

Background Information about the Student

This chapter presents information about Emily's relationship with her family, and her general behaviour, including reaction to family rules and boundaries. It also discusses aspects of her health and well-being, leisure-time pursuits, including extent of television viewing, and responsibilities and chores at home.

Subsequent chapters about Emily cover friendships and social interactions in general, her particular qualities as a learner, how she felt about school and the extent to which she engaged in the wider life of the school. Also covered are her attitudes towards subjects and her assessment of the ones she was best at, her views and experiences of teachers, how she handled the transition from primary to secondary school and the subsequent transition from Year 9 to Year 10. And, finally, her achievement over the course of the study is discussed.

Introducing Emily¹³

Emily identified as New Zealand Māori/ Pakeha and lived with her parents, grandparent and younger siblings.

Her parents were keen for Emily to have the best opportunities in life.

When the transition study began, and our students were nearing the end of their last year of primary schooling (Year 8), Emily was 13 years of age. She identified as New Zealand Māori/Pakeha, and lived with her mother, father, grandmother and two younger siblings. All members of her immediate family were born in New Zealand and English was the language spoken in the home.

It was evident that te ao Māori was very important to Emily: she mentioned particularly enjoying studying tikanga and te reo Māori at school, and her Year 8 teacher stated that these were areas in which Emily did particularly well. And by the end of her first year of secondary school Emily commented that one of the most interesting and worthwhile topics she had learned about during the year was Māori history in social studies. She remarked at that stage too

that she would like to have seen the works of Witi Ihimaera¹⁴ on the list of required reading for English, because she felt that his writing was much more relevant to her and to many of her friends than some of the texts that were selected.

Both parents had paid employment, her mother as a part-time kitchen-hand and her father as a skilled worker in a service industry. Information about Emily's parents' educational qualifications was not provided in the questionnaire completed by parents; there were however data that showed that Emily's parents were very keen for her to have as good an education as possible to give her the opportunity for a satisfying career and a good life. Her parents also stated in relation to Emily's future that they would be "*proud of her whatever she does*".

Emily had a room of her own, a quiet place to study (although no desk for that purpose), a dictionary and other books at home to help with her schoolwork, and a calculator.

When asked to describe other aspects of her home, Emily reported that her family owned a car, both a landline telephone and a cell phone, and a computer. Emily had access to the Internet on their home computer but not software packages designed to help student learning, such as Encarta. Emily estimated that there would be between 26 and 100 books in her home.¹⁵ The family did not own any musical instruments.

¹³ As explained in Part I, this is not the student's real name.

¹⁴ A New Zealand Māori author of national and international acclaim.

¹⁵ All students in the study were asked in the Phase 1 interviews whether the features or items listed were in their home. Students were also asked to estimate — they were provided with a simple 'formula' to help them gauge this — how many books there were in their household. The purpose of these questions was to obtain a quick, very broad indication of family socio-economic status.

Relationship with Parents/Family

Emily's responses to the list of statements given in Exhibit A (following) indicate that she had a very good relationship with her parents/whānau, a strong sense that they looked out for her well-being and safety, and felt that they took a real interest in her and in each other generally. The data also show that Emily's feelings about her family remained very stable over the course of the study.¹⁶

Talking about School with Family and Others

At the different phases of the study, Emily advised that her mother was there when she arrived home from school and that her "Mum" was the person she most often chose to talk to about what happened at school. In Phase 2, Emily added that she also talked to her younger sister about school, apparently taking on a sort of 'mentoring' role:

"I tell her what the expectations are — she will be Year 9 next year."

Referring to the things she told her mother about school, in Phase 1 Emily said she talked about everything that happened, including what she did at lunchtimes with her friends, and problems that arose. And at the end of her first term at secondary school this is what Emily had to say:

"I tell her problems, which is hardly ever [because I seldom have problems]. She gives me encouragement and help to find solutions. I tell her funny things and we joke around."

As a Year 10 student, Emily now talked to her mother about the following aspects of school:

"Oh, like, if I have a problem at school, I will tell her that. But I'll also let her know that it's nothing to be worrying about, unless I can't handle it. And I tell her interesting things that happen, funny things, and I tell her about my friends 'cause she knows most of them. And I tell her about my teachers, and if I'm struggling on anything. I practically tell her everything. [Pause] It's just some things are harder to tell her about — some things that I do. She tells me to be open with her but it's harder to be straight up [with some things]. I end up telling her but it takes me a while."

Emily's mother too stated that she and Emily 'often' talked together about school matters. For instance, in Phase 3 she commented that their discussions covered...

"...projects, school trips, teachers, ups and downs of the day."

The finding that Emily liked to share her experiences of school with her parents', particularly her mother, is indicative of a positive relationship. Her parents' answer of 'very well' to the Phase 1 question 'Most of the time how would you say you and your Year 8 child get on together this year'¹⁷ reinforces the positive nature of their relationship.

Other indications that Emily's parents took an interest in her learning and were supportive include Emily's feedback at each phase of the study that her parents 'always' checked that she had done her homework and were 'always' willing to provide help if she needed it (see discussion around Exhibit C in Chapter Six). As well, specifying 'the main things you do with your Year 8 child this year', Emily's parents wrote:

"Followed her sports. Supported her in decisions she made. Family meetings. Communication. Got involved with school activities."

Emily's relationship with her parents/whānau was very positive.

Emily regularly talked with her mother about what happened to her at school.

Her parents ensured that Emily completed her homework.

¹⁶ Emily rated almost every statement listed in Exhibit A as 'always or almost always true' across all four phases of the study. The exceptions were statements d), i), l) and q) to which she responded as follows.

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
d) My parents worry too much about what I do at school	1	3	4	3
i) My parents want to control whatever I do	3	5	4	5
l) My parents expect too much from me	2	2	5	5
q) My parents let me do what I like	3	4	4	3

Note: '1'=Always/almost always true; '2'=Usually true; '3'=Sometimes true/sometimes not true; '4'=Not very often true; and '5'=Not at all true. Emily's answers suggest that her parents were according her greater independence as time went on, while at the same time ensuring that they were looking out for her well-being by continuing to have rules and boundaries for behaviour in place.

¹⁷ This question was also asked of parents in Phases 2 and 4 but Emily's parents did not provide feedback at these phases of the study.

Exhibit A: Aspects of their relationships with parents/whānau that students rated over the course of the study

Aspect of relationship ^a
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) I get along with my parents/caregivers b) My parents/caregivers praise me when I do well c) My parents/caregivers ask about what I do at school d) My parents/caregivers worry too much about what I do with my friends e) My parents/caregivers like my friends f) My parents/caregivers know when I am upset about something g) I can tell my parents/caregivers my problems and troubles h) My parents/caregivers trust me i) My parents/caregivers want to control whatever I do j) My parents/caregivers care about me k) My parents/caregivers understand me l) My parents/caregivers expect too much from me m) I do interesting things with my parents/caregivers n) I feel close to my family/whānau o) My family/whānau asks me about school p) My parents/caregivers help me if I need help q) My parents/caregivers let me do what I like r) My family/whānau really help and support each other
<p><i>Students indicated the extent to which each statement applied to their particular circumstances by selecting from the following scale:</i></p> <p><i>1 = Always or almost always true</i></p> <p><i>2 = Usually true</i></p> <p><i>3 = Sometimes true, sometimes not true</i></p> <p><i>4 = Not very often true</i></p> <p><i>5 = Not at all true</i></p>

^a Note that statements are sequentially labelled (a, b, c, etc) for ease of reference only; they were not labelled in this way on the version given to students to rate during their interviews.

