Children and young people have experienced both positive and negative aspects of life in lockdown. It is important that we seek to maintain and enhance the positives and we consider how to mitigate the negatives. This section focuses on how our five insights might inform future policy development for children.

### **1. COVID-19 had a range of different impacts on the children and young people we heard from – both positives and negatives.**

We heard about a range of different experiences from children and young people across Aotearoa New Zealand through the survey. In general, the children and young people who responded to our survey focused on the positive things about lockdown. Many also acknowledged the hard things about being in lockdown levels 3 and 4 but chose to highlight good things like time with family, opportunities to do new things, and having more control over their time.

It is clear that there are differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people.

Responses to COVID-19 need to take into account the inequities that existed before the pandemic, those that have been exacerbated by COVID-19, and those that are forecast for the future.

The Ministry of Health's COVID-19 recovery plan states:

*The psychosocial response to COVID-19 must be grounded in equity and ensure responsiveness for Māori and for other population groups who experience inequitable outcomes or have unique needs, while also meeting the needs of the entire population.<sup>17</sup>*

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has outlined in a Statement its grave concerns for the physical, emotional and psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and called on States to protect the rights of children. The 11th point of the Statement sets out an expectation that states would:

*Provide opportunities for children's views to be heard and taken into account in decision-making processes on the pandemic. Children should understand what is happening and feel that they are taking part in the decisions that are being made in response to the pandemic. UNCRC, April 2020.<sup>18</sup>*

It is important that the government actively consider how its efforts to respond to COVID-19 are informed by a range of children and young people's views and the differential impacts on children and young people, as a collective, and as individuals.

***Recovery efforts need to ensure children and young people are not treated as a homogenous group. This means ensuring the rights, interests and wellbeing of different groups of children are considered in policy responses, including: tamariki Māori, Pacific Peoples, disabled children and children who belong to the rainbow community.***

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Health. 2020. Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa: COVID-19 Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Recovery Plan. Wellington: Ministry of Health <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/covid-19-psycho-social-mental-wellbeing-recovery-plan-15may2020.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> UNCRC, April 2020, as downloaded from: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CRC/STA/9095&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CRC/STA/9095&Lang=en)

## **2. Relationships are critical – the impacts of lockdown on relationships with friends and family, both positive and negative, were significant**

Most of the children and young people we heard from highlighted the importance of family, relationships and friends during lockdown. Having more time to spend with family was considered by most as a positive of lockdown. The children and young people who responded to our survey predominantly thought their relationships with their parents and or caregivers had improved over lockdown. Some talked about how lockdown provided an opportunity to get to know each other better, and to have more quality time with each other. Others said how the stress, at times, placed strain on their family, some finding the close quarters with family incredibly challenging and at times very isolating.

This insight, coupled with research findings about stress on families parenting through lockdown,<sup>19</sup> highlights the importance of a work-life, family-life balance.

*Maintaining the gain of positive work, family-life balance some families experienced means a re-think of our work structures and environments to allow more time for families and children to be together. That includes finding new and innovative ways of working that allow for minimal commuter time, flexible work hours, adequate sick leave and maternity/paternity leave options, and adequate pay levels so low wage workers don't have to work excessive hours.*

## **3. Children and young people enjoyed having control over their time, having more free time, and having opportunities for new activities.**

Many of the children and young people we heard from appreciated the freedom that lockdown provided. In lockdown they liked being able to sleep in, having less expectations or time pressures, being able to choose how they spent their time, and when they did their school work. Many of those we heard from appreciated being able to try new activities and hobbies during lockdown.

Independent play and free time are critical to child and adolescent development. We must recognise that poverty of opportunity and choice are significant factors that impact on a child's right to play and to be involved in their communities. Families and whānau need to be supported and resourced so that play and free time are realistic options for children and young people.

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<sup>19</sup> Prickett, Kate C., Michael Fletcher, Simon Chapple, Nyguen Doan, and Conal Smith (2020). Life in lockdown: The economic and social effect of lockdown during Alert Level 4 in New Zealand. Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University of Wellington.

*This demonstrates to schools and families the benefits of fewer activities and more down-time for children and young people. COVID-19 rebuild efforts should include opportunities for children and young people to play and engage in their communities and surroundings in ways that are meaningful to them.*

#### **4. The changing nature of education during lockdown was unsettling for some and seen as an opportunity for independence by others.**

Online learning was a new experience for most children and young people who completed the survey. Experiences were both positive and negative and ranged from enjoying the flexibility online learning offered, finding online learning boring or challenging, being able to stay in a quieter environment without the distractions of their peers, and missing the social side of school. Many young people noted they enjoyed more control over their time.

The availability of devices and data was not universal, and this digital divide further adds to existing inequalities in learning outcomes for children and young people facing economic disadvantage.

