

Schools Sustainability Survey

Research into pupils' views on environmental sustainability

March 2019

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1. Summary

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In December 2018, 2990 pupils across England at primary (year 5 and 6), secondary and 6th form level completed an online survey on their views on environmental sustainability. Whilst views and perceptions can vary according to different respondent characteristics, here's an overall summary of what they told us...

Interest in learning more is high, despite over half of respondents saying they have already learnt lots or quite a bit about the environment.

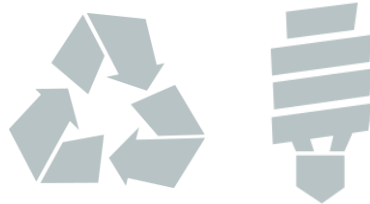


56% say they have learnt lots or quite a bit about the environment at their current school or college

68% are interested in learning more about the environment

Actions to help the environment that pupils say they are encouraged or supported to take by their school or college include:

- **81%** recycling
- **72%** reducing litter
- **49%** saving energy



When thinking about renewable energy..



46% are not sure if their school or college generates its own renewable energy. But...

65% agree that their school or college should be generating renewable energy

Respondents expect action and support from their place of study on the environment...

"All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment."

86% agree

"All schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like me to do things to help the environment."

85% agree

Thinking about opportunities to help the environment...

49% say they would like to be involved with projects or activities at their school or college that help the environment.



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Survey respondents were also asked about their views on environmental issues more broadly, telling us...

Thinking about climate change...

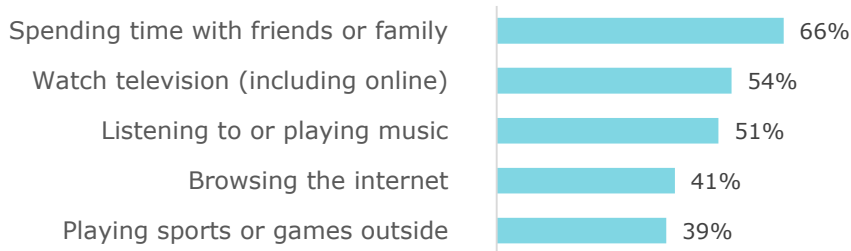


74% Say they have heard of climate change and know a bit about it

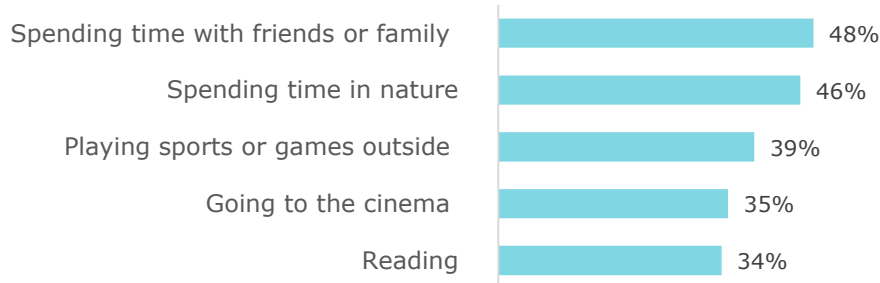
54% Say they are very or fairly concerned about climate change

80% Say it is fairly or very important for world leaders to do more to tackle climate change

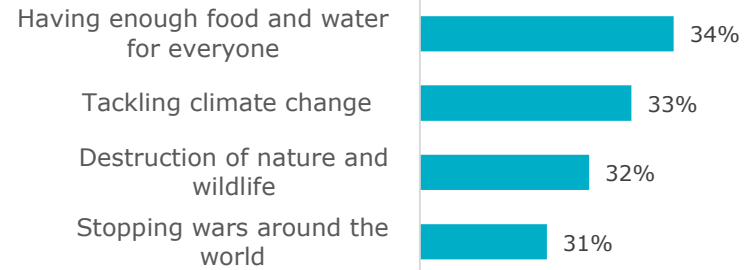
Respondents mainly spend their spare time...



If they had the chance, respondents would spend more time...



The most important issues facing the world today include...



Respondents report low recognition of international sustainability initiatives. Prior to answering the survey...



22% Say they had heard of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals

2. About the research

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About the research

Since 2010, NUS has carried out annual research with students in higher education on their experiences of and expectations for learning for sustainable development. In 2015, the same research was started with students in further education. This research, aims to complete the picture, and understand perspectives from all levels of education.

To complete the research, a partnership was formed between NUS and [Green Schools Project](#), which supports schools to set up and run student-led environmental projects. An online survey was designed to be completed by pupils in primary (years 5 and 6) and secondary (years 7 to 13) education, and focuses specifically on environmental sustainability.

The survey was distributed by NUS and Green Schools Project to a range of contacts, who were asked either to directly participate in the research, or to distribute the opportunity to participate amongst their networks. All schools who wished to participate in the research were required to complete a consent form on behalf of the respondents. Respondents of all ages were also asked to provide consent when participating in the survey. It was suggested that schools could encourage participation by including completion of the survey within lessons.

To incentivise participations, two prize draws were offered of funding towards sustainability-focused projects within the schools – one for primary schools and one for secondary / 6th form colleges. Schools and colleges were also provided with a report of the data from their pupils.

A total sample of 2990 responses were received from pupils studying at primary and secondary schools, and 6th form colleges. The pupils study at a range of different types of education institution, including state and private schools, academy and non-academy. The data has been weighted to represent statistics available from the Department for Education on the proportion of state and private pupils, and also within state schools, the proportion of academy and non-academy. Overall figures have been used, rather than those specific to the level of education. Data has not been weighted by gender or ethnicity as data at the required level of detail is not publicly available.

Throughout the report, the responses are presented for overall respondents, respondents studying in primary education (years 5 and 6), respondents studying in secondary education (years 7 to 11 – lower secondary), and respondents studying in 6th form (years 12 and 13 – upper secondary). Where statistically significant differences (at a confidence level of 99% unless stated otherwise) exist between respondents with different characteristics, these are highlighted as follows:

Respondents studying at academy schools are more likely to say this than those in non-academy schools.

Limitations

When reading the findings of this report, it's worth noting the following about the respondents:

- Despite promotion to schools nationwide and offering a Welsh language version of the survey, only responses from pupils studying in England were received.
- It is likely that those schools that did respond are those at the more engaged end of the spectrum when it comes to environmental sustainability, often with specific staff members with a responsibility for the issue within the school or college who were able to drive participation in the research within the school.

3. Respondents

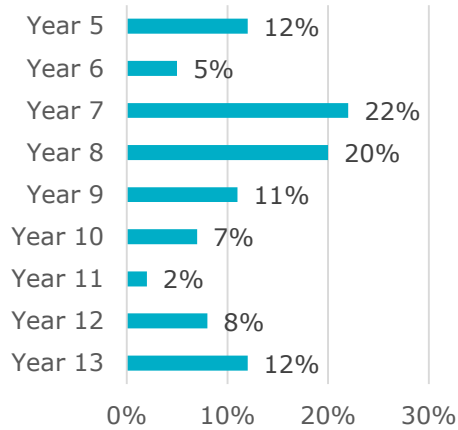
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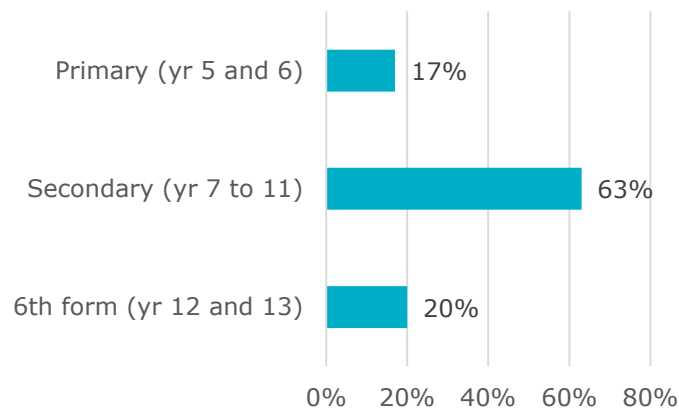
The respondents

Respondents in schools across England are...