All Students

Who was there when they arrived home from school

For the large majority of students, at least one parent or some other adult was there when they arrived home after school; and for most of the rest there were either older siblings present or some after-school arrangement had been made, such as going to a grandparent's house until their parents came home. However, for around 10 percent of students at the beginning and end of the study, students came home to an empty house after school.

Who they talked to most about school

Students most often talked to their 'Mum' about school matters. But once they reached secondary school, students were more likely to also choose to talk to their friends and older siblings about what happened at school. And it became increasingly apparent over time that (some) students either grew more reluctant to talk or often chose to tell their parents only certain things about school — work, achievement, teachers, problems, reserving other topics, especially anything to do with social relationships, for friends/siblings.

Student feedback on parents' input with homework

More than two-thirds (70–73%) of students in Phases 1 and 2 reported that their parents almost always or usually checked that they had completed their homework. This percentage dropped to 55 percent in Phase 3, but rose again to 61 percent in Phase 4. At the other end of the scale, eight percent of students in Phase 1 reported that parents seldom or never checked their homework; corresponding figures for the subsequent three phases were 13 percent, 19 percent and 20 percent.

Student feedback about parents helping them with homework when required was mostly very positive, with 83, 89, 77 and 73 percent at respective phases saying that their parents usually or always helped them. However, over the course of the study the proportion of students saying their parents seldom or never helped with homework when they needed it rose from three percent in Phase 1 to 10 percent in Phase 4.

All Students

Their overall relationships with parents/whānau

At each phase of the study students provided us with feedback about aspects of their relationships with their parents, according to the dimensions listed in the table below. They provided their responses by means of a five-point rating scale.

The data presented show that despite diverse backgrounds and circumstances, students in general rated their relationships with parents/family very positively over the course of the study.

Aspect of relationship	Students who answered either 'Always or almost always true' or 'Usually true' ^a to each statement			
	Phase 1 %	Phase 2 %	Phase 3 %	Phase 4 %
a) I get along with my parents/caregivers	94	96	91	89
b) My parents/caregivers praise me when I do well	92	93	86	95
c) My parents/caregivers ask about what I do at school	85	82	73	77
d) My parents/caregivers worry too much about what I do with my friends	49	47	44	43
e) My parents/caregivers like my friends	87	79	75	78
f) My parents/caregivers know when I am upset about something	79	68	67	55
g) I can tell my parents/caregivers my problems and troubles	72	68	58	59
h) My parents/caregivers trust me	91	88	78	86
i) My parents/caregivers want to control whatever I do	36	32	25	28
j) My parents/caregivers care about me	98	99	97	97
k) My parents/caregivers understand me	93	86	79	84
l) My parents/caregivers expect too much from me	32	34	25	25
m) I do interesting things with my parents/caregivers	74	68	58	55
n) I feel close to my family/whānau	94	90	87	88
o) My family/whānau asks me about school	88	87	76	77
p) My parents/caregivers help me if I need help	96	95	87	88
q) My parents/caregivers let me do what I like	35	38	31	29
r) My family/whānau really help and support each other	93	89	89	88

^a To simplify presentation of the data, in this table we have combined the two response categories 'Always or almost always true' and 'Usually true'. Although some of the detail is lost by doing this, it still provides a useful idea of overall trends in students' responses regarding relationships with their parents/whānau.

There was also a great deal of consistency in responses over time for most of the aspects listed, the main exceptions being statements f), g), and m).

For example, in contrast to Phase 1, considerably lower proportions of students in Phase 4 were now saying that they felt their parents usually knew when they were upset about something, or that they could tell their parents about their problems or troubles. There were also fewer students in Phase 4 who currently felt that they did 'interesting things with their parents/caregivers'. The proportion of students who answered either 'not very often true' or 'not at all true' (as opposed to choosing the 'sometimes true, sometimes not true' option) also rose between Phases 1 and 4 for each of these categories, from between six percent (aspect 'f') and 13 percent (aspect 'g') in Phase 1 to between 11 ('f') and 19 percent ('g') in Phase 4. (Very few students omitted to answer one or more aspects of this question; where there was missing data, it was usually just one or two students involved.)

continued...

All Students

Their overall relationships with parents/whānau – continued

It would seem that although students felt there was constancy in fundamental aspects of their relationships with parents/family — such as that their parents cared about them and would help them if they needed help — they were also signalling that changes were occurring in their relationships as they became more independent and/or were spending more time with peers.

Teacher Views of Family Support

Teacher feedback consolidates the picture of caring parents/whānau. The Year 8 teacher, for example, considered that Emily's parents had been 'very supportive' of their daughter's schoolwork during the year¹⁸ and were very supportive of her in general. A similarly positive rating of family support was given in Phase 3 by Emily's Year 9 form class teacher.

Family Rules and Discipline

It was evident that there were established rules and guidelines set for Emily and her siblings for appropriate behaviour in the home and beyond.

In Phase 1, Emily's parents indicated that there were family rules about: watching TV; completing homework; spending time with friends — including when and where they could meet; using the telephone; playing computer games; surfing the Internet; playing video games; sharing housework; and how they

dressed. There were also rules about alcohol, language, time to be home by, the movies or videos they were allowed to watch, and bedtime on school days¹⁹.

Emily seemed to generally respect the need for her parents to place certain boundaries on what she could or could not do. For example, when asked as a Year 8 student what she would decide if her friends wanted her to do something her parents told her not to do, Emily replied 'wouldn't do it', adding that it was important to "*obey my parents' rules*". After almost a year at secondary school, and again when she was in Year 10, Emily continued to say that she 'wouldn't do it' to this same question.

In contrast, it is interesting — although perhaps not surprising — to note that her parents' response to an equivalent question in Phase 1 was that Emily 'would try to persuade me to let her' (before she, on the whole, conceded defeat!).²⁰

Teachers regarded Emily's parents as very supportive.

The family had established rules for appropriate behaviour.

Emily generally respected the rules and boundaries set by her parents.

All Students

Teacher feedback on how supportive parents were of students

Participating teachers in each of Phases 1 and 3 judged the majority of parents of students in the study to be 'supportive' or 'very supportive' of their children. This was especially the case in Phase 1 when the teachers rated over 80 percent of the Year 8 students' parents as being supportive or very supportive. Year 9 teachers were less likely to give these ratings, but this was primarily because a greater proportion of these teachers answered 'not sure', considering that they did not know parents well enough to be able to make a judgement.

As well, at each of the two phases, teachers considered that in a small number of cases — six percent in Phase 1 and two percent in Phase 3 — the students' parents were either 'not supportive' or 'not at all supportive', noting in the latter instance that they had concerns about the child's family circumstances.

¹⁸ By contrast, when asked to describe parental support for students in her class as a whole, this teacher rated parents as 'supportive', adding "*Generally*".

¹⁹ Each of these areas for family rules was listed in the parent questionnaire. Parents were asked to answer 'Yes', 'No' or 'Not applicable' to each one, as appropriate.

²⁰ Parents were not asked this question in Phase 3 and feedback from Emily's parents was not provided in Phase 4.

All Students

Family rules and discipline

Parents were asked if they had family rules in place for any or all of the following:

- (a) TV watching;
- (b) Homework;
- (c) Spending time with friends;
- (d) Where child can meet her/his friends;
- (e) Using the telephone;
- (f) Using the computer for games;
- (g) Using the Internet;
- (h) Playing video games/Playstation;
- (i) Doing housework;
- (j) Dress;
- (k) Use of alcohol;
- (l) Language;
- (m) Time to be home by;
- (n) Movies/videos s/he can watch;
- (o) Bedtime on school days.

Of the parents who responded in Phase 1 (N=60, 54%), two-thirds or more indicated they had family rules in place for each of options 'a' to 'd' and 'i' to 'o'.