*We should challenge the education system to consider how to support young people to have greater flexibility and have options for greater learning on-line if it suits their needs best. Access to technology needs to be seen as an essential communication and learning tool, not a luxury item for some.*

#### **5. Improvements in wellbeing varied across the children and young people we heard from.**

We asked children and young people a series of 18 statements that were the same questions chosen to broadly cover aspects of wellbeing in the 2018 'What Makes a Good Life?' engagement to inform the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. Overall the results showed that many of the areas of wellbeing showed significant differences, with higher self-reported wellbeing in the 2020 responses. However, these results showed considerable variation when analysed by school decile. Responses from the lower decile schools (1-5) showed consistently lower wellbeing ratings with those in higher decile schools (6-10) recording higher wellbeing ratings (see Appendix 2). This seems to be indicating a widening inequality for children and young people from lower socio-economic communities. Further investigation of this issue is needed.

A further concern is the lower proportion of young people that said they could cope when things get hard. This is further reinforced by the NZ health survey that found the increase in psychological distress for young people aged 15-24 is much greater than the population as a whole. The findings of the Youth19 survey are consistent with the NZ health survey and

other research highlighting a general decline in youth mental health internationally and prior research emphasising the importance of poverty and inequality in mental health.<sup>20</sup>

***Policy decisions must recognise these different experiences and pressures on families and address the underlying issues of poverty that drives so many inequalities. A particular focus also needs to be taken to support mental wellness for young people.***

## Conclusion

Although this report has highlighted many of the positives that children and young people talked about when reflecting on their time in lockdown, we know that for some, lockdown created significant challenges, broadening and deepening some already difficult living situations and existing inequities.

As COVID-19 continues to have impacts both globally and here at home in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is increasingly important to continue to listen to the voices of children and young people, their family, whānau and communities. Hearing the stories and views of a diverse range of children and young people and valuing their lived experience is the only way to truly understand their individual circumstances.

Elevating and amplifying their views so that they are included in the development of policy and rebuild efforts will lead to better decisions and more effective outcomes.

This global pandemic continues to have significant impacts both on life right now, and into the future. Children and young people, their families, whānau, hapū, iwi and wider communities should be supported to be leaders in how we grapple with these impacts and their future and move forward together.

Listening to, considering and incorporating the views of children into government responses to COVID-19 can improve policy and lead to better outcomes for all. The above section on further analysis of policy implications from the survey findings and other research, offers insights about how children and young people can be better supported through the COVID-19 recovery. It is our hope that this report will encourage policy makers in government and those focusing on rebuild efforts to consider children's views in their decisions in responding to the impacts of COVID-19.

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20 Fleming, T., Tiatia-Seath, J., Peiris-John, R., Sutcliffe, K., Archer, D., Bavin, L., Crengle, S., & Clark, T. (2020). Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey, Initial Findings: Hauora Hinengaro / Emotional and Mental Health. The Youth19 Research Group, The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bdbb75ccef37259122e59aa/t/5f338e4cfb539d2246e9e5ce/1597214306382/Youth19+Mental+Health+Report.pdf>)

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# Appendix One: Methodology

The survey was sent out shortly after restrictions reduced from level 3 lockdown to level 2 in May 2020. We asked children and young people about their wellbeing on the day they took the survey, in level 2. We also asked them to reflect on their experiences of lockdown levels 3 and 4, what they had experienced during that time and the impacts that time had on them.

## ***Survey methodology***

We asked a range of closed and open-ended questions through an online survey, which had a targeted distribution list through schools and community partners. Manual coding was carried out on the open-ended questions. A broad range of topics were identified. We grouped responses into clusters of common themes.

The 115 schools who previously participated in the OCC's 2018 "What Makes a Good Life?" engagement were invited to take part in the survey. This included schools from throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, covering all deciles and both rural and urban locations. That sample frame was used as it was tested to be generally representative of school-aged children in New Zealand.

Approximately a quarter of schools participated, across a range of deciles, cities and from both rural and urban settings. We also invited community youth organisations to participate in the hope of hearing from children and young people who may not be in education.

## ***Weighting of the responses***

In order to make sure that our survey responses more closely reflected the overall population of children and young people in New Zealand, we assessed the overall characteristic of the respondents against the known population. While ethnicity, gender and age were as we expected, the distribution by school decile was skewed to the high-decile end. This means we had a higher response from more socio-economically advantaged children and young people.

We applied decile weighting so the responses were calibrated to the appropriate decile distribution and assessed responses to determine if there were significant differences responses before and after weighting.

We determined that it was most appropriate to use the weighted values for responses to the questions on:

- What adults in the home did during lockdown
- Access to a device during lockdown
- Access to data during lockdown
- Elements of wellbeing

We were supported by the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families and Children (Awhi Rito) who developed a demographic weighting process to reflect the decile distribution of the general child and youth population.

The population-level enrolment information by decile was obtained through the Ministry of Education's website, Education Counts (<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/schooling/student-numbers/6028>).

### ***Elements of Wellbeing***

Our survey asked the same set of wellbeing questions on the 2020 survey as was asked on the 2018 survey whose results were presented in the February 2019 'What Makes a Good Life?' report. We have compared children and young people's views on this series of questions.

In order to make the 2018 and 2020 data more comparative, we used children and young people's school decile to weight responses based on their representation in the sample compared to the national representation of school decile enrolment. These weights were constructed within each year and by school type (i.e., primary and secondary school enrolment representativeness). This also helped correct for some of socioeconomic differences between the 2018 and 2020 samples. We dropped responses from the 2018 data where school deciles were not known. In order to make comparisons between the two time points, we present the weighted estimates in the graphs in the body of this report, and in the tables in Appendix 2.

The findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

Children who provided a school name were able to be matched to the associated school decile and were included in the quantitative analyses. While the unweighted findings were substantively similar to the weighted estimates presented in this report, the weighted estimates we present are more conservative (e.g. increases in wellbeing were lesser and decreases in wellbeing greater between 2018 and 2020 in the weighted analyses). This likely reflects a more socioeconomically-advantaged sample of young people and children who participated in the 2020 survey.

## ***There are some limitations in the approach we took***

Some of the limitations to this approach were:

- The written survey format excluded young children and those who were not able to engage in this way
- Only children and young people who were in school on the day the survey was held participated.
- The number of tamariki and rangatahi Māori respondents were lower than their national representation.
- Young people not in education or in contact with a community organisation who shared the survey missed out on the opportunity to participate.
- Young people who had not returned to school after lockdown were excluded
- There was an over-representation of young people from high decile secondary schools.

We recognise the exclusively online and written nature of this survey limited the reach of this engagement. Usually we would seek to complement online survey methods with face to face engagement to make sure children and young people who may not otherwise get a chance to have a say get the opportunity to have their perspectives heard.

Due to the timing of the survey in level 2, and in recognition of students transitioning back to in-person learning after lockdown, we were unable to undertake face-to-face engagements.

## Appendix Two: Elements of wellbeing additional details

Our survey asked the same set of wellbeing questions on the 2020 survey as was asked on the 2018 survey whose results were presented in the February 2019 'What Makes a Good Life?' report. We have compared children and young people's views on this series of questions.

The below tables show percentage difference between 2018 and 2020 results when separated out into primary and secondary school aged students who either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements. Chi2 tests were conducted, with all differences noted in this section statistically different at least  $p < .05$ . Where the difference is higher, it is noted as + and – when lower, with NC used when there was no significant change. All results are weighted.

Figure 24: Detailed differences in wellbeing, 2020 compared to 2018.

Wellbeing element	Primary aged students (6-12 years)			Secondary aged students (13-18 years)			All responses
	All	Decile 1-5	Decile 6-10	All	Decile 1-5	Decile 6-10	
'I can cope when life gets hard'	NC	NC	NC	-13%	-8%	-16%	-8%
'I am proud of who I am'	NC	NC	+ 8%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
'I feel I belong at school'	+6%	NC	+15%	+16%	+11%	+20%	+11%
'I feel safe online'	+4%	NC	+8%	+11%	NC	+16%	+9%
'I feel fit and healthy'	-3%	-4%	NC	+10%	-5%	+22%	+4%
'I feel respected and valued'	+5%	+5%	NC	NC	NC	NC	+2%
'I feel safe at school'	+6%	+6%	+7%	+9%	NC	+16%	+7%
'I get enough time to spend with my family/whānau'	NC	-5%	+9%	+9%	-4%	+19%	+6%
'I feel safe in my neighbourhood'	NC	NC	NC	+6%	-5%	+14%	+4%
'I get to do fun activities in my spare time'	+7%	+8%	NC	+7%	-6%	+17%	+6%
'I have a friend or friends I can talk to'	+11%	+9%	+12%	+11%	NC	+17%	+11%

'I am able to make decisions for myself'	NC	NC	NC	+6%	NC	+11%	+4%
'I can go to the doctor when I need to'	NC	NC	NC	+5%	NC	+10%	+4%
'I have opportunities to build skills and knowledge for my future'	6%	-8%	NC	NC	-11%	+9%	-2%
'I have a stable and loving family/whānau'	NC	NC	NC	NC	-6%	+11%	+2%
'My parents or caregivers have enough money to pay for basic stuff like food and clothes'	+6%	NC	+ 8%	+4%	-2%	+10%	+4%
'I feel safe at home'	NC	NC	NC	+4%	-3%	+10%	+3%
'I have a warm, dry place to live'	NC	NC	NC	5%	-3%	+10%	+3%



MANAAKITIA Ā TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's  
Commissioner