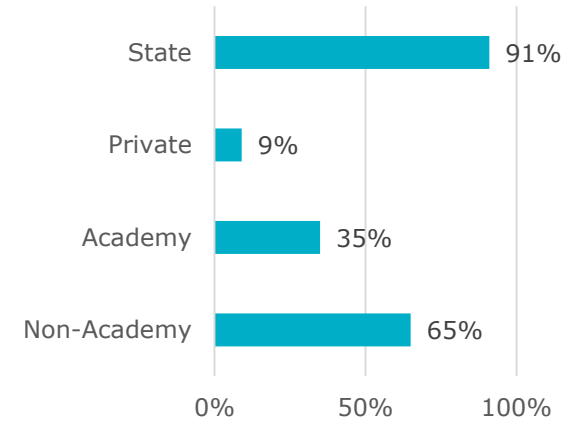
YEAR



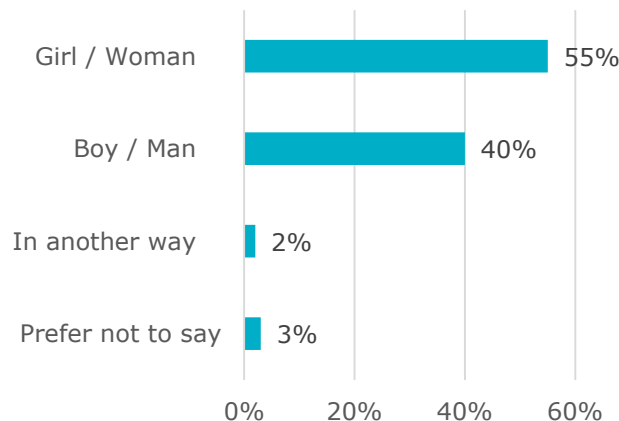
EDUCATION LEVEL



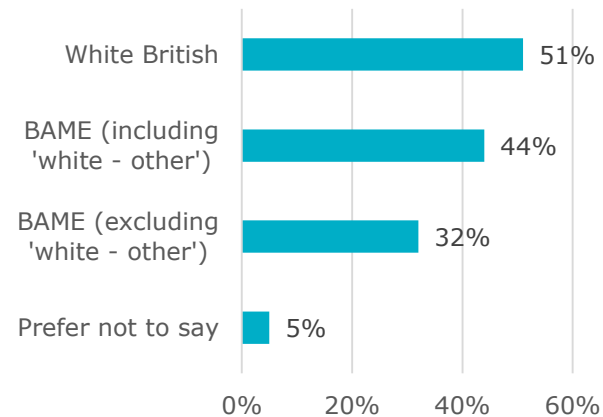
SCHOOL TYPE



GENDER IDENTITY



RACE / ETHNICITY

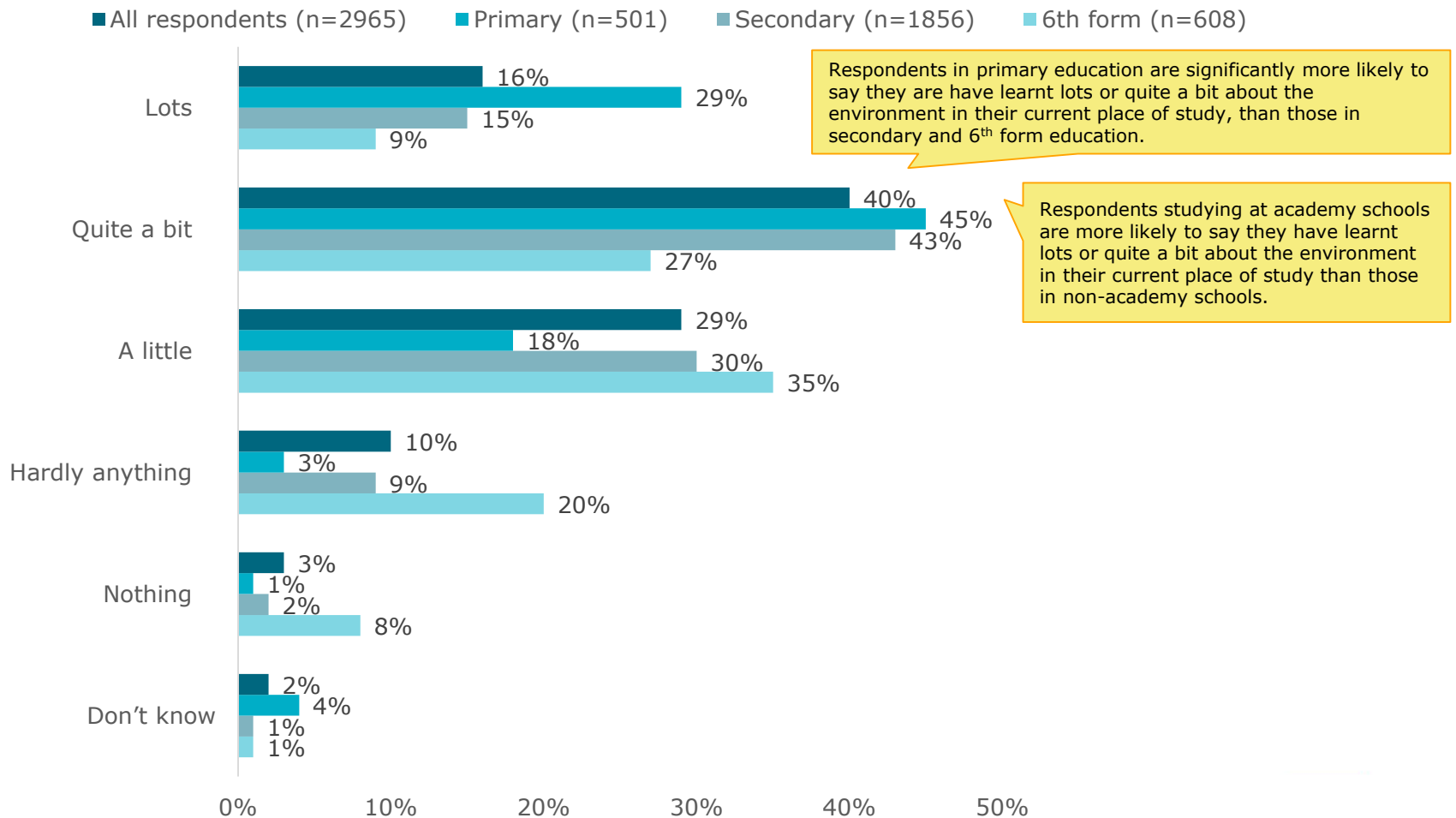


4. Research findings

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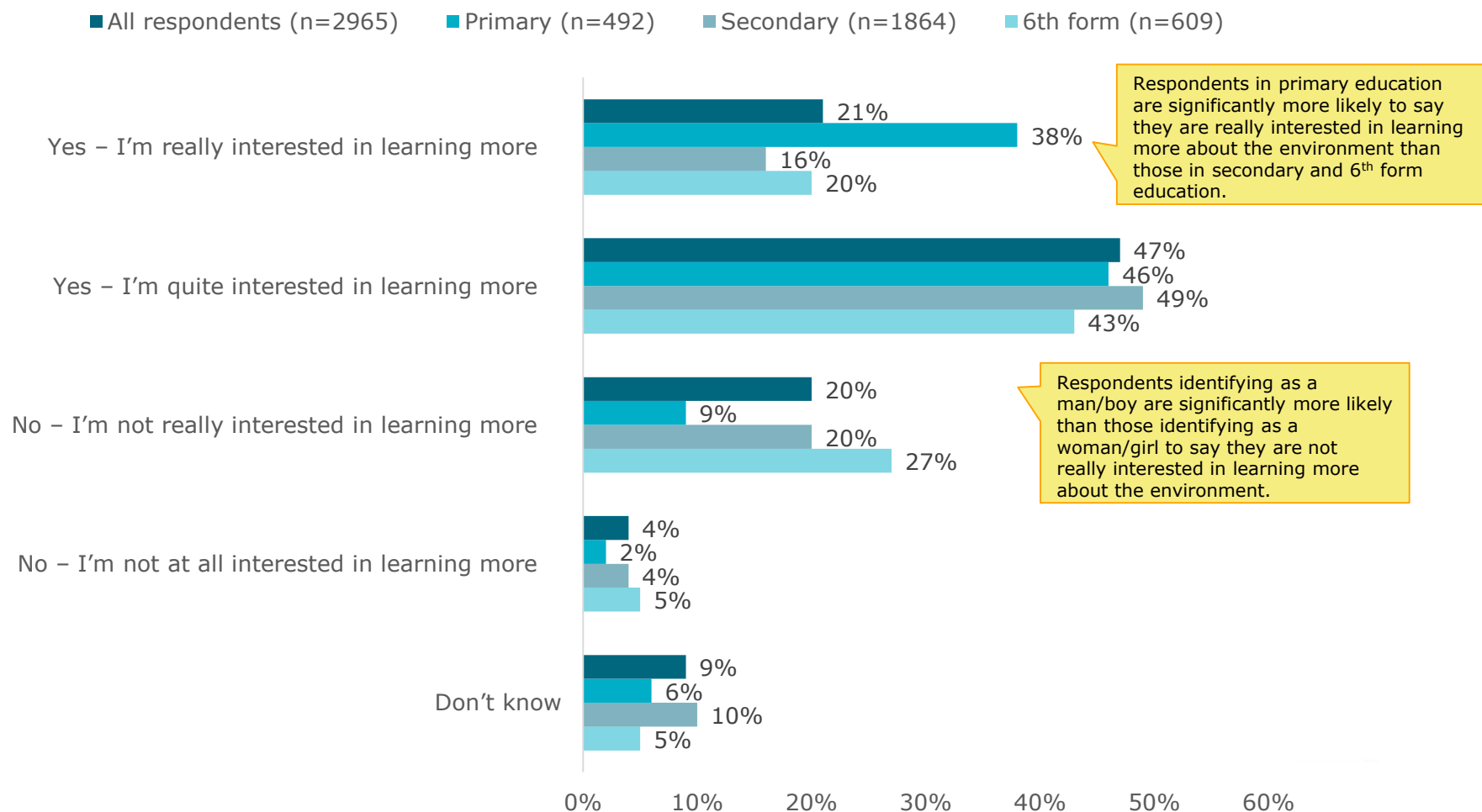
Over half (56%) say they have learnt lots or quite a bit about the environment at their *current* place of study, however over a third (42%) say they have learnt only a little, hardly anything or nothing.