Where parents indicated that they did not have family rules in place in their households, this was most often in relation to dress standards (27%), using the telephone (17%), spending time with friends (11%), watching TV (10%), and using the computer for games (9%).

Rather than indicating whether or not they had family rules to do with alcohol, 17 percent of parents omitted to answer (missing data was minimal for each of the other categories), suggesting that parents did not think alcohol was generally an issue for Year 8 students, although they may perhaps have had rules in place about this for any older children in the family.

A small number of parents answered 'not applicable' for some areas: one parent because they had no telephone, four parents because they had no computer, 12 because they did not have Internet access, and 11 because the family did not own Playstation or video games.

Parents mostly indicated that if their children did break the rules, punishment was usually time out, withdrawal of privileges (eg, reduced computer time, no pocket money), staying in until chores were completed, or being 'talked to'. One or two mentioned physical punishment.

Student Behaviour, Independence, and Responsibility

On the basis of changes in ratings over time on three of the dimensions shown in Exhibit A — ‘My parents worry too much about what I do with my friends’, ‘My parents expect too much of me’ and ‘My parents let me do what I like’ (for her specific ratings see footnote 16) — there is a suggestion that Emily was becoming more responsible and that she felt her parents had a correspondingly greater level of trust in her since she had moved on to secondary school.

But there was other information that reinforces that family/parent-child relationships are complex, multi-dimensional, and evolving and that young adults are likely to challenge the previously established order at home. For instance, when asked to rate the applicability of the statement ‘My child shows me respect’, Emily’s parents answered ‘yes, all or nearly

all of the time’ in Phase 1, whereas in Phase 3 they now said that this was only ‘sometimes’ the case.²¹

In addition, while Emily’s parents reported in Phase 1 that they did not currently have any concerns or worries about Emily in terms of ‘behaviour at home’, a year later, the answer was ‘sometimes yes, sometimes no’.²²

However, they did not mention any other concerns about Emily. This suggests that while there may have been a slightly negative trend in some of her behaviours (within the home) over the year, this did not appear to be a major worry for her parents. For example, parental estimates of Emily’s work and progress in her first year at secondary school were very positive and they expressed no concerns about her friends.

Emily’s friends and her progress at school are discussed further later in this report.

There was a small, negative change in Emily’s behaviour in Year 9.

Her parents had few concerns about Emily after her first year at secondary school.

Luke on Challenging Boundaries at Home

While Luke acknowledged the importance of having certain boundaries, set by his parents, on what he could and could not do, he also considered it necessary to challenge those boundaries. For example, in Year 8, Luke answered that he ‘would try to persuade my parents to let me’ if he was being encouraged by his friends to do something with them that his parents had told him ‘NOT to do’.

At the end of Year 9, and again in Year 10, Luke gave the same answer, but showed that he still had regard for his parents’ wishes by not choosing the response option ‘would do it anyway’.

Responding to an equivalent question about this issue in Phase 1, Luke’s mother stated that it ‘depends’ *“on the group of friends that he hangs out with”*, whereas in Phase 4 her response mirrored Luke’s when she answered that he ‘would try to persuade me to let him’. However, she did not indicate any anxiety about this situation.

²¹ Refer discussion related to Exhibit D in Chapter Seven.

²² At each phase of the study we asked parents to indicate whether they were currently worrying about specified aspects of their child’s behaviour or well-being. For the details, see p.46.

All students

On challenging boundaries for behaviour set by their parents

The table below shows how students overall answered the question ‘If your parents/caregivers told you NOT to do something and your friends really wanted you to do it, what would you do?’* at three points of the study.

It is evident that, once they moved on to secondary school, students were considerably less likely to answer ‘wouldn’t do it’ if their parents told them not to do something their friends wanted them to do and correspondingly much more likely to say that they would ‘try and persuade my parents to let me’ — although many added that if they were ultimately told ‘no’, then they wouldn’t do it.

Only a very small proportion of students reported that they would go against their parents wishes and ‘do it anyway’.

Their comments, especially at Phases 3 and 4, suggest that at least some students were becoming more proactive about making their own decisions and weighing up the pros and cons of those decisions. For example, in contrast to the student who in Year 8 stated “[I] would listen to parents more than friends”, the following responses illustrate views expressed by students in Years 9 and 10:

- “Depends on what my friends want me to do and if I want to do it or not.”
- “Depends what it is, why I’m not allowed. If I feel that it’s right, I will do it.”
- “Well, if it was something I knew was wrong, then I wouldn’t do it, but if it was something little like not going to a party because I hadn’t cleaned my room, that’s different.”
- “If it was smoking I wouldn’t do it, if it was something like going to the movies I would.”

It was also becoming more evident that students needed to be adequately convinced by their parents’ reasons for banning certain things, before they were (reasonably) happy to comply with the decision.

For instance:

- “If there was a good reason given by my parents, I wouldn’t do it.”

Response category	Phase 1 %	Phase 3 ^a %	Phase 4 %
Wouldn’t do it	71	38	40
Would try to persuade my parents to let me	8	31	34
Would do it anyway	3	3	4
Would try to persuade my friends not to do it/to do something else	3	12	4
Depends	13	9	13
Don’t know/hasn’t happened	–	1	1
Other	3	2	1
Missing data	–	4	2

^a Students were not asked this question in Phase 2.

* This is one of the items taken from the *Competent Learners at 14* study, part of an ongoing longitudinal study carried out for the Ministry of Education by Wylie et al, NZCER (see Part II, under the heading ‘Content of Interviews and Questionnaires’ for website details for this study).

Health and Well-being

Physical health and emotional well-being can impact heavily on ability to learn and achieve, social relationships, participation in many pursuits, and a person's sense of self. It was therefore important to include questions about student health and well-being in the study.

Health

At the beginning of the study, Emily felt that the response category 'I am very healthy/hardly ever get sick' best described her. She went on to say that she undertook some sort of exercise for around "three hours" most days, usually "sports or just playing around outside". She also had breakfast nearly every day.

One year later, Emily again described herself as 'very healthy' and continued to take some sort of exercise most days, although perhaps not quite as much as she had done as a primary school student. At this stage of the study, Emily undertook the 25 minute walk to and from school each day and in season trained with her netball team twice a week.

In Phase 4, the picture remained much the same, with Emily continuing to describe herself as very healthy and saying that she averaged about half an hour of exercise a day, walking to school (but taking the bus home) and playing netball in season.

Emily's parents rated their daughter's health as 'excellent/very good' in Phase 1 and again in Phase 3 and answered 'no' in Phase 1 to the question 'Do you think this child's health makes things harder in any way for her — eg, when doing schoolwork, learning things, getting on with other people?'

Teacher ratings of Emily's physical health were similarly positive.

Data on school attendance, discussed in Chapter Seven, showed that Emily very seldom had days off school for illness or any other reason. In fact, in Phase 4, she confided that she preferred to come to school even when feeling unwell, because she hated to miss any of the 'gossip' with her friends.

Well-being

At each phase of the study, Emily described herself as feeling 'good/happy' most days²³. Her parents gave a similar response, describing Emily as 'generally happy' in each of Phases 1 and 3, apart from some anxiety from time to time about 'how she looked', very typical of young people in this age group.

Emily's Year 8 teacher rated Emily's emotional well-being as 'excellent' and her Years 9 and 10 form teachers recorded that they did not have any concerns about Emily in this respect. All of her teachers who commented, as well as her parents, also rated Emily as 'always taking an optimistic view of life'.

It is relevant too to note here that, throughout the study, Emily described herself as having a very friendly nature, the ability to make friends, and confidence in areas such as acting, which she loved. She also commented at each phase of the study that she felt her confidence was increasing, with the result that she was more inclined to seek out opportunities to meet new people and try new things.

Emily seldom had days off school for illness or any other reason.

She was characterised as optimistic, confident, and friendly.

²³ Students could choose one of five options to describe how they felt 'most days'. These options were: 'I feel good/happy'; 'I mostly feel OK'; 'I don't feel either good or bad, happy or unhappy'; 'I don't feel very good/more unhappy than unhappy'; 'I don't feel at all good/mostly unhappy, depressed; 'Don't know, haven't thought about it'.

All students

Their physical health

According to the data in the table, the large majority of students felt that they were generally in good or very good health. It is interesting to note, however, that compared to their responses in Phase 1, fewer students described themselves as ‘very healthy’ one year on. Seven students indicated that they felt their health often made it harder for them to learn.

	Phase 1 %	Phase 3 %
I'm very healthy	34	21
About the same as most people — most of the time I'm healthy but sometimes I get sick/don't feel well	54	60
I often get sick/don't feel well	6	10
I have a particular physical health problem ^a	4	5
Missing data	1	4

^a These were mostly said to be asthma or migraine. Other conditions included a spinal problem, heart murmur, and stress-related illness.

The exercise they undertook

In Phase 1, 97 percent of students reported undertaking some sort of exercise most days, while three percent said they did not. The students who exercised, variously: walked; danced; rode their bikes; went for runs; did gym-related exercise routines; played around outside with friends; played sports; and did fitness/PE at school.

The amount of exercise students undertook ranged from a minimal 30 minutes per day, three to five times a week, to up to four hours every or almost every day.

By Phase 3, the great majority (89%) of students continued to take part in some sort of exercise on a regular basis, although the proportion saying they did not had risen to nine percent and, overall, students reported spending less time each day on exercise than they had previously. In large part they attributed this to longer school days, having to take public transport to and from school, and having a greater number of competing tasks to do, such as homework.

Students who said they did not exercise attributed this mainly to being “*too lazy*”, although health reasons and lack of time were given as explanations by a small number of students in each case.

Eating breakfast

Whereas in Phase 1 almost every student ate breakfast most school days, in Phase 3 only 71 percent said this was the case. While a few who didn't eat breakfast said it was because they didn't feel hungry at this time of day and preferred to eat later, most said it was because they “*don't have time*” — for example, because “*the bus comes early*” — or they “*can't be bothered*”.

All Students

Whether they wished to change aspects of their lives

When in Phase 1 we asked our then Year 8 students if there was ‘anything you would like to change in your life right now?’, a third* (33%, N=37) of students answered that there was, while 56 percent (N=63) answered ‘no, not really’. Remaining students said either ‘maybe’, or that they were ‘not sure/haven’t really thought about it’.

Those who admitted to wanting to change aspects of their lives most frequently mentioned wishing that their health was better and/or that they were fitter — *“Take my sickness away”*; *“That my knee was fixed so I could do sport again”*; *“Be fitter”*; *“Stop smoking”* — followed by a desire to be more confident — *“Wish I was more confident to do things in front of others”*.

Other desires expressed were to do with:

- doing better at their study;
 - *“Be more confident in my schoolwork.”*
 - *“Improve my spelling.”*
 - *“Study harder, get better at work.”*
- learning a new skill/improving skills;
 - *“Want to improve my music skills — the guitar.”*
- family matters/dynamics;
 - *“For my Dad to live in New Zealand and get along with my brothers better.”*
 - *“Bring my Nana and Poppa back to life.”*
 - *“I’d like to help my Mum because she’s sick. Would like to make my Mum better.”*
 - *“Go back to live with my parents.”*
- appearance/body image;
 - *“Lose my weight.”*
 - *“Get my front teeth fixed.”*
- having more friends;
- having more money and/or particular possessions;
- changing schools and/or teachers;
 - *“Return to the teacher I had in the beginning of the year.”*
 - *“Go to an intermediate rather than primary — kids my own age rather than younger ones.”*
- accommodation matters (having their own room, moving to a different house or neighbourhood);
- ‘being a better person’ in terms of their own attitudes and behaviour;
 - *“Be kinder to my little brother.”*
 - *“[Improve] my attitude — not bullying anyone and always listen to the teacher.”*

and,

- wishing they were ‘rich and famous’.

* See ‘note’ in the ‘All Students’ box on p.37 regarding students’ answers to this question.

Desire to Change Aspects of her Life

Emily indicated in her first interview that there was “*not really*” anything in her life she would like to change right then’.

Recent, Important Changes in her Life

Taking part in the school production in Year 10 was an important boost to her confidence.

In Phases 2 to 4 students were asked if there had been ‘any big or important changes or events in their life’ since our previous interview with them²⁴. We wanted to gather information that would enable us to consider how important other things happening in students’ lives might be when looking at how they handled the transition from primary to secondary schooling.

In Emily’s case, for instance, there is little to suggest that there was anything taking place in her life outside of school that was likely to have an ongoing

(adverse) effect on how she coped at school or generally. In Phase 2, Emily answered that there had not been any big or important changes in her life and initially said ‘no’ again in Phase 3. However she did then add that she had...

“...been helping my family look after my grandmother— she has to have [an operation].” (Emily subsequently reported that everyone at home was now well again.)

In Phase 4, Emily reported only on a very positive event in her life: she reflected that she had found taking part in a recent school production both challenging and very enjoyable. She commented that her participation meant that:

“I feel more confident to get involved in lots of things now.”²⁵

All Students

Reported changes in their lives

Around a third of students answered ‘yes’ in each of Phases 2 to 4 when asked if there had been any big or important changes or events in their lives, *other than* moving to secondary school, since we last talked to them. Almost all of the remaining students answered ‘no’. The changes or events mentioned were a mix of positive and more difficult occurrences or situations.

Examples of positive occurrences for students, most often to do with recognition for achievements, feeling good about their own personal development, and/or being pleased or happy about changes in family or living circumstances were:

- “Being recognised and being told by the teacher that I had achieved highly in Year 9.”
- “Making a lot more new friends — a good thing.”
- “Have made big advances in my music — more than I expected!!”
- “Winning the trophy, the badminton prize, first equal. I was voted the most improved boy in badminton.”
- “My confidence is better. I used to be shy but now I’m really out there. My attitude has changed to being OK, now I’m more positive about school.”
- “Being in the school production this term [Year 10].”
- “Being on Project K [through school]. And we just got a computer with the Internet [at home].”
- “Behaving better than last year.”
- “It’s good to feel more relaxed about school [now that I’m in Year 10].”
- “Recognition for my volleyball and my achievements in class.”
- “I got a job [cleaning at a pharmacy]. My aunty works there and asked if I could do anything to earn some money. I just enjoy working there.”

continued...

²⁴ In Phase 2, the wording of this question was ‘Other than coming to secondary school/college, have there been any big or important changes or events in your life?’.

²⁵ As an aside, two of the researchers had the opportunity to observe Emily when she was in Year 10 during a lunchtime rehearsal for her performing arts class. She and other students in the class (and in the study) had written and produced a series of sketches to demonstrate various drama techniques. Emily was observed to be relaxed and confident, and enjoying her interaction with other students and the teacher.

All Students

Reported changes in their lives – continued

- “I’m getting to know my Dad, the only time I ever saw him [before] was when he was at my nanny’s. I see him now and ask if I can see him more often.”
- “Having a new bedroom built on the house so will have own room.”
- “Moved house in December — was new, different, and exciting. Now live close to school in a much nicer house and can walk to school. And got a new cousin, she is really cute!! I was really excited when I got a text message telling me she was born. I try and see her whenever I can.”

However, as shown by the responses detailed below, in addition to undertaking the transition from primary to secondary schooling, students are also likely to be having to deal with a range of other unsettling changes in their lives. As well, at any given time, there are students facing very challenging events or circumstances in their personal/family lives, which impact to a greater or lesser extent on their participation and learning at school.

- “I have to do everything at home.”
- “My grandmother died [recently]. Has had a big effect on my education. In classrooms, I kind of feel a little bit low, not myself.”
- “Mum moved out, with my younger brother and sister, just before Christmas. (I go to see her once a week, I ride there on my bike.)”
- “More responsibilities at home — a bit of a hassle, Mum expects high things from me because I am getting older.”
- “We moved, we’re the only Islanders around the street now. It’s just different from where we lived. We have to wake up early and then we leave home about 7.30am to get to school on time. It’s a bit boring.”
- “I had more friends [before]. I’ve lost contact with my old friends, it’s sad, everyone’s just splitting up.”
- “Lost the girlfriends I had (at primary) and now I have good friends and bad friends.”
- “My sister had a baby and she and her boyfriend are living with us — there are problems.”
- “Just having a hard time communicating with my aunty, trying to get her to understand my feelings — she takes advantage of people. Feel pretty sad — that’s what affects my learning, just family problems.”
- “Lost a few friends and had to do more around the home for my parents because my brothers have part-time jobs after school.”
- “Mum has a new guy. I don’t like him. I don’t get to see my Dad that often and I have to stick with this guy all the time, and my Dad doesn’t know about it.”
- “Just problems between my parents. And I used to get beatings so I’ve come to live at [a relative’s] house.”
- “My two uncles died. I lost them in the same month. [How has it affected your schoolwork?] Yes, it has. My English teacher had to kind of talk to me because losing them was hard, ‘cause [one of them], he’s like another dad to me. I wasn’t doing my work, I was just staying in my own little corner — quiet.”

* Note: The question discussed above, plus the question discussed in the previous ‘All Students’ box, did not always seem to have ‘worked’ particularly well. As only approximately a third of students answered ‘yes’ to these questions each time they were posed, almost certainly this underestimates the reality for students overall. For instance, from other information obtained during the study, we know that important family changes — such as a parent leaving home, or a parent being seriously ill — was a current situation for some students who indicated that there had been ‘no important, recent, changes in their lives’.

As the questions are intrinsically very personal in nature, this may have made it difficult for more reserved or private students to answer, especially in a research interview situation, despite all efforts to make the interviews pleasant and informal. Other reasons may be that the questions were not framed in a way that some students related well to (eg, were not specific enough). It may be, too, that for this age group, if a student was feeling OK on the day, they may not have remembered to mention recent difficulties. Conversely, they may not have thought to mention something positive, if the initial excitement of it had passed. Finally, these were the last questions in a quite long interview session, when students had grown tired.

Home Interests, Activities, and Responsibilities

Favourite Activities

An awareness of students' leisure-time activities helps establish each student's individual character; it can also increase understanding of the sorts of experiences, attitudes and skills or competencies students bring to their learning and involvement at school, and give an insight into the likelihood of a student having a sense of future goals, and the nature of those goals.

Preferred pastimes in Year 8 were spending time with friends and sports.

For Emily, when in Year 8, the things she **most** liked to do in her spare time outside of school were:

"Hang with my friends; talk [to them] on the phone; go out and play 'anything that's interesting at the

time'; and play sports — softball, netball and soccer."

Of these activities, the one Emily spent most time on each week was talking to her friends on the telephone.

Parental perceptions in Phase 1 of Emily's preferred spare time activities were mostly the same as Emily's, her parents stating that Emily liked:

"Outdoor activities, sports, watching television, using the computer, talking on the phone, going out with friends."

And the pastimes they considered Emily spent **most** time on each week were...

"...outdoor activities, using the phone, and mixing with friends."

Luke on Favourite Activities

In Year 8, Luke's favourite things to do in his spare time were:

"Going down to the school [grounds after school] to play soccer and basketball shoots, go bike rides with friends, play Playstation with my friends and [siblings], and read Harry Potter books (I've read the whole series) and Dandy books — comics."

Most of his leisure-time was devoted to soccer: practising in the backyard at home as well as at school, and of course playing actual matches.

Luke's mother gave a similar account of Luke's preferred spare time activities when he was in Year 8:

"Playstation — computer games, Internet computer games; playing sport (cricket and soccer), bike rides with friends, hip-hop class, watching TV."

In Phase 2, Luke now spent most of his spare time:

"Talking to friends on the phone."

One year later, in Year 10, his response was:

"Watch television; go outside [and practise sports]."

A comparison of Phase 2 and Phase 4 data indicate that Luke was a little less likely as a Year 10 student to spend time on several of the leisure activities that were among his favourites a year earlier.

For example, although he still spent time reading for pleasure, he now did so only 'one or two days a week', rather than 'three to five days'.

He also spent relatively less time: using the computer for Internet searches and playing computer games; hanging out with friends (although he continued to talk to them on the phone or text them 'every or almost every day'); playing competitive sport; and 'exercising' (with the exception of 'playing sport for fun' which he continued to do on a daily basis).

Conversely, while he previously 'never or almost never' attended a youth group or took part in church activities, he now said that he did these things 'one or two days a week'.

While some of the changes were no doubt due to shifts in personal preferences, others may have been influenced by different priorities among the friends he mixed with, and specifically the girlfriend his mother mentioned.

In Phases 2 and 4 we made a slight modification to the question about spare time activities, with participating students now being asked 'how often' they spent on each of a list of activities. The results for Emily are presented in Table 1.

And, as in Phase 1, students were again asked to indicate which **one** activity they spent most of their spare time on each week. In Phase 2, essentially repeating her Phase 1 answer, Emily said she spent most of her spare time "*playing outside [with friends]*". A year later, in Year 10, her response was a continuation of the theme: that is, that she primarily liked to socialise with friends:

"[I] hang out with friends, talk on the phone."

It is interesting that a comparison of some of the Phase 2 and Phase 4 data in Table 1 shows that

Emily was less likely to say she played sport, either formally or informally, as a Year 10 student. Almost certainly, this was because of her involvement in a range of other extra-curricular activities at school, including a school production which had involved considerable after-school rehearsal time.

It is also notable that whereas Emily appeared to be reading more for personal interest in Year 10 — an activity she had previously, and consistently, said she found disagreeable — she was no longer spending time on the creative writing she used to enjoy so much.

This latter change is again most probably because of her extra-curricular involvement, but the changes in total perhaps suggest shifting priorities for Emily as she matured and increased her range of experience, became more aware of her own particular strengths, and consolidated her interests.

Friends continued to be a priority in Year 10, but emphasis on other leisure activities was changing.

All Students

Favourite leisure-time activities

Asked in Phase 1 what 'sort of things they most liked to do in their spare time (when not at school)', the then Year 8 students most often specified:

- spending time with friends and/or talking to them on the phone;
- spending time with or helping their family;
- watching TV;
- playing sport for fun;
- playing competitive sport;
- reading; and
- using the computer (for games, MSN, and searching the Internet).

Other favourite activities included playing with family pets, playing the guitar or other musical instrument, writing stories, attending dance classes, listening to music, drawing, skateboarding, bike riding, playing chess, making things (eg, woodwork), working on cars/motorbikes, and learning new things/doing homework.

Comments that illustrate the range of activities that students undertook follow:

"Most of it is outside with friends playing sports (for fun). But if I have homework I do that instead. Go to dancing classes — jazz, read before I go to sleep. Do all sorts of things."

"Being with friends: I like being around people so like being with friends and family. Play sports with friends: netball, volleyball and touch [rugby]. Go to the movies. (That's when I'm not at singing and dancing lessons.)"

"Practise the drums at my uncle's house. I practise every four days: already play in church band. Play rugby and cricket for fun, and play rugby league for a club. At my auntie's place, play computer games, X-box."

Although all students in the study mentioned at least one favourite leisure-time activity, it was evident that there were students who undertook a quite narrow range of activities, a few focusing primarily on watching TV, and 'hanging out' with friends when they could (often not involving any particular activity).

continued...

All Students

Favourite leisure-time activities – continued

In Phases 2 and 4 we again asked students about their leisure time activities, but in a slightly different format: on each of these occasions they were asked to indicate how frequently they undertook each of the activities listed in the table below.

Broadly speaking, the data suggest that there was not a great deal of change over the course of the study in the sorts of activities students most liked to do in their spare time.

However, there is an indication that students made increasing use of technology to communicate with friends (texting, talking to them on MSN), probably in part because they were more likely to own a cell phone, in particular, once they were at secondary school. This form of communication was perhaps more prevalent, too, as the study went on, because secondary school students tend to be more geographically dispersed than students attending a primary school, making it more difficult to see friends outside of school hours. And, of course, because cell-phone and Internet use was increasingly the ‘thing to do’, to keep up with peers.

Activity	Students who undertook activity either ‘Every/almost every day’ or ‘3–5 days a week’ ^a	
	Phase 2 %	Phase 4 %
Watch television/videos/DVDs	80	83
Read for fun/interest (not including schoolwork)	43	40
Write for fun/interest (not including schoolwork) — eg, write stories, poems, songs	Not asked	16
Use a computer (eg, MSN, Internet) (not including schoolwork)	49	59
Play electronic/video/computer/Playstation games	44	39
Hang out with friends	57	56
Talk to friends on the phone or text message them	47	59
Play sport for fun	60	58
Go to art or music or dance classes	21	14
Do exercise/physical training (eg, go for walks or a run, bike rides, aerobics)	52	50
Play competitive sport (eg, in school sports team)	36	38
Make things	28	13
Practise singing or playing a musical instrument or practise dancing	32	27
Cultural activities (eg, kapa haka)	23	16
Go to a youth group (eg, Air Training Corps, Scouts, Guides)	15	13
Take part in church activities/go to church	25	23
Other activity you do in your spare time (not counting schoolwork, housework or part-time work)	20	16

^a To simplify presentation of the data, in this table we have combined the two response categories ‘Every or almost every day’ and ‘Three to five days a week’. This makes it easier to see where or if changes in the sorts of activities students *most often* undertook in their spare time occurred over the course of the study. (The other response options available to students were ‘One or two days a week’, ‘Less than one day a week’, and ‘Never or almost never’.)

Table 1: The frequency with which Emily undertook specified activities in her spare time, as at Phases 2 and 4 of the study

Activity	Rating	
	Phase 2	Phase 4
Watch television/videos/DVDs	2	1
Read for fun/interest (not including schoolwork)	5	3
Write for fun/interest (not including schoolwork) — eg, write stories, poems, songs	Not asked in this format	5
Use a computer (eg, MSN, Internet) (not including schoolwork)	2	1
Play electronic/video/computer/ Playstation games	4	4
Hang out with friends	1	1
Talk to friends on the phone or text message them	1	1
Play sport for fun	1	3
Go to art or music or dance classes	5	5
Do exercise/physical training (eg, go for walks or a run, bike rides, aerobics)	5 ^a	5
Play competitive sport (eg, in school sports team)	1	3
Make things	5	5
Practise singing or playing a musical instrument or practise dancing	5 ^a	5
Cultural activities (eg, kapa haka)	5	5
Go to a youth group (eg, Air Training Corps, Scouts, Guides)	4	5
Take part in church activities/go to church	5	5
Other activity you do in your spare time (not counting schoolwork, housework or part-time work) ^b	1 ("Go out and play.")	2 ("Extra-curricular activities")

Key to rating categories in Table 1:

- 1 = Every or almost every day
 2 = Three to five days a week
 3 = One or two days a week
 4 = Less than one day a week
 5 = Never or almost never

^a Despite Emily answering that she 'never or almost never' spent time on these activities in her spare time, other information showed that she liked singing and dancing and that she exercised (eg, walked) most days. It appears that she must have interpreted the above statements to refer only to the undertaking of these activities in a formal, organised sense, rather than in an informal or just-for-fun way. In addition, in the case of 'performing arts' activities, these occurred primarily within the context of school, in her performing arts option classes and in relation to school productions.

^b Students were asked to write in any 'other' activities, not already listed, that they liked to do in their spare time.

^c Although these extra-curricular activities were school-based, Emily obviously thought her participation in them counted as something she did in her personal 'spare time' (probably because they often involved practices or rehearsals before and after school and during lunchtimes).

Television Viewing and Computer Use Outside of School

There is a considerable body of research on the nature and extent of young people's television viewing and the impact that certain viewing patterns can have on their overall learning and development and behaviour. Similarly, with the ready access that many children and young people now have to computers, there is growing evidence that they may spend a significant proportion of their time using computers for non-educational reasons (eg, playing games, chatting on-line), to the detriment, perhaps, of other aspects of their lives.

Because of the potential for television viewing and computer use to take up a lot of a student's out-of-school time we wanted to gather information about this for our particular group of students, to see if it might be a relevant factor in making sense of some of the other findings from the study.

Watching television

Despite claiming that watching television was "*not really*" one of her 'favourite'²⁶ things to do in her spare time, in Year 8 Emily nevertheless said she usually spent about two-and-a-half hours a day watching TV. (This lends weight to her parents' view

Emily spent less time watching TV once she was at secondary school.

²⁶ Watching television often seems to be a 'default' activity for many people, including Emily, Luke and other students in the study — that is, something that they do as a matter of course, rather than consciously choosing as an activity that they particularly enjoy.

Watching TV did not significantly interfere with participation in other activities.

Emily had a low level of weekly computer use.

that watching TV **was** one of Emily's favourite spare-time activities.) Emily most enjoyed soap operas: Shortland Street, Neighbours, Home and Away.

One year on, Emily now spent about *"one hour each day [watching television] — depends what's on"*.

In Phase 4²⁷, we did not ask the now Year 10 students to specify how much time they spent each day watching television; however, at this stage, Emily recorded that she watched television/videos/DVDs 'every or almost every day' (see Table 1).

Given all the other information about Emily's extra-curricular and social activities and her diligence about homework, and so on, it is evident that while watching TV was a regular part of her daily life it did not detract from her involvement in other activities.

Using the computer when not at school

In Phases 1 and 3 Emily spent only a very modest amount of time — approximately two hours a week — on the computer at home, mainly chatting to her friends on MSN: *"only to people I know"*. She also played music, and sometimes looked up things on the Internet for homework projects. She did not play games on the computer and only very occasionally used the computer as a word processor for school assignments:

"Depends on whether we're allowed to for assignments — [mostly] we have to handwrite [them]."

As a Year 10 student, Emily now estimated that she used the computer outside of school time (and excluding schoolwork) 'every or almost every day' for a short time. She continued to enjoy chatting with her friends via MSN.

Luke on Watching Television and Using the Computer

Like Emily, Luke did not nominate TV as one of his favourite spare time activities in Phase 1, but still spent about *"two hours most days"* watching it. This is no doubt why his mother listed it as one of his favourite spare time activities.

In Phase 3, Luke spent a similar time each day watching TV — *"one-and-a-half to two hours"* — just watching *"whatever's on"*. That Luke was a consistent television viewer was confirmed both by his mother and his own ratings in Phases 2 and 4 where he said he watched TV on a daily basis.

However, while watching TV was clearly an integral part of his life, as with Emily, it did not prevent him from regularly participating in a range of sports and other activities; in addition, he spent considerable time socialising with his friends. Unlike Emily, however, it is very likely that Luke allowed TV to distract him from the homework he so seldom enjoyed doing.

In Phase 1, Luke estimated that he spent about three-and-a-half hours a week — *"Half an hour a day, usually, [although] I'm not allowed to watch TV this week — was told to 'use my imagination'. I'm not allowed to use the computer either!"* — on the computer when not at school...

"...playing games, looking up Encarta (to do research for homework), and emailing friends. (I'm not allowed to use chat-rooms — the language [etc] is not acceptable to my Mum.)"

By Phase 3, Luke was spending only slightly more time per week on the computer: about four hours. He continued to use it in the ways that he had previously indicated (except that it was now evident that he was able to chat to friends online!):

"Play games, do homework, download games, send emails, chat to friends on MSN."

In Year 10, Luke estimated that he used the computer '3 to 5 days a week (not including schoolwork)', to play games, use the Internet, and chat to or email friends.

²⁷ For this phase of the study, students rated how *often* they watched TV/videos/DVDs rather than specifying how much *time* they spent on this each day.

All Students

TV watching

Asked 'About how much TV or video do you watch each day on average?', the majority (77%) of students in Phase 1 estimated that they watched between one and four hours daily, with the largest number (32% overall) watching between two and three hours per day. A further six percent of students advised that they spent between 30 minutes and one hour viewing daily.

By contrast, 11 percent of students reckoned that they spent from four to seven hours (or in one case, more than seven hours) daily in this way. Only two students watched either no TV or only a minimal amount (less than 30 minutes a day). A small number of students were 'not sure'.

Students' responses to the same question in Phase 3 showed much the same pattern of TV viewing, reinforcing other data reported earlier that for around two-thirds of students TV watching was one of their favourite activities (and perhaps a 'habit' for quite a few others).

And, in Phase 4, when asked how often they did each of a series of activities in their spare time, 51 percent of students watched TV/videos/DVDs 'every or almost every day', with a further 32 percent watching '3 to 5 days a week'.

Computer and Internet use

Forty-three percent of students in Phase 1 nominated 'using the computer (eg, for MSN)' as one of their most favourite spare time activities; 39 percent also specified that one of their favourite activities was 'playing electronic/video/computer/Playstation games'.

And in Phase 4 the frequency with which students used a computer in their spare time (not including schoolwork) was as follows:

'Every/almost every day' %	'3 to 5 days a week' %	'1 or 2 days a week' %	'Less than 1 day a week' %	'Never or almost never' %
29	30	11	15	14

To another question in Phase 1, which asked students whether they used a computer when not at school, 76 percent of students advised that they did so. Mostly, they used it for playing games (60% overall); for homework, especially when they needed to do research for special projects; and for accessing the Internet for personal interest.

The data resulting from the same question in Phase 3 were very similar, with just slightly more (79%) students overall saying they used a computer out of school time. They again most often used the computer for playing games, homework/projects, and the Internet, although now just over two-thirds of those who spent time on the computer used it to access the Internet, compared to just under half in Phase 1.

When in Year 8, the largest proportion (34%) of students spent between one and four hours a week using the computer when not at school, with a further 16 percent spending between four and eight hours, and 14 percent saying they spent nine to 15 hours weekly on the computer. By contrast, 21 percent spent 'no time' on the computer, and an additional 11 percent spent only minimal time — a few minutes up to one hour.

In general, the pattern of responses in Phase 3 was much the same, apart from an indication that students overall were spending a little more time on the computer over the course of a week. The main exception was that there were now six percent (N=6) of students who estimated that they spent a very significant amount of time on the computer: between 20 and 40 hours each week.

continued...

All Students

Computer and Internet use – continued

When specifically asked in Phases 1 and 3 what they mainly used the Internet for, students most often stated that they used it for: chatting to friends (MSN); looking up things of personal interest — for example, information about cars, famous people/'stars', cartoons, magazines, Trade Me; researching material for homework projects; sending and receiving emails (especially in Phase 3); listening to and/or downloading music; playing games; writing stories; developing their own website; using drawing software/computer art; working with photographs; and using design/architecture software.

Responsibilities Outside of School

By asking students about home duties and responsibilities, we wanted to get an idea of the extent to which students had calls on their time that could impact on ability to engage in leisure-time activities and affect time for studying, and so on.

Home duties or chores

She had only light duties at home. According to her parents, Emily spent around half-an-hour a day helping out at home when she was in Year 8, doing chores such as *“keeping her bedroom clean, clearing the dishes, and collecting in washing off the line once a week”*. Emily herself reported that she received pocket money *“every week”*, irrespective of whether she carried out her chores!

In Phase 4, Emily was still expected to do some home chores, although they were not very onerous ones: hanging washing on the line and bringing it in again (*“only in the weekends”*), and *“sometimes”* cleaning her room.

Part-time work

Emily felt she had less time or energy in Year 9 for leisure-time activities. Over the first three phases of the study, Emily did not have any part-time work. But by Phase 4, Emily had begun to babysit the children of family friends from time to time. She added that when she was *“old enough”* (ie, the legal age of 15 years) she was keen to apply for part-time work in a supermarket or similar.

The Balance between Leisure Time and Responsibilities

In Year 8, Emily mostly felt she had enough time outside of school to do the things she liked doing: the main impediment to this was *“having to do homework”*. But in her first term at secondary school, Emily answered that she did *“not really”* have enough time to do the things she enjoyed or liked doing when not at school. Again, she attributed this to homework. However her comment suggests that an equally, if not more, important factor was that she was very tired at the end of the day, most likely due to the new routine and demands of being at secondary school:

“Because of homework — [and] get home at 4pm and am real tired.”

As a Year 10 student, Emily's view on whether she had enough time for things she liked doing when not at school was:

“Yes and no. ‘Yes’ because I do sports in the weekends and ‘no’ because I do a lot of extra-curricular things [through school] this year, so that takes up a lot of weekends and after school and I also have to do lots²⁸ of homework.”

²⁸ It is however interesting to note here that in other responses during the Phase 4 interview, Emily reported that she had not been getting a lot of homework so far that term, and that the amount received was significantly less than in Year 9. Her reference to homework here may therefore refer more to 'catch up' work she was doing of her own accord because of missing classes when rehearsing for the school production.

All Students

Views on adequacy of their leisure time

More than three-quarters (78%) of students in Phase 1 felt that ‘yes’ they ‘mostly’ had enough time to do what they liked doing outside of school. Sixteen percent answered ‘sometimes’ and six percent ‘no, hardly ever’.

The reasons the latter two groups of students gave for not having enough time to themselves was mainly because they had to fulfil various family responsibilities, especially chores, and/or felt that homework took up quite a lot of their spare time:

- *“Have homework and chores and paper round to do.”*
- *“Heaps of stuff in the way — cultural stuff, church activities, family problems.”*
- *“Homework. Many things to do — talk to my family, family outings.”*
- *“Have to clean up the house.”*
- *“Chores — [eg] cleaning the house — but sometimes I do too much of other things instead of what I’m supposed to do. Would like to spend more times with friends but mostly too busy.”*

Some also felt that their *friends* sometimes got in the way of doing other things that they wanted to do:

- *“Because I’m busy with friends.”*

When we repeated the question ‘Do you find you have enough time this year to do the things you like or enjoy doing when you are not at school?’ in Phase 2, considerably fewer students — just 63 percent — felt that they usually had enough time, with 11 percent saying they sometimes did, and 26 percent saying they did not.

Nearly all those who felt they often didn’t have enough time to themselves attributed this to increased levels of homework now that they were at secondary school, or to a combination of homework and chores/family responsibilities:

- *“Too much homework.”*
- *“So many things to do around the house from Mum and Dad, not enough time for going out with friends and have a lot more homework now.”*

One year later, in Phase 4, most students (79% answered ‘yes, mostly’) seemed to have re-established a better balance between homework, chores, and other responsibilities, and securing enough time to spend in the ways that they chose:

- *“Can prioritise more now.”*
- *“Homework takes up time but I usually find a way to get out with my friends.”*

The five percent of students who ‘sometimes’ felt they did not have enough time, and the 14 percent who considered they ‘hardly ever’ did, again often attributed this situation to homework, chores and other responsibilities, but now also mentioned that sports and other extra-curricular activities competed for their time and made it hard to balance everything. (It is interesting to note, however, that perceptions did differ about this, in that some students felt that taking part in formal sports, etc, was not ‘choice’ leisure time, while others felt that it was.)

- *“Lots of other things to do — have out-of-school activities that clash.”*
- *“Sometimes outdoor sports and youth groups take up a lot of my time, I find it hard to get time to do homework and other things.”*

Parental Concerns about Child Behaviour and Well-being

To obtain further insights into the ways in which students may be changing or developing at the time of transition and subsequently, we asked parents at each phase of the study if they were currently worrying about any aspects of their child's behaviour or well-being. Specifically, we asked parents to rate whether they had concerns about their child in relation to: help around the house; friendships; interests; behaviour at home; school; self-esteem/self confidence; and any 'other things'.

Despite a level of concern about some of Emily's friendships in Phase 1 (and this concern appeared to have disappeared by Phase 3), and an indication of some less desirable behaviour at home by Phase 3²⁹, feedback from Emily's parents suggests that in most respects they were happy about their daughter's behaviour, interests, and progress and participation at school. Other data support this claim. Information in Chapter Thirteen, for example, shows that they considered that Emily had done 'very/extremely well' in her schoolwork during her first year at secondary school.

Parental Worries or Concerns about Luke

Luke's mother felt that Luke had a good range of interests in Year 8 and had 'no concerns' about him in this respect at that stage. But in relation to help around the house, friendships, behaviour at home, school, and Luke's levels of self-esteem/self-confidence, she 'sometimes' had concerns about her son.

A few months later, when Luke had completed almost a term in Year 9, his mother reported a greater level of concern about Luke, in terms of him carrying out his responsibilities and his general behaviour at home. And in contrast to her earlier response, she was now 'sometimes' concerned about his current range of interests.

Towards the end of his first year at secondary school, Luke's mother had an even greater level of concern. She noted:

"I have concerns about most things as this has been a difficult year and turning into a teenager can be so unsettling."

However, her feedback about Luke at the end of his first term in Year 10 was much more positive: apart from saying she 'sometimes' had concerns about the extent to which Luke helped out at home (he was reluctant), she had 'no concerns' about his friendships, interests, general behaviour at home, school matters or self-esteem.

²⁹ While they reported 'no concerns' about Emily's behaviour at home in Phase 1, in Phase 3 Emily's parents reported that they 'sometimes' had some concerns about this. In addition, they were less likely than previously to say that she showed them respect (see Exhibit D in Chapter Seven).

All Students

Parents' concerns about aspects of the students' lives

The data in the table show that participating parents were most likely to say that, at least some of the time, they had concerns about their child's self-esteem/self-confidence, the extent to which they helped around the house, and behaviour at home. And it is of interest to note that parents most often expressed these concerns when their children were nearing the end of their first year of secondary school, and not, as might perhaps be speculated, soon after the transition from primary school. The pattern for considerably higher levels of concern in Phase 3 also applied to 'student interests'.

Aspect of child's life or behaviour	Parents who answered either 'Yes' or 'Sometimes yes/sometimes no' at each phase of the study			
	Phase 1 (Based on N=60; 54% of total parent group) %	Phase 2 (Based on N=55; 53% of total parent group) %	Phase 3 (Based on N=59; 59% of total parent group) %	Phase 4 (Based on N=62; 67% of total parent group) %
Helping around the house	20	42	49	35
Friendships	21	24	27	30
Interests	16	31	37	25
Behaviour at home	24	34	41	38
School	24	17	33	35
Self-esteem/self-confidence	32	29	47	40

The data further show that parental concern about their children's friendships tended to increase over the course of the study, as did concerns about how their child was getting on at school:

- *"He has found a friend that is very naughty. Unfortunately they are in the same class. I hope that he can be strong and resist him."*
- *"Maths and English sometimes. [My daughter] can't retain what she's learnt. We think it may be the teaching methods."*
- *"[Have concerns about] where [my son] is at academically and if he needs help."*

But, overall, at each phase of the study, the majority of parents (from a low of 52% for 'helping around the house' in Phase 3 to a high of 76% in Phase 1 for 'interests') answered 'no', they did not currently have any concerns of any great import regarding the aspects of their children's lives specified in the table.

However, a few parents at each stage expressed a range of other concerns about their children, most notably to do with health issues:

- *"Putting on too much weight, complaining of headaches."*
- *"Her eating habits and lack of exercise."*
- *"Her stress and anxiety."*

and 'being a teenager':

- *"She's a teenager. It would take too long to list them (only kidding)."*
- *"Language: teenagers frequently swear. Why?"*
- *"These images of being a gangster: bling bling."*

continued...

All Students

Parents' concerns about aspects of the students' lives – continued

The comments that follow illustrate more broadly concerns expressed by parents:

- *“Have found that he doesn't like letting his friends know that he goes to Boys' Brigade as it's not a 'cool' thing to do. (He does enjoy it though.) He is very aware of being 'cool' to fit in! As a parent of a Year 9 student (and a teenager) I have found this year to be challenging, exciting and scary all rolled into one. With primary [school] I've always tried to know where [my son] was up to at school — with schoolwork, expectations of him and his friends. I've known his friends from Year 1 and had formed a relationship with them and their parents. I found it much easier to set boundaries for [my son] there. Now...it's not as easy to speak to his teacher, let alone get to know them and find out how [my son] is doing at school. Also we are allowing him to make more choices for himself but find it frustrating when it seems as if he isn't working as hard as we feel he should be. But at the end of the day it's great to see him grow and to mature — to have chats and laughs with him — they offset the frustrations! He is a great kid, with a great sense of right and wrong and also knows that he is loved by his family.”*
- *“Wish he had more interests.”*
- *“Social skills, laziness, attitude to everything, weight.”*
- *“Friendships: has lots, but some I'm concerned about. Interests: would like him to develop more. Other: usual teenage behaviour, pushing boundaries, limits.”*
- *“Seems to have fewer friends now [Year 10]. Interests aren't broad enough. Has slack attitude to school.”*
- *“Fears taking on new challenges.”*

Summary Statements about Emily and her Relationships with Family

Emily had a close relationship with her family. She described them as being very supportive of her in all aspects of her life, including her education. Emily's teachers described her family in similar terms.

For the most part, Emily and her mother, in particular, talked freely, with Emily regularly telling her mother what happened to her at school — everyday things, as well as triumphs and problems, and about her friends, many of whom her family knew. There was an indication in Phase 4, however, that as Emily was maturing and experimenting more in her life, it wasn't always as easy as it had been for her to be open about everything. While she continued to tell her mother most things, she commented that there were sometimes topics she was finding it a little harder to talk about, although she usually did so eventually.

Other data presented in this chapter reveal Emily as a young person with a range of interests and pursuits, and as someone who enjoyed spending time in the company of an increasingly diverse range of others, often 'just talking'. Her busy social life meant that Emily engaged in correspondingly modest levels of TV watching and using the computer for leisure purposes.

Her family had high expectations of and for Emily and her younger siblings and rules and boundaries they were required to abide by. At all phases of the study, Emily appeared to generally respect those guidelines. And Emily was fortunate in that her quite low level of home chores and responsibilities did not interfere with her ability to complete her school-related tasks or take part in performing arts, sports and the other leisure-time activities that she enjoyed.