

A photograph of three students in school uniforms walking up a wooden staircase. The student in the foreground is a boy with a blue backpack. The student in the middle is a boy with a blue and orange bag. The student in the background is a girl. Large windows are visible in the background, letting in bright light.

chancesFOR  
**CHILDREN**

BUtTLEuk

# Boarding Chances for Children 2022-2023

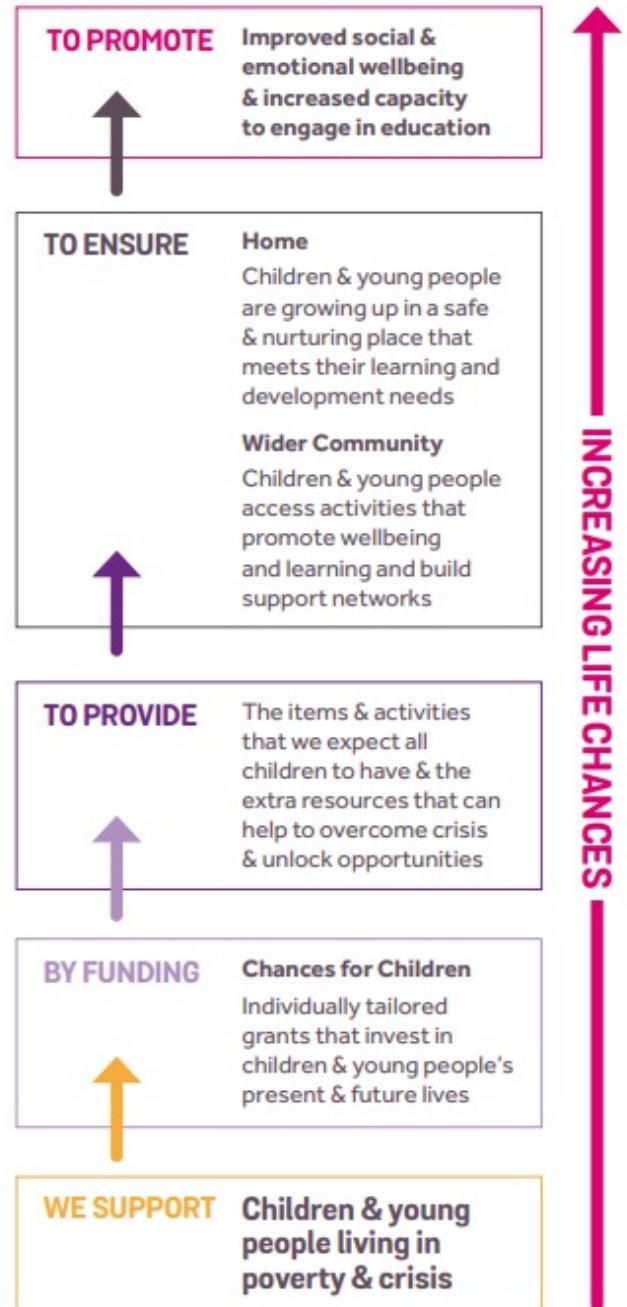
# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2023 Finishing Cohort.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Results.....	4
Impact.....	5
Impact for boarders.....	5
Impact for parents/carers.....	7
Finishers – in their own words.....	8
<b>Continuing Cohort – 2022-23.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Overview.....	10
Wellbeing.....	14
<b>Boarders’ voices: hearing from our grantees.....</b>	<b>16</b>
What did we ask?.....	16
What did we learn?.....	16
SDQ scores.....	17
<b>Co-production.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Challenges, solutions and conclusions.....</b>	<b>21</b>
A year in review.....	21
Financial evaluation .....	21
Changing applications.....	22
Mid-year leavers.....	22
Concluding remarks.....	23

# Introduction

All of Buttle UK's grants are designed to support children and young people living in poverty and going through crisis. Most of these are Chances for Children grants, which take the form of a package of items and activities up to the value of £2,400. We also fund Support for Boarding grants, which are an annual commitment towards school fees for young people aged 11-16 (and in some exceptional circumstances, up to 18). This support is a longstanding part of Buttle UK's work in supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in our society. It is reserved for very serious cases, where household circumstances are having a significant and ongoing detrimental impact on the child's wellbeing, development, and education.

This support is intended to offer an alternative, holistic environment for children to thrive. It enables a home-from-home for them to fully engage in their education, with the support of pastoral staff. It can also give families the space they need to be in the best position to support their children through difficult circumstances. We routinely measure the myriad impacts of this support against our Theory of Change, to understand how these grants make a difference. This report sets out our findings. This impact measurement also helps us to take an active role in ensuring that our grantee's needs are being met through their boarding school journey, both before they join and during their time as a boarder.



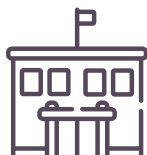
**£880,201** of funding for the Support for Boarding programme in the 2022-23 financial year



**75** students supported to attend boarding provision in the 2022-23 academic year



**20** young people completed GCSEs, A-Levels and vocational courses in Summer 2023



**38** partnerships with schools across England and Wales

# 2023 Finishing Cohort

## Headline Results

Buttle UK is keen to understand the role that our support has in supporting emotional wellbeing, aspiration and education, as well as opportunities for better long-term prospects. Therefore, every year we gather the GCSE and A-Level results of those finishing their secondary or further education, as well as information about our grantees' next steps.

While increased educational attainment is not the main intention of our grants, it is an aspect which can go hand-in-hand with the high-quality teaching, extracurricular opportunities and structured learning provided by boarding schools. Feedback from families regularly suggests that the education their young person has received exceeds that which they would have had locally, and in some cases has been transformative for their child's learning behaviours and attainment.

In summer 2023, 20 boarders finished their studies. 15 completed their secondary education, and we have results for 10 of these students. They took an average of 8 GCSEs each and passed 87% of all taken, which is slightly above the national average. As the table below demonstrates, the results of this cohort are excellent and exceed the averages reported in national GCSE data.

Subject and grades	National Average	2023 Buttle UK GCSE Cohort
Maths, Grade 4 and above	61.0%	80%
Maths, Grade 7 and above	17.2%	33.3%
English, Grade 4 and above	64.2%	100%
English, Grade 7 and above	16.0%	100%
All subjects, Grade 4 and above	67.8%	86.7%

All of the GCSE finishers are continuing with education, as follows:

- Seven of these students are continuing at their current setting.
- Eight of the finishers are undertaking A-Level study across a diverse range of subjects, with a notable focus on STEM subjects.
- Two of the finishers are taking on apprenticeships, one in computer programming and one in animal care.

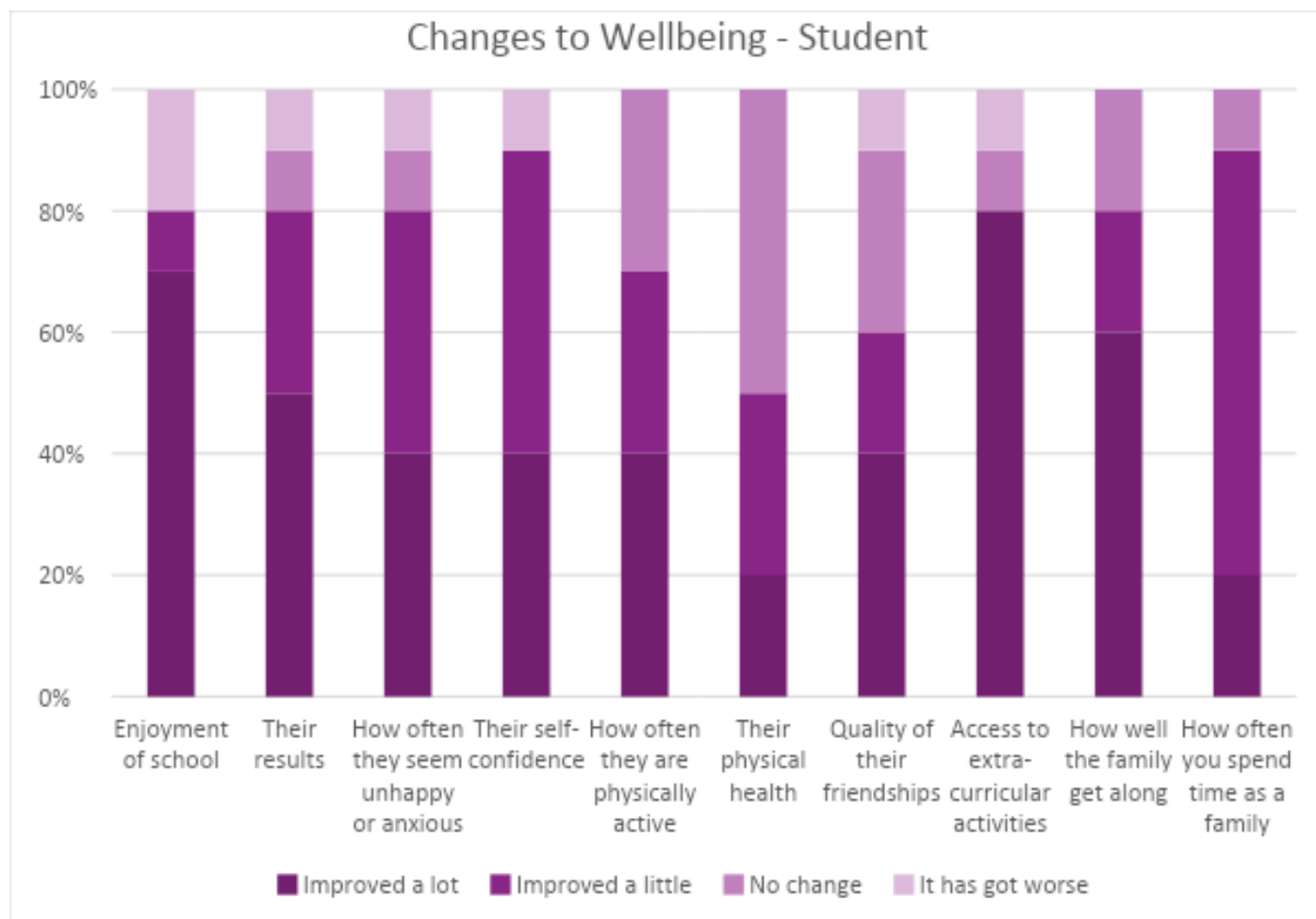
For the five A-Level finishers, we have results for three of these boarders. All of them achieved results ranging between A-C across the A-Levels they took. Two of them are going on to attend university, while one intends to retake one of their exams before attending university.

Naturally, boarding schools provide aspiration and education, ensuring that children attend school regularly and have support to excel academically. This focus on education can create opportunities for better long-term prospects. It is hugely positive to hear about the focus on academia and further study for our finishers across the board.

# Impact

## Impact for Boarders

The impact of a boarding grant can be diverse, given that it is usually provided over a five-year period. Our survey measures the impact on the boarders themselves mainly, but also the impact for their parents or carers. The graph below demonstrates where the improvements are greatest for our boarders, and where there are areas that the grant did not necessarily help.



The overall impact is widely positive. Improvements to self-confidence, academic results and enjoyment of school were rated highly, with access to extra-curricular activities being rated as improving a lot for 80% of students. This reflects the positive influence that boarding placements can have, given that these educational settings tend to have a broad programme of holistic development beyond the classroom. This approach can contribute to a more balanced and fulfilled sense of well-being.

Interestingly, this cohort reported lower levels of change in physical activity and physical health. This is unusual, given that previous cohorts have cited the myriad sporting opportunities available to them as instrumental to their interest and enjoyment of sport. Nonetheless, we know that each cohort has its own unique mixture of individuals, some of whom may have been active before attending. It may also be attributed to the ongoing impact of COVID-19; school closures reduced team sports and practices for periods of time. We anticipate the impact of the pandemic to continue to show itself in the results of our grantees as they move through their schooling journey.

Positively, many families reported high net improvements to family wellbeing, namely the strength

of their relationships and the time they get to spend together. It might be assumed that living away from home could contribute to a weakening in the parent-child relationship. However, written feedback from families explains that the placement contributes to lower stress and higher family wellbeing, as well as enjoying quality time when they are together. Likewise, they explain that the experience often contributes positively to students' well-being by enhancing their confidence and adaptability.

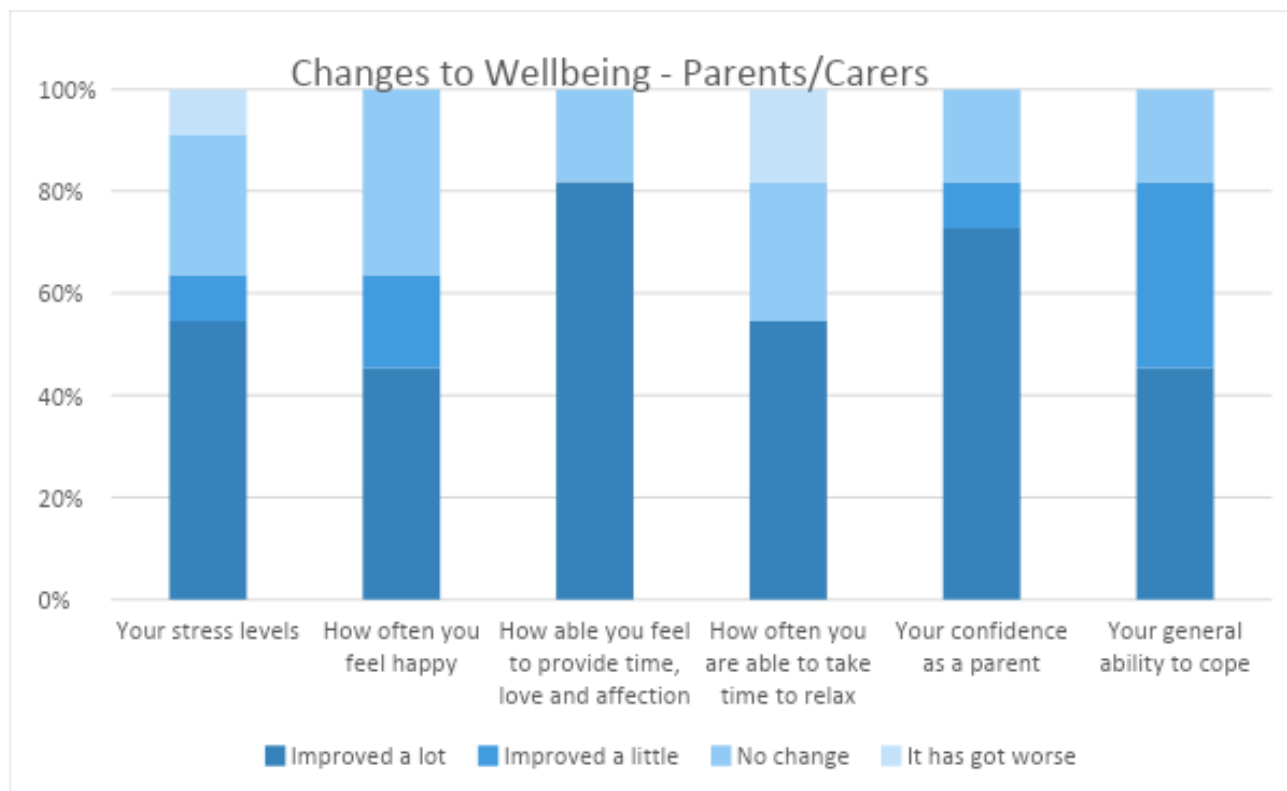
For one family, there were areas of wellbeing that they felt had declined for their child over their time at boarding school. It is important that we explore this data, to better understand our role in supporting change. For this young person, there were other significant life-changing difficulties that their parent felt had caused a decline in their wellbeing. They still remarked that;

**“The support provided for [child] has been invaluable. With diagnoses of [learning disabilities], I believe that the support has enabled her to achieve the best GCSEs she could have. She has had the best grounding and environment in private education that will be to her benefit throughout her life.”**



## Impact for Parents/Carers

Many of our grantees apply for support with boarding because of extremely challenging family circumstances at home. While this makes boarding school a practical option for ensuring stability and education for their child, it can also have vicarious benefits for parents and carers. Many have their own mental and physical health issues, and/or the addition of caring responsibilities for other children or family members with high levels of need.



Over 80% of parents and carers reported a significant improvement in their ability to provide the love and attention their children needed as a result of their boarding grant. Similar improvements were reported in parents' confidence and ability to cope. This is a positive indicator of their increased capacity to support their children's wellbeing and development - particularly for those households where the crisis is long-term or ongoing.

In terms of tangible changes to the household, 70% of parents reported that the grant had reduced their financial strain. Almost a quarter also shared that they had been able to increase the number of hours they had worked since their child had started at boarding school. These factors were attributed to helping to improve their capacity to provide a safe and nurturing home environment, as well as relieving the stress of significant financial strain.

Improvements to wellbeing were lowest for parent/carer stress levels and time for relaxation. In their feedback, they attributed this to the remaining demands on their time that were not facilitated by their child being away at boarding school. These included factors such as high-needs siblings and the impacts of their own illness or disabilities (which tended to be a significant factor in their child's need for a placement).

## Finishers – in their own words

While this was one of the smallest finishing cohorts for some time, it is hugely important to understand the unique perspectives of each student. The overall picture is very positive. Many students speak highly of the difference that their grant has made to their lives, particularly their personal development and their enjoyment of the myriad opportunities they have been able to take up at their schools.

**“ The school aspect has been great, as well as the boarding. I’m confident, and care about the society and environment a lot**

**“ My time at [school] has been amazing and I have learnt so much. I have also made some new friendships which I’m sure will last a lifetime. I love my school, it’s such a great place to be and I want to thank you for giving me the chance to go there**

**“ There have been many clubs and volunteering opportunities with younger years which have helped me develop my confidence, from reading in chapel to assisting teachers in dance and art classes and I have been able learn skills outside the classroom that have helped me mature**

**“ I have enjoyed every minute. Thank you for your help**

It is also encouraging to understand how their boarding placement had a role in helping this cohort to overcome challenges and difficulties. This was often attributed to the supportive adults and peers they lived with. It is incredibly valuable to see boarders acknowledging the emotional support they have received in their setting, which they tended to report on more than their academic support. This is evidence of where a boarding placement is sympathetic to Buttle UK’s Theory of Change and the aims we aspire to for young grantees.

**“ Year 11 was not a good year for me as I was diagnosed with [health disorder] which is believed to come from the trauma my family suffered. I am pleased that I can get on with my A-Levels and know why I might be feeling low. My teachers have been so supportive and I am so glad that they have been there to talk to. They have helped me a lot**



**“ It has been hard work but I have enjoyed it. I have made new friends and gained confidence. I have had many experiences I would not have had if I didn't go to this school. I have been homesick but accepted this to go to a really good school!**

It's important to note that individual experiences can, and do, vary widely. Schools differ in their approach and resources, so the impact on wellbeing can depend on the specific boarding school and the support it offers to its students. For some, their school did not provide the full support they needed to overcome the wider challenging factors in their lives. For Buttle UK, this provides an opportunity to review the partnerships that we support and feedback we can give to schools themselves.

**“ Mixed – when I started school, I loved it but as my condition progressed and I started using my wheelchair, attitudes changed and I was seen more as a disabled person and this was isolating**

**“ I have enjoyed my school but found [school] more stressful because of [bully]**



# Continuing Cohort – 2022–23

**66** [Child] is thriving as a boarder...she and I live alone and as I have physical and mental health issues, she has had to help be my carer. Boarding is giving her respite from that and the freedom to be a child and explore her own potential. She is enjoying learning how to cook and sew, how to do laundry and keep her room tidy, how to cope with washing/showering herself and manage with compromising in a group situation. She has grown in independence so much already and I can see she is much more proud of herself for all the things she can do for herself. When she comes home she is happier and the time we have together is much calmer and more enjoyable. I am so much better rested and able to cope when she is home for weekends and we get along so much better. School is a massive, massive support to us both and has given me hope again for [child]'s future

## Overview

Across the 2022-23 academic year, 75 children had a boarding placement funded by Buttle UK, 13 of them through the Royal National Children's Springboard Foundation (RNCSF) partnership\*. Of these, 46 were due to continue their placement in Autumn 2023. For the students funded directly by Buttle UK, we undertake an annual survey which captures the children's wellbeing, family circumstances and the ongoing impact of the boarding grant.

94% of parents and carers report that their child enjoyed their time at school over the last year, while 97% feel that their child is achieving well. They also report positively on aspects of their child's personal development, such as their capacity to do things independently and increasing confidence over the last year, attributing this to their boarding placement. Parents explained that;

**66** [Young person] has matured as he seems to every year and seems happy and confident within himself. He is very focused on getting good GCSE results now

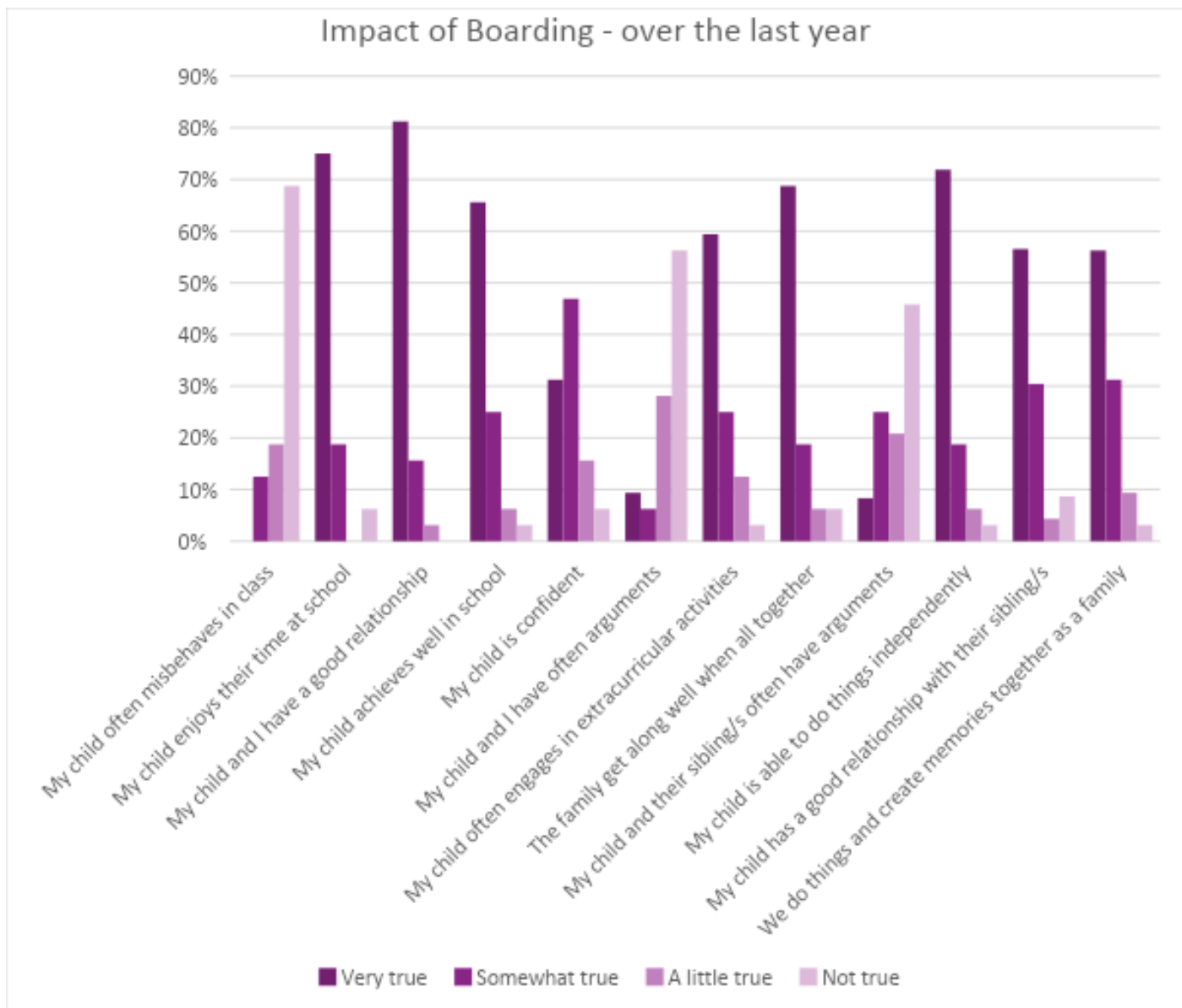
**“ [Child] enjoys school the majority of the time. Her school reports regarding her behaviour, engagement in lesson etc. is excellent.**

**“ There was a massive improvement during [child’s] first year of boarding, Y7. Throughout Y8, things have continued to improve but at a slower pace, which I think is understandable**

**“ His behaviour compared to 4–5 years ago has tremendously improved**

**“ Much closer to family due to working with school and CAMHS so she feels heard and supported. Concentration at school has improved as we get to the end of the academic year**





Encouragingly, high proportions report positively across indicators for family stability, relationships and wellbeing at home, too. Boarding schools often foster a close-knit community. This sense of belonging can provide emotional support, reducing feelings of isolation and contributing to overall wellbeing, which then carries over at home. Every parent/carer surveyed reported that they had a good relationship with their child, with 81% stating that they felt this was very true. Similarly, relationships with siblings and how well the family got along when spending time together were rated highly. This was reflected repeatedly in qualitative feedback, often being cited hand-in-hand with the role of the school in supporting these home relationships:

“Everything is getting better – we have always been close and had a loving caring relationship and being at [school] has reiterated and strengthened that

“Since attending [school], [child] has improved so much and I have found it’s done him the world of good and helped our relationship

**“ [Child] has managed her own responsibilities better now that she’s in boarding school and the environment here is healthier, bettering her mental health. Things have been more quiet at home and although she isn’t always here like before, we still manage to bond like a mother and daughter should. [Child]’s experience with friends is improving as their relationships develop and if there’s any problems, she can always go to the matrons**

**“ The time we spend together now is ‘quality time’. As [young person] is so busy at school, when she is home she enjoys the solitude of being rural and loves being outside. She appreciates the down time. She has always been a kind child but having a friendship group has definitely improved her self–esteem and emotional intelligence**

Nonetheless, one aspect of improvement was notably lower, namely around arguments between boarders and their family. 43% of parents/carers reported that they often argued with their child, and 54% reported arguments between their child and their siblings, where applicable. Parents shared multiple reasons for this, most often citing their child’s growing sense of autonomy and hormonal changes as they grow into a young adult. They also reported on the challenging dichotomy of their life as a boarder and responsibilities at home.

**“ She is no longer enjoying the boarding element especially at weekends when the majority of the children have gone home and she is then bored!**

**“ [Child] is now more vocal about wanting her own time which can cause arguments when home and I require care or help**

**“ He is getting older but tends to complicate simple things and backchat. However, it is a work in progress**

## Wellbeing

All of Buttle UK's grants are intended to support and improve children and young people's wellbeing. Many of the children and young people we support have emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties because of their lived experiences. Grantees that attend boarding provision are those that have been identified as particularly vulnerable, due to the persistent or significant challenges that financial hardship and an ongoing household crisis have presented. Therefore, supporting their wellbeing is paramount.

While all of our surveys to new boarding starters, renewals and finishers measure aspects of our Theory of Change in slightly different ways, they all have one set of 25 psychometric questions in common. This is known as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). It is an internationally recognised tool for measuring the mental health and wellbeing of children. We request it across all of our boarding surveys to track change over time, and compare the scores that these surveys create against national averages. The scores are a measure of total difficulties the child is experiencing around emotions, conduct, peer relationships and hyperactivity.

A low score between 0-13 is a positive outcome; scores above 13 indicate that a child is experiencing a level of poor wellbeing. The higher the score, the higher the level of difficulty. The data below demonstrates the difficulties that our grantees face. This year's cohort has many more students in the 'Very High' category against the national average of 5%. They also meet or slightly exceed the proportions expected for those in the 'Slightly Raised' and 'High' categories. This is a reflection of the impact of the serious challenges and barriers these grantees have experienced.

Total difficulties	Bandings/brackets	UK wide comparison	All grantees in the 2022-23 cohort
0-13	Close to average	80%	69%
14-16	Slightly raised	10%	11%
17-19	High	5%	5%
20-40	Very high	5%	15%

The key findings of this year's SDQ survey can be summarised as follows:

- On average, between 2022 and 2023, the SDQ scores of this cohort fell by 1 point – this is positive. This reduction in SDQ score saw some pupils fall into a band below that which they had previously been.
- For students who have attended boarding school for at least three years, the average fall in SDQ score was 2 points since 2021. This may indicate a positive relationship between longevity of placement and decreasing SDQ score over time. Increasing maturity may also play a part in this increase, though this may be tempered by the emotional changes brought about by puberty.
- Some pupils saw an increase in their SDQ score in the last year; 16% had a significant rise in their score (an increase of 5 or more points). Those grantees were brought to the attention of the Boarding Grants Officer so that they could act on this information with the parents and school. We have started taking an increasingly active approach to noting, analysing and sharing SDQ scores to support a child when they may need help.

- The boarding cohort who started in September 2022 had particularly low SDQ scores in their baseline assessment, averaging an 8. They have seen small downward shifts in their scores commensurate with their low starting point. One of their cohort, however, saw a jump in their SDQ score. This did not bring them into a significant or concerning SDQ bracket, but will be monitored, particularly as much work is being done to help first-year students as they begin their boarding journey.

We recognise the challenges and dysregulation that starting a new boarding place can bring. This year, we have worked closely with current boarders and alumni to gather their perspectives on how best to support new starters. This type of work is reflective of our commitment to co-production and grantee voice at the centre of our work (see Co-Production chapter).

## SDQ scores – a reflection on pupil responses

This year, for the first time, we included the SDQ questionnaire in a modified form directly to pupils in the student survey. With time, we will collate more data and will share this more widely as our understanding grows.

Previously, we have only undertaken the SDQ questionnaire with parents/carers in the surveys they undertake annually, not least because of the continuity of their assessments over time. They are also removed from the other factors that may influence a child's responses, such as the potential for bias and lower emotional maturity. However, we can learn so much from our grantees when we ask them more directly about their experiences. The SDQ can be tailored for this age group to ensure the results are valid and comparable. Asking pupils to complete an SDQ questionnaire themselves provides an interesting insight into the differences, or similarities, reported by their parents.

For the 16 responses we received, parents were slightly more likely to rate their child as having a higher SDQ score (therefore, indicating lower wellbeing) than the boarder themselves. For a quarter of the cases where we had responses from parent/carer and child, the child's score placed them in a different band (both higher and lower). This exercise contributes to our understanding of the value of the responses we get from children and young people. It adds credit to ensuring that grantee voice is actively sought and at the centre of our impact measurement.



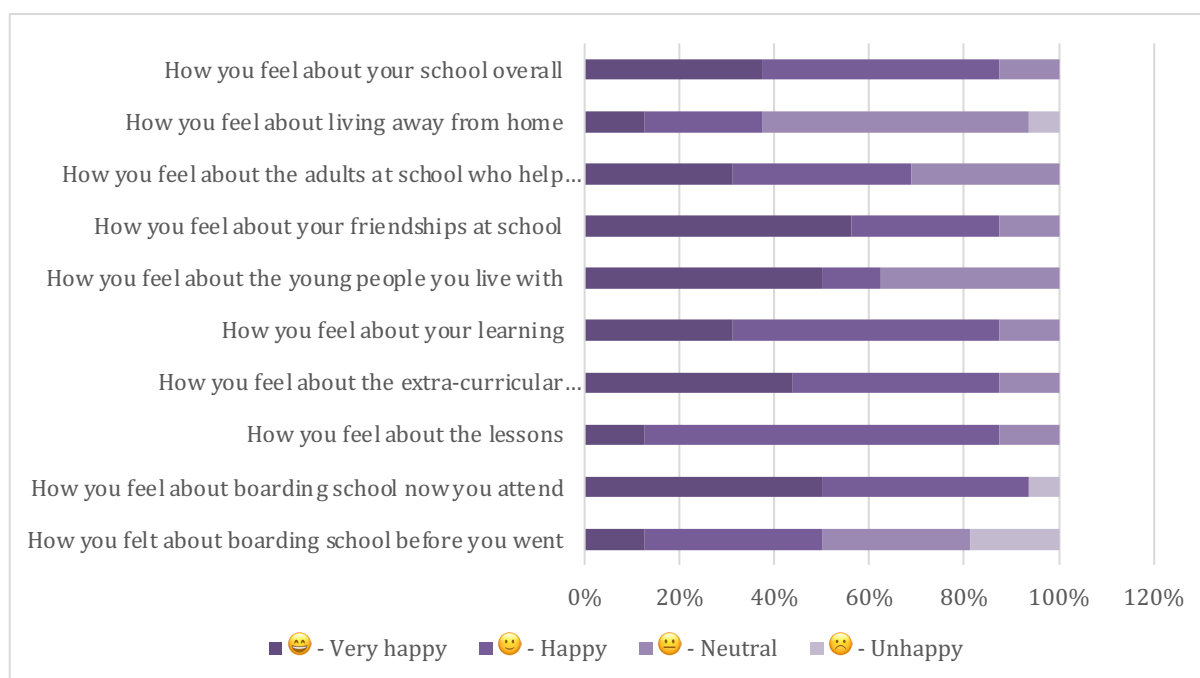
# Boarders' voices: hearing from our grantees

## What did we ask?

In Summer 2023, 16 boarders responded to our invitation to a survey where they could share their insights into their experience of being a boarding grantee. They completed a mixture of questions, including some that rated aspects of their life at boarding school and some open-text questions where they could express themselves more freely. We also included a tailored version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire suitable for their age group. Of the 16 respondents, we had a good representation from all year groups. There were a particularly high number of respondents from Year 11, which may be because of them being our finishing cohort.

Year Group	Number of respondents
8	3
9	2
10	2
11	6
12	2
13	1

## What did we learn?



One interesting insight is the difference between the feelings that boarders had before and after starting their placement. Only 13% said they felt really happy about it before they went and 19% felt actively unhappy about the prospect. After starting, this shifted to 94% overall who expressed happiness at attending, with half reporting that they were very happy now they attended. This was reflected in the 88% of students who liked their school overall. The corresponding feedback attributed this to multiple aspects, such as the activities, the environment and the staff, amongst other factors:



**“ My personal favourite aspect of boarding is the