Q. Thinking about your time at your current school or college so far, how much have you learnt about the environment?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

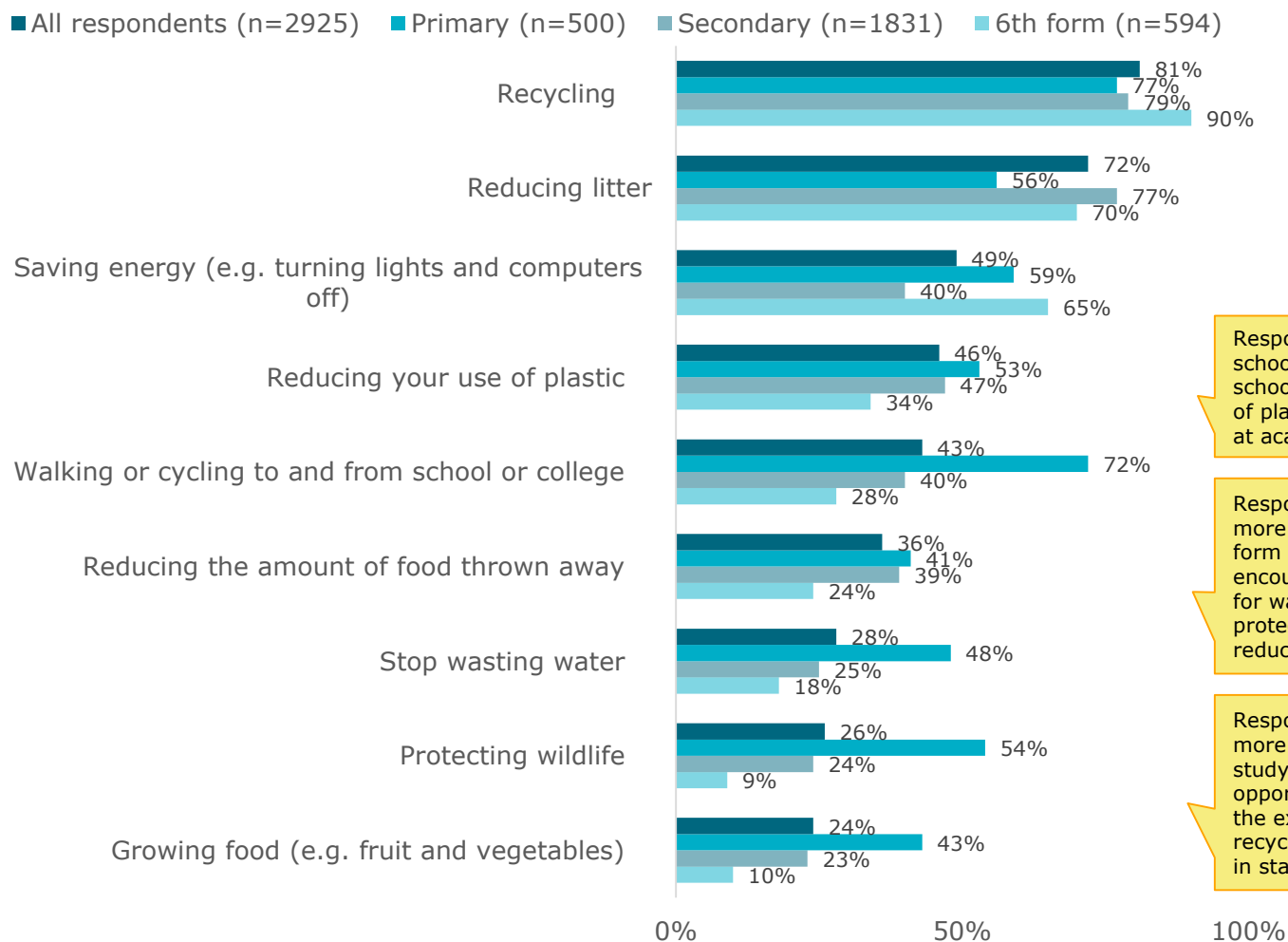
Two thirds of respondents say they are interested in learning more about the environment (68% are really or quite interested).



Q. Would you like to learn more about the environment?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Recycling (81%) and reducing litter (72%) are the most commonly reported actions to help the environment that respondents report being encouraged by their school or college.



Respondents in non-academy schools are more likely to say their school encourages reducing the use of plastic compared to respondents at academy schools.

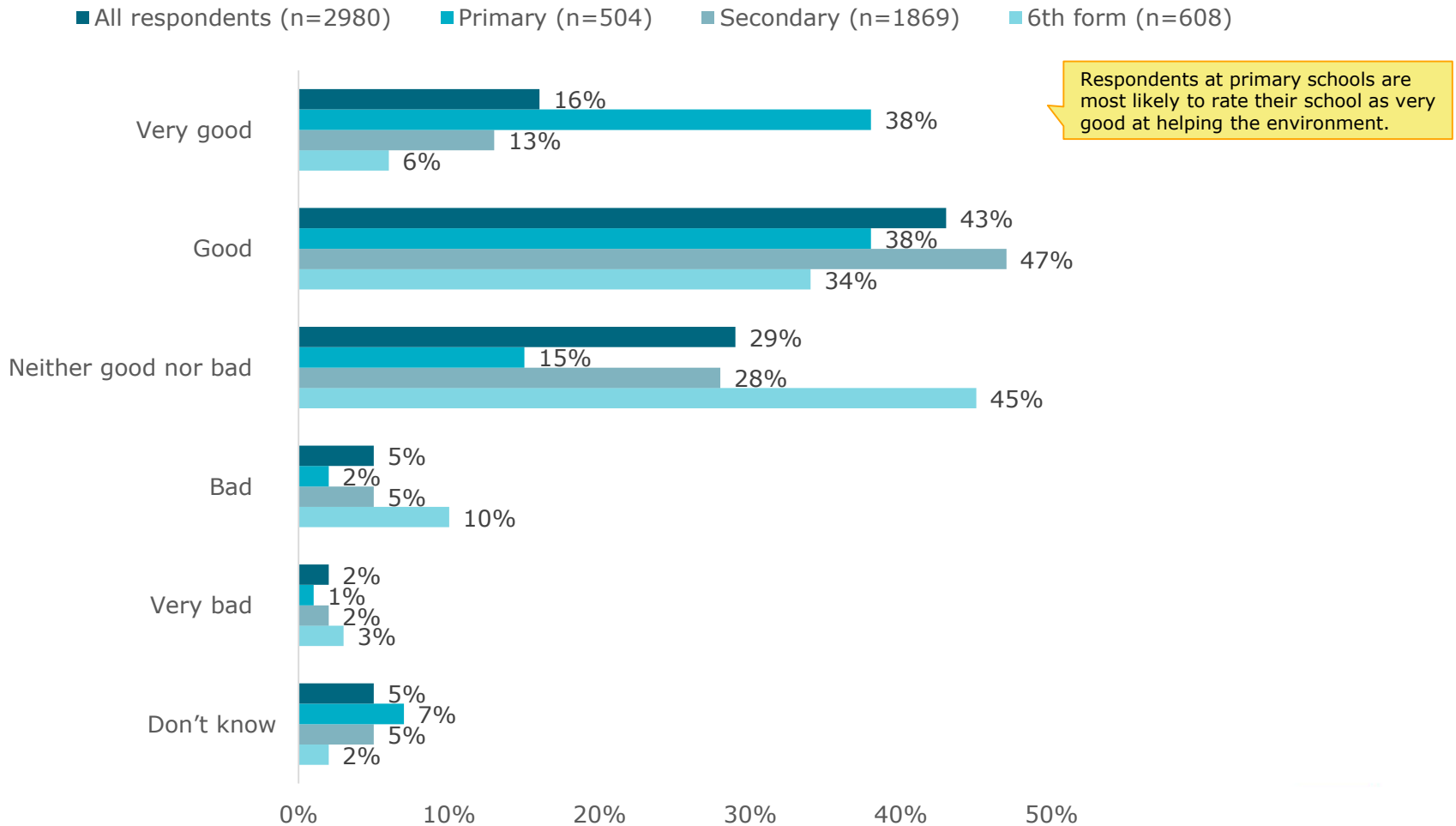
Respondents in primary schools are more likely than secondary and 6th form respondents to say their school encourages or provides opportunities for walking/cycling to school, protecting wildlife, growing food, reducing plastic and wasting water.

Respondents private schools are more likely to say their place of study encourages or provides opportunities to do each action, with the exception of growing food and recycling, compared to respondents in state schools.

Q. Does your school or college encourage you to, or give you a chance to, do any of the following things?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, respondents report a positive view of their school or college in terms of action to help the environment – 59% rate their school as very good or good.

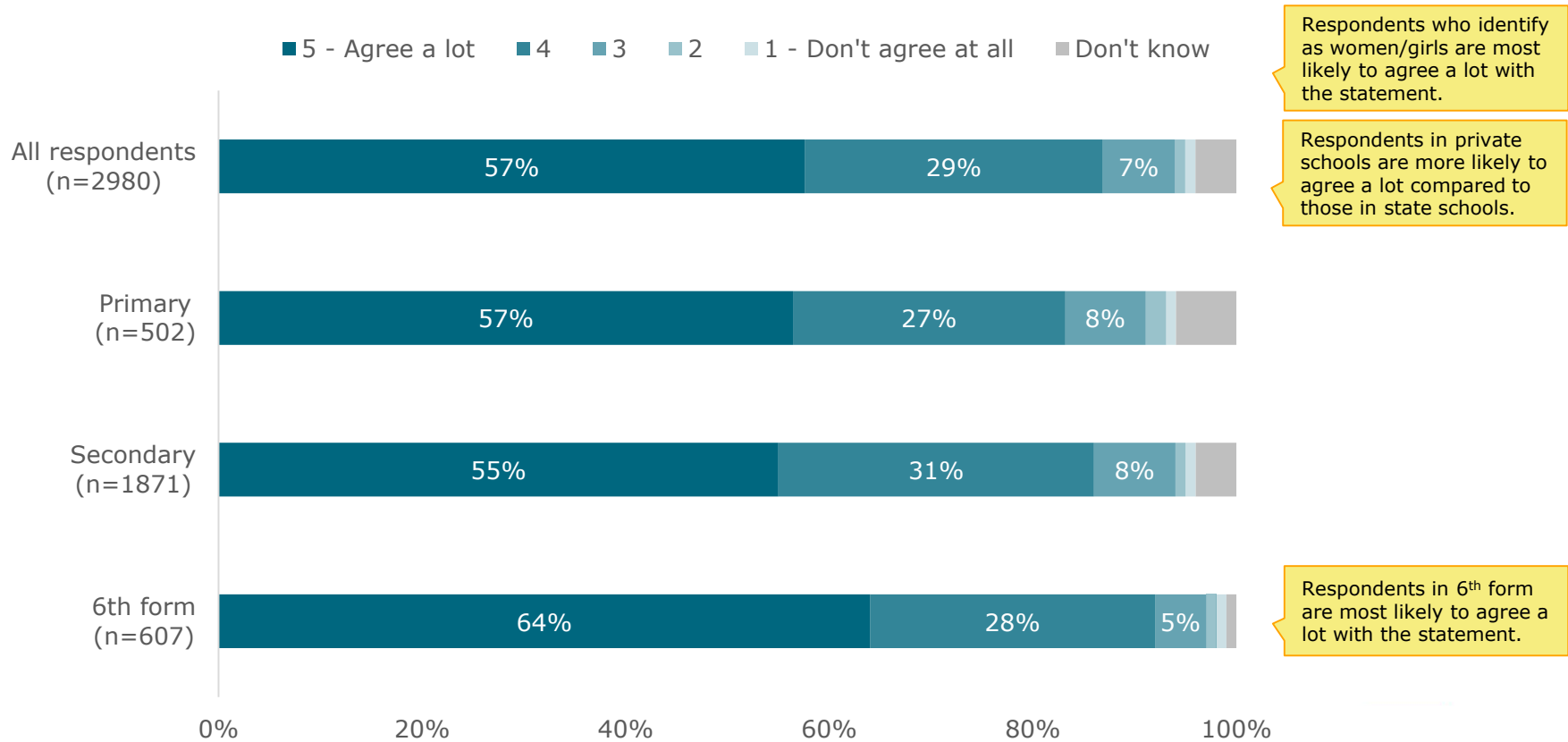


Q. How good or bad do you think your school or college is at helping the environment?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

The majority of respondents overall agree that all schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment (86%).

"All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment."



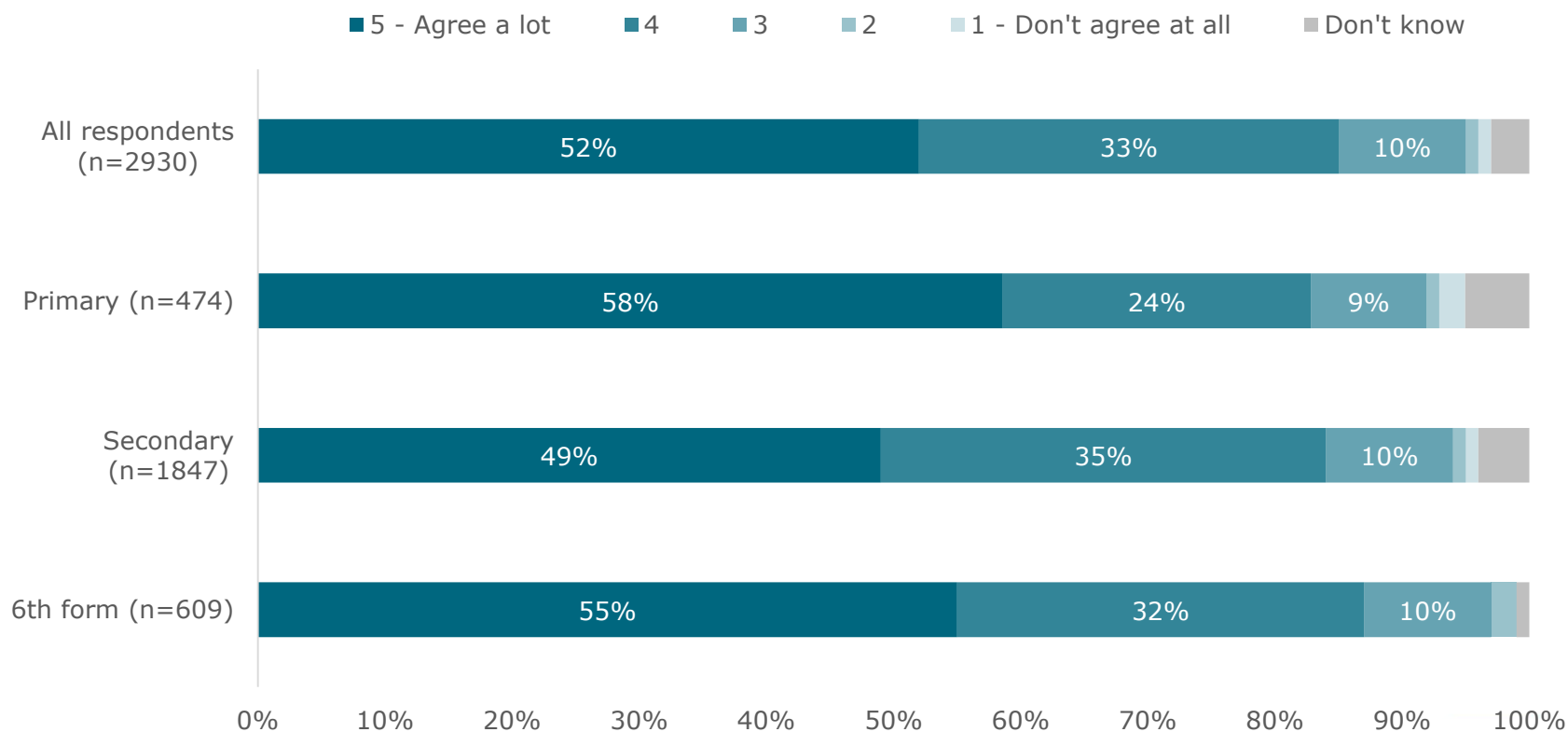
Q. What do think about this statement?

All schools and colleges should be doing things to help the environment.

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, the majority of respondents (85%) also agree that all schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like them to do things to help the environment.

"All schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like me to do things to help the environment."



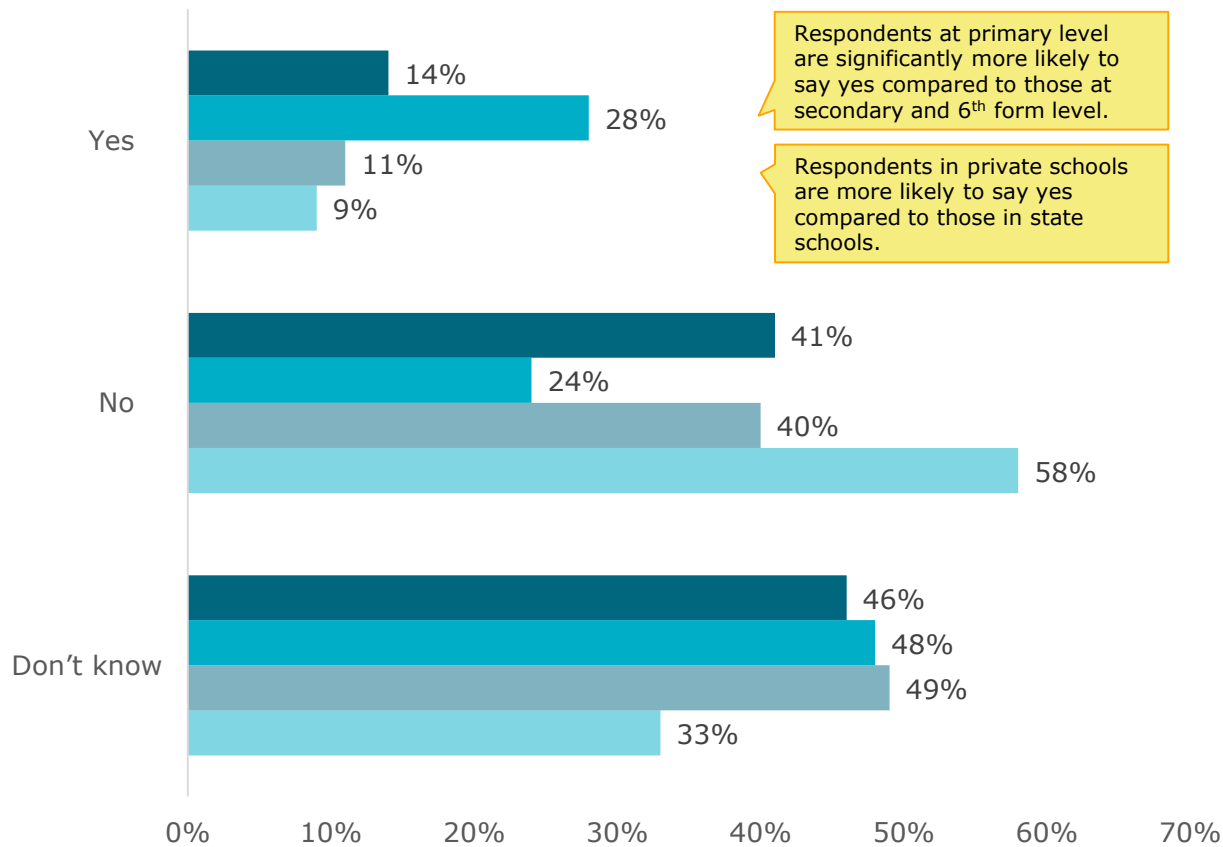
Q. And what do you think about this statement?

All schools and colleges should be encouraging and helping pupils like me to do things to help the environment.

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, around half of respondents (46%) are unaware of whether their school or college generates renewable energy.

■ All respondents (n=2976) ■ Primary (n=502) ■ Secondary (n=1867) ■ 6th form (n=606)



Q. Renewable energy is energy which comes from sources that will not run out any time soon, like the sun, wind, water and the natural heat of the earth.

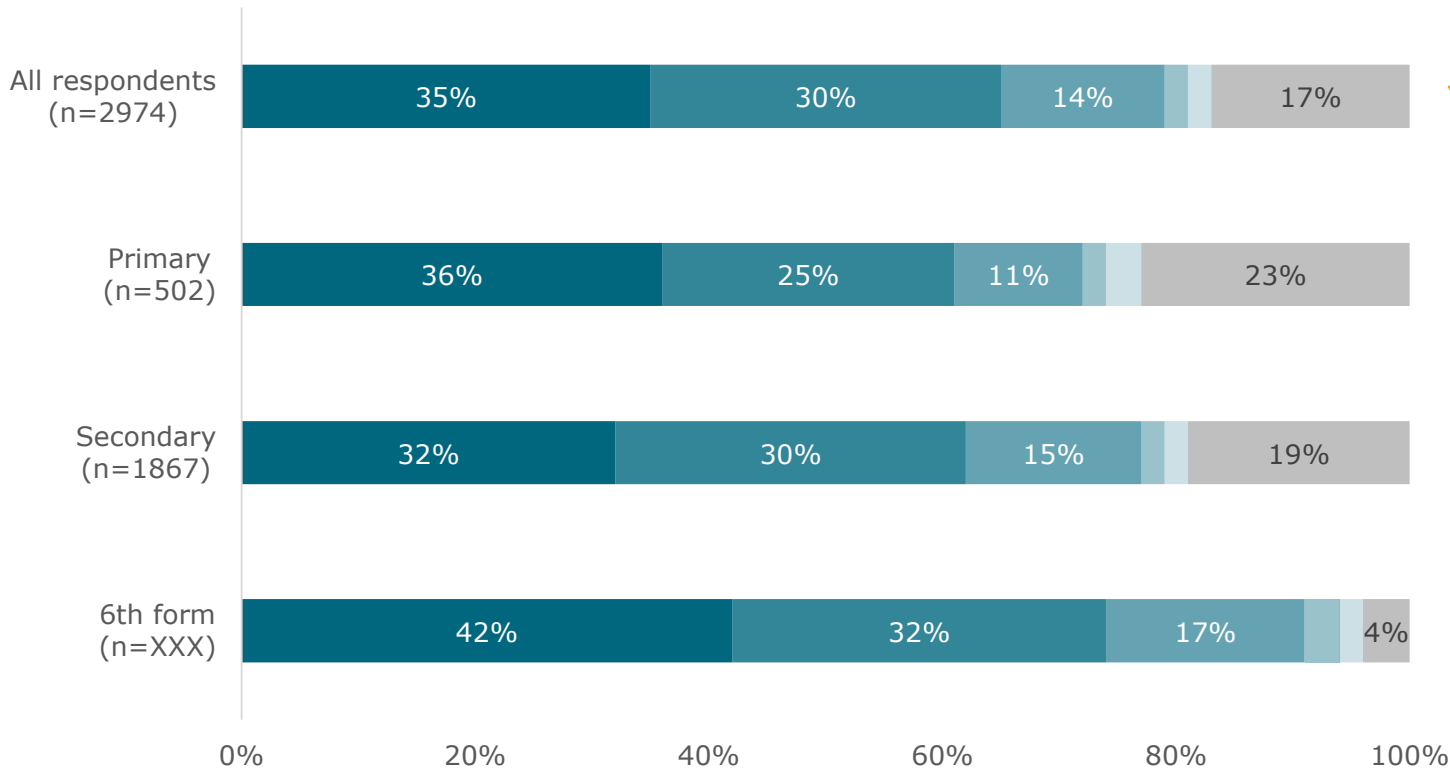
Does your school or college generate any renewable energy?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, almost two thirds agree (5-agree a lot, or 4) that their school or college should be generating renewable energy.

"My school / college should be generating renewable energy."

■ 5 - Agree a lot ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 - Don't agree at all ■ Don't know



Respondents in private schools are more likely to agree a lot compared to those in state schools.

Respondents at 6th form level are more likely to agree a lot compared with those at other levels.

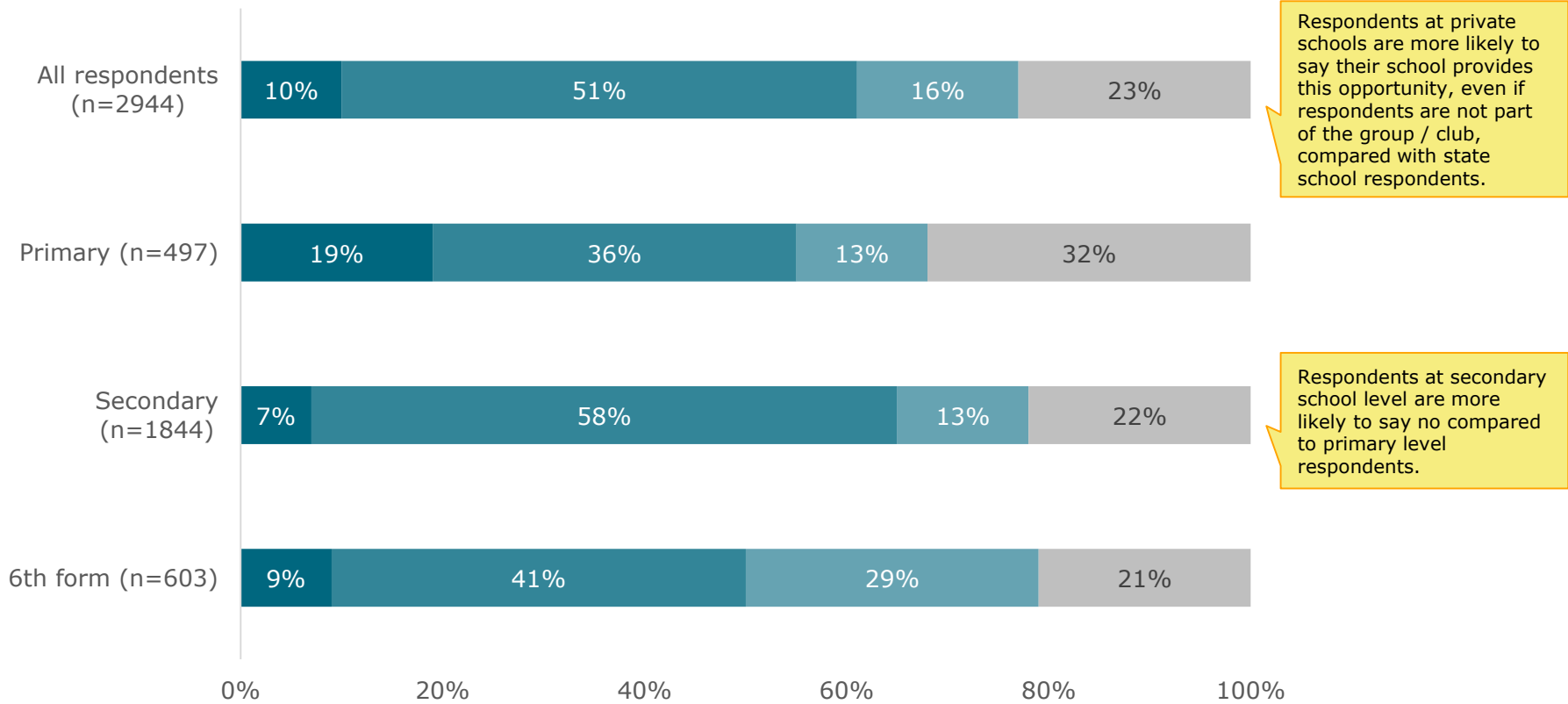
Q. What do you think about this?

My school / college should be generating renewable energy.

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, 10% of respondents say they are part of a team or club that gives them a chance to be involved in improving the impact their school or college has on the environment.

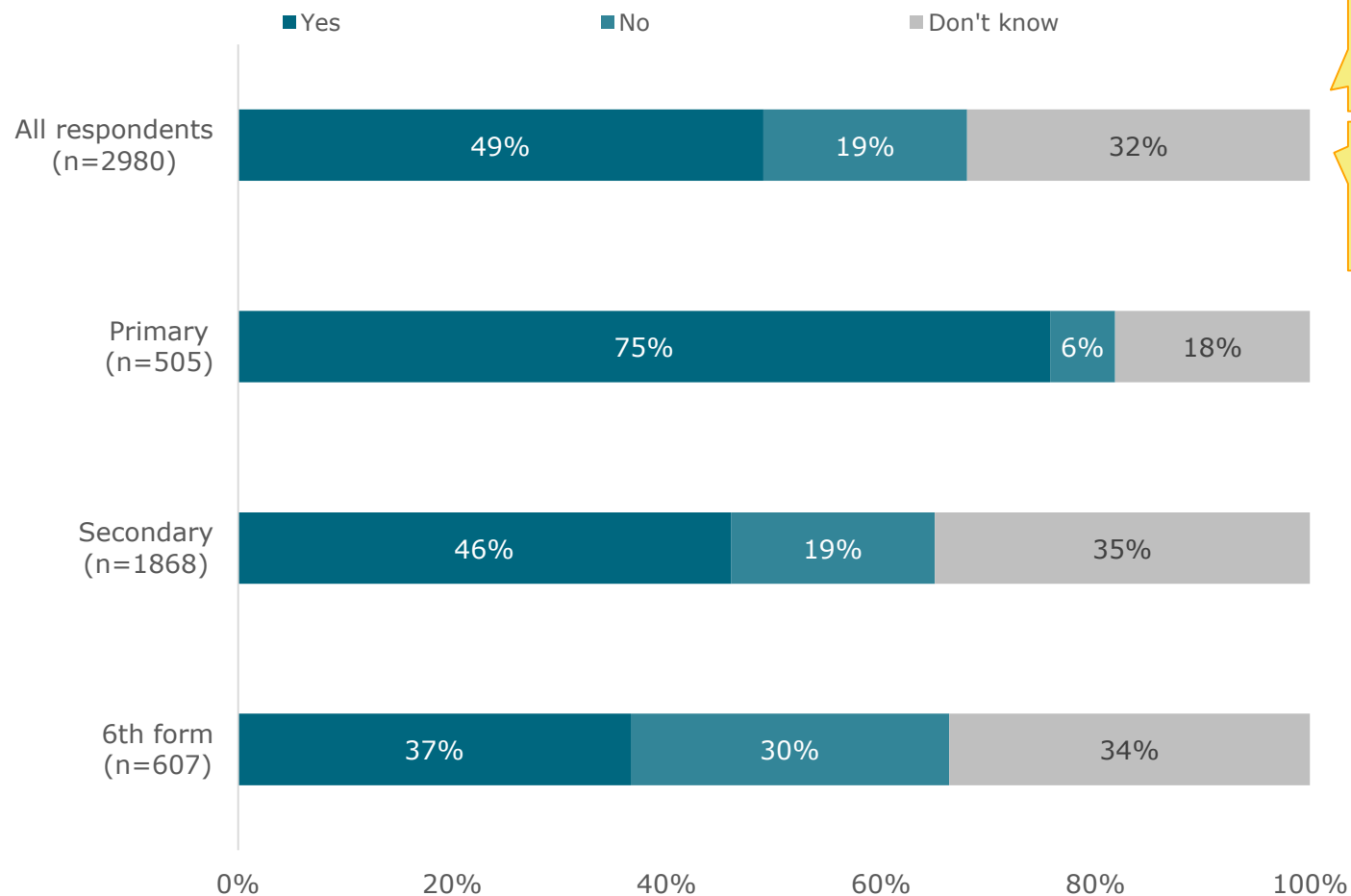
■ Yes – my school / college has this and I’m part of this group
 ■ Yes – my school / college has this but I’m not part of this group
 ■ No
 ■ Don’t know



Q. Does your school or college give you the chance to get involved with trying to improve the impact it has on the environment (for example, being part of an Eco or Green Team or Club)?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, almost half of respondents (49%) say they would like to be involved with projects or activities at their school or college that help the environment.



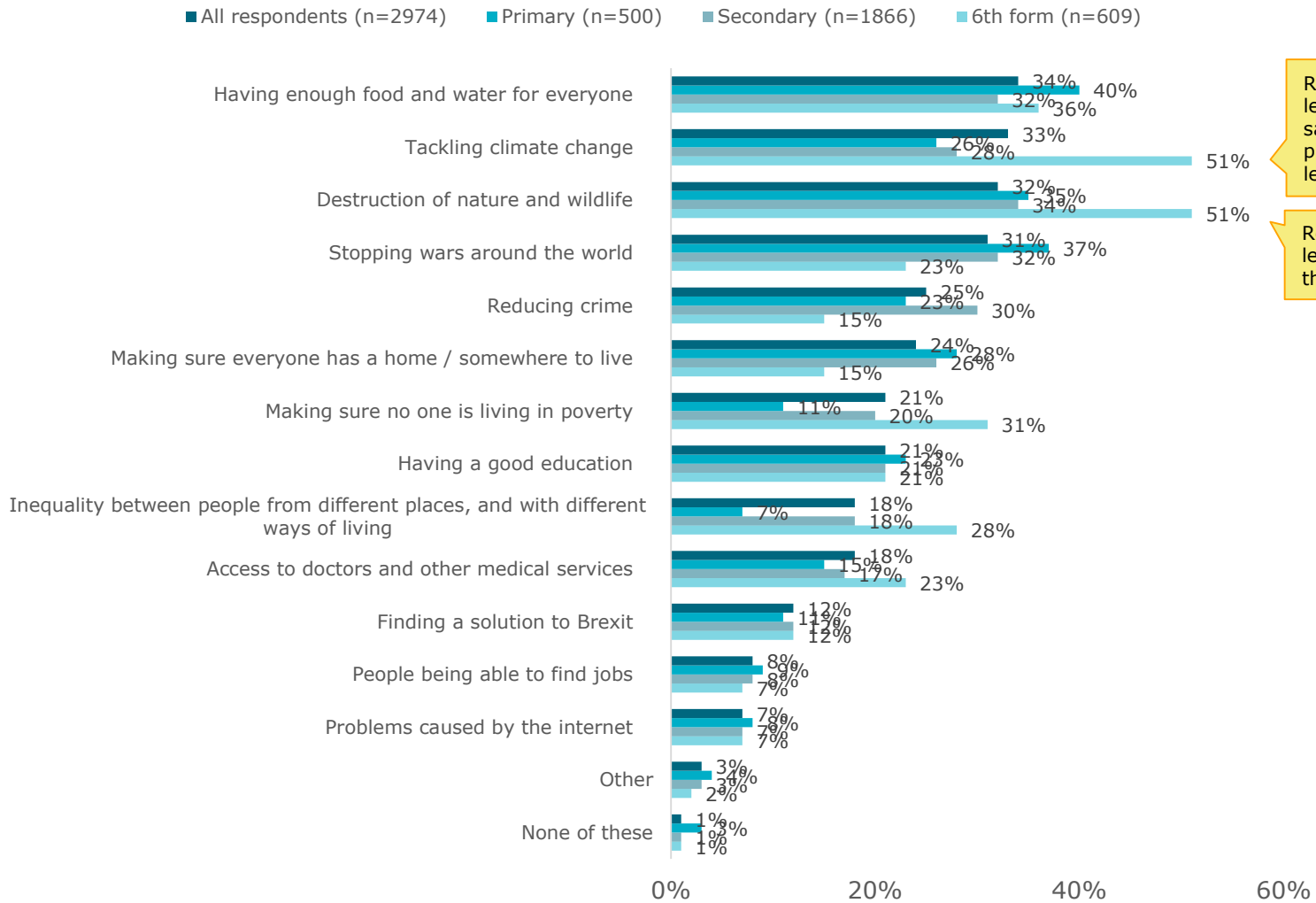
Respondents at primary school level are more likely to say yes compared to secondary and 6th form level respondents.

Respondents who identify as women/girls are more likely to say yes compared to those who identify as men/boys.

Q. Would you like to be involved with projects or activities at your school or college that help the environment?

Weighted base: 2980 Balance: No response

Respondents note having enough food and water for everyone (34%), tackling climate change (33%) and the destruction of nature and wildlife (32%) as the most important issues .



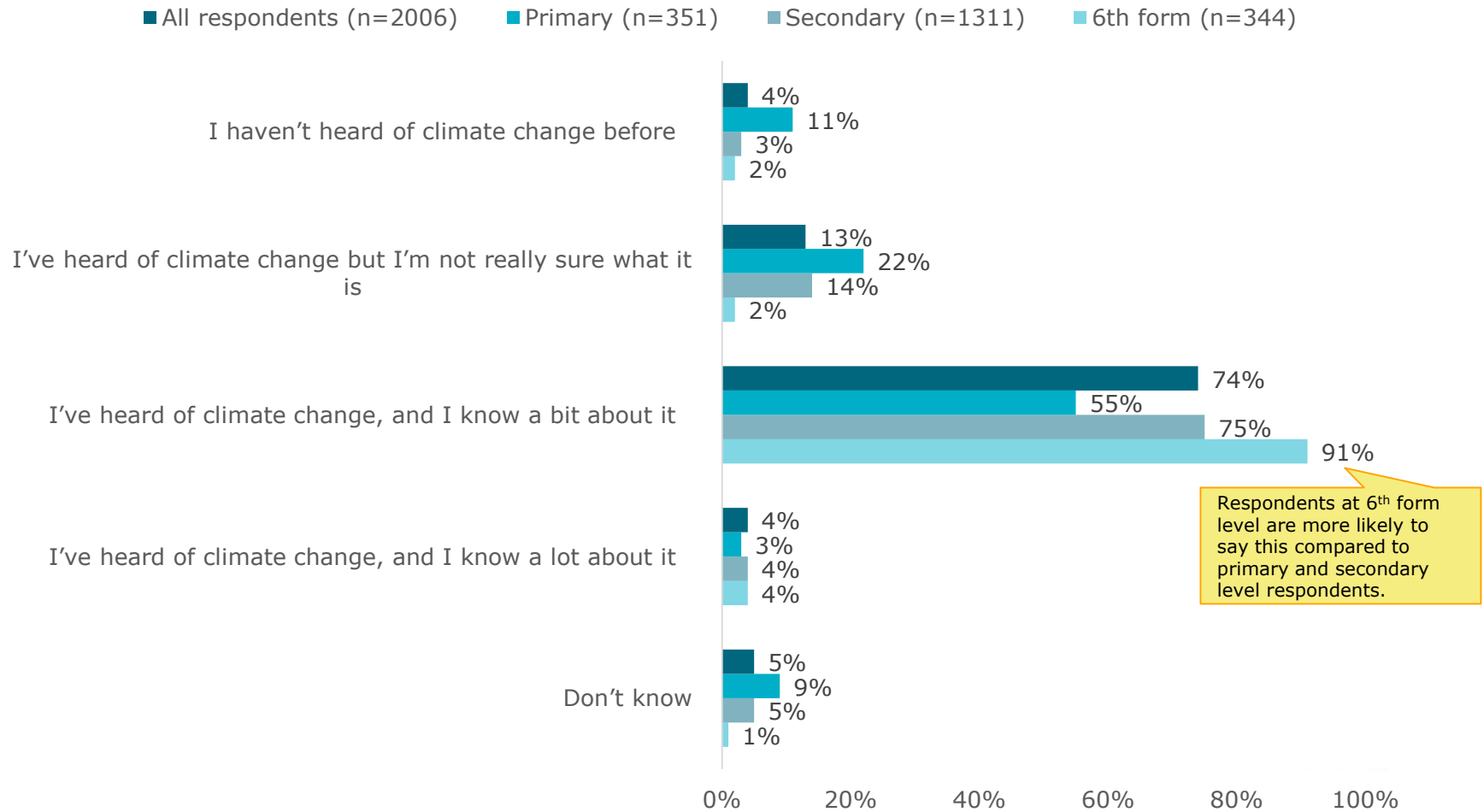
Respondents at 6th form level are more likely to say this compared to primary and secondary level respondents.

Respondents at 6th form level are least likely to say this.

Q. What do you think are the most important issues facing the world today?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

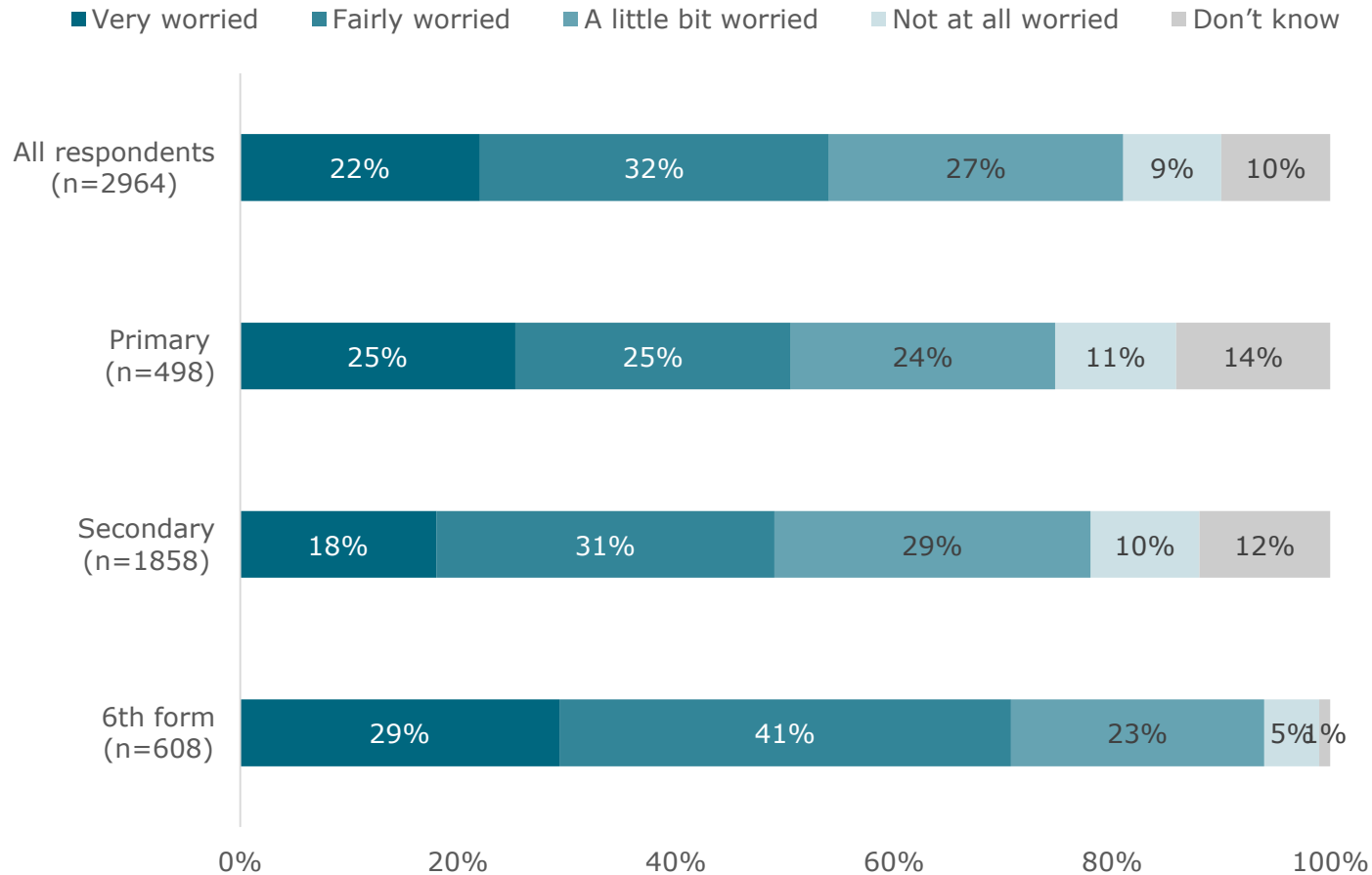
Overall, three quarters of respondents (74%) say they've heard of climate change and know a bit about it.



Q. Which of these options best describes what you know about climate change?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

54% of respondents say they're very or fairly worried about climate change.

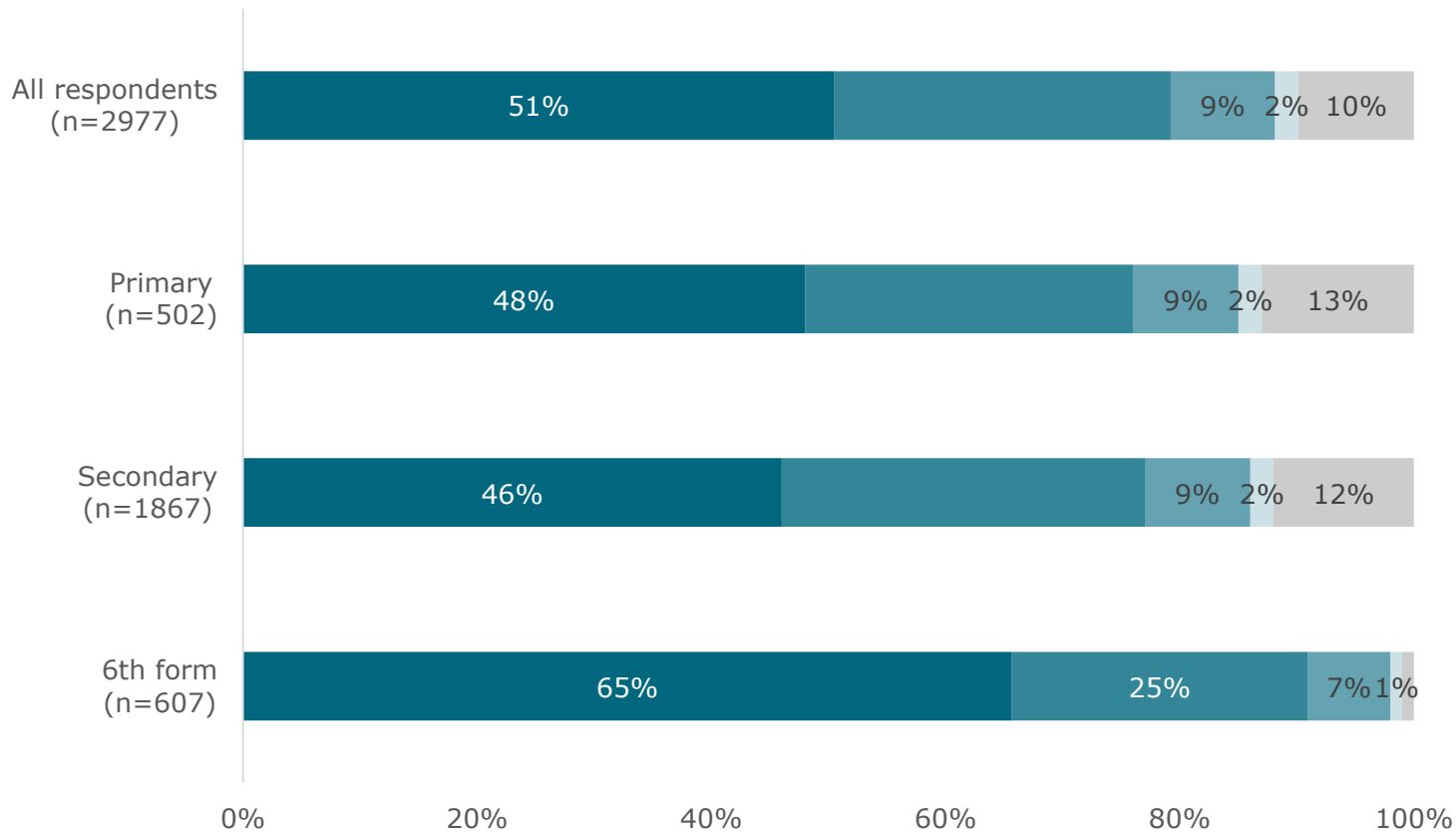


Respondents who identify as women/girls are more likely to say they are worried about climate change compared to respondents who identify as men/boys.

Respondents at 6th form level are more likely to say they are worried about climate change compared to primary and secondary level respondents.

Half of respondents (51%) say it is very important that world leaders do more to tackle climate change.

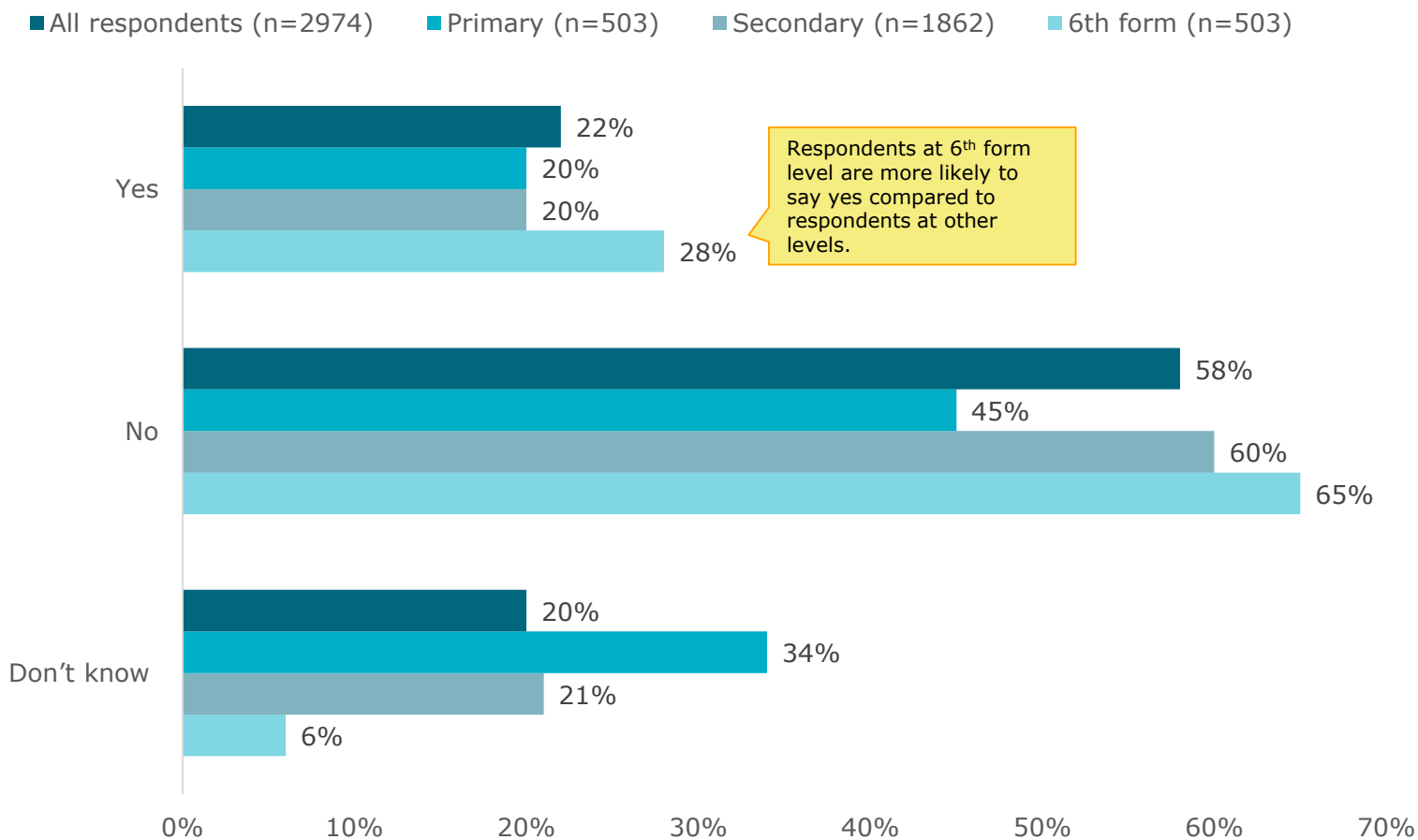
Very important Fairly important A little bit important Not important at all Don't know



Respondents at 6th form level are more likely to say they think its very important compared to respondents at other levels.

Q. How important, or not important, do you think it is that world leaders do more to tackle climate change?
Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Less than a quarter of respondents (22%) say they have heard of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

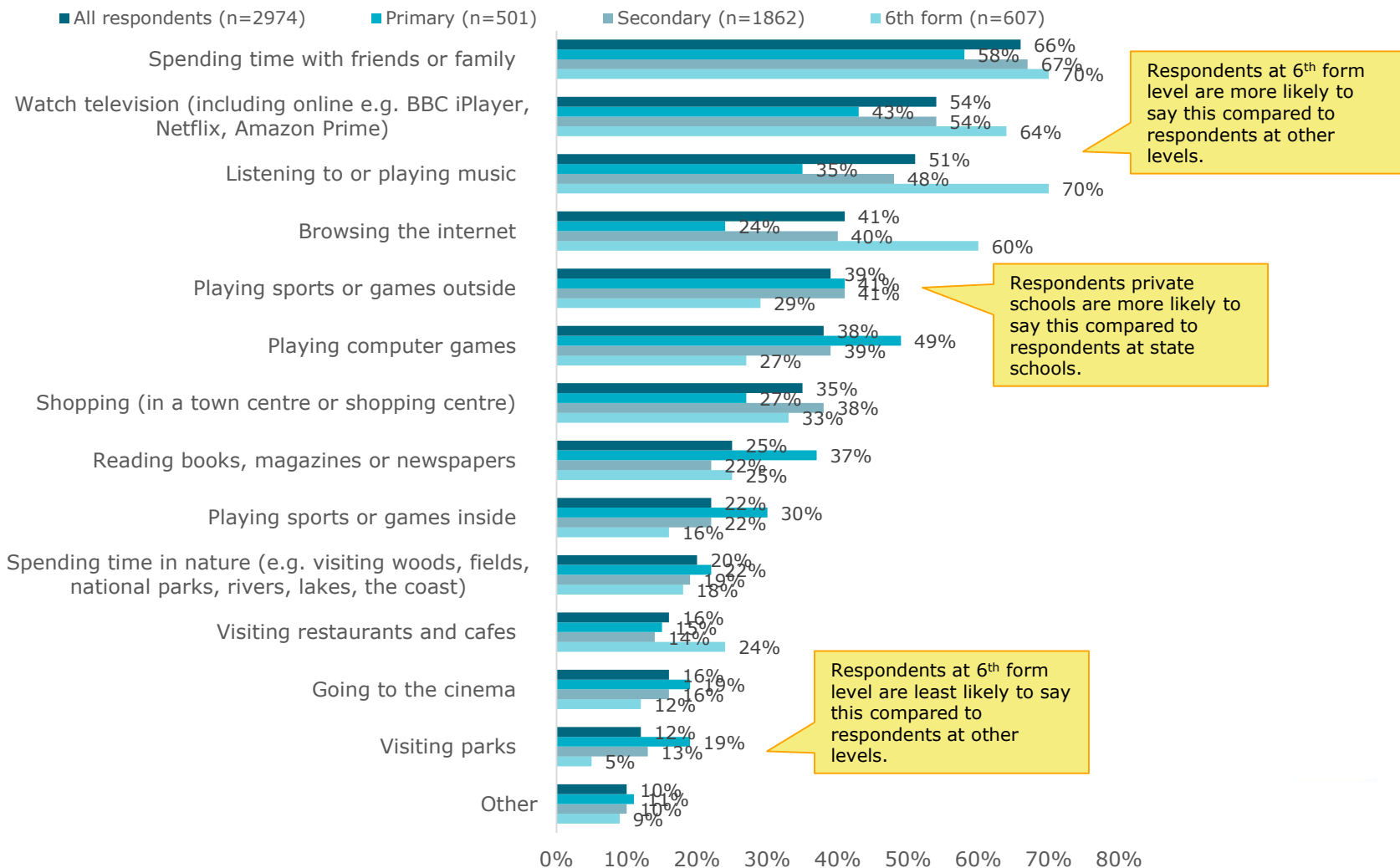


Q. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a set of 17 goals that countries around the world have agreed to work towards with the aim of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people live in peace and prosperity.

Before answering this survey, had you heard of the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals?

Weighted base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

The main activities respondents participate in during their spare time include spending time with friends or family (66%), watching television (54%) and listening to or playing music (51%). 20% say they spend time in nature and 12% say they visit parks.



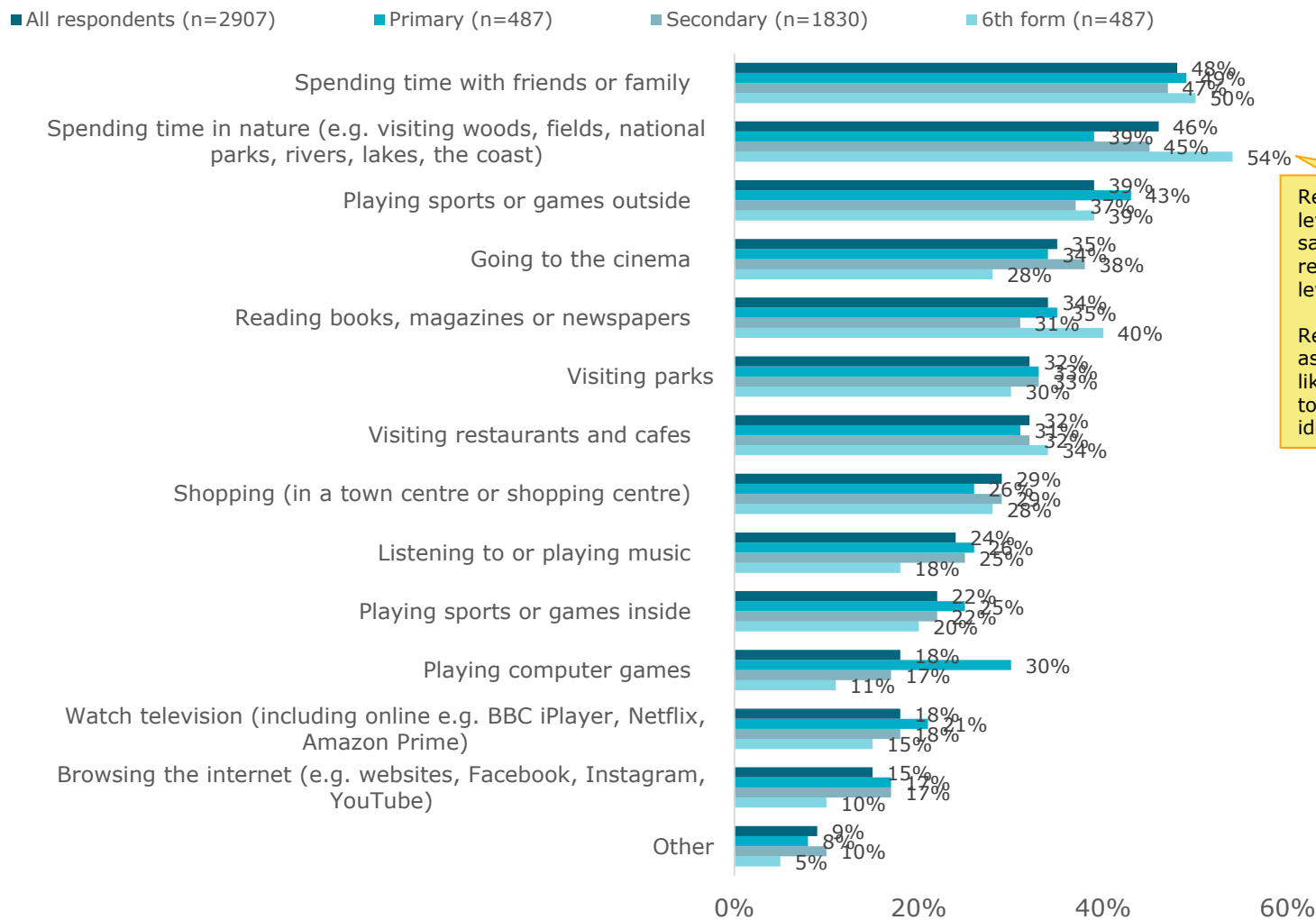
Respondents at 6th form level are more likely to say this compared to respondents at other levels.

Respondents private schools are more likely to say this compared to respondents at state schools.

Respondents at 6th form level are least likely to say this compared to respondents at other levels.

Q. Thinking about your spare time, after school, at the weekend and during the school holidays, which of the following activities do you do most often?
 Weighted base: 2974 Balance: No response

The main activities respondents would do more if they had the chance are spending time with friends or family (48%), spending time in nature (46%) and playing sports or games outside (39%).



Respondents at 6th form level are more likely to say this compared to respondents at other levels.

Respondents who identify as women/girls are more likely to say this compared to respondents who identify as men/boys.

Q. If you had the chance, which of the following activities would you like to do more of?

Weighted base: 2907 Balance: No response

For more information about this research please contact
Rachel Drayson (Insight manager – Sustainability) at NUS:
rachel.drayson@nus.org.uk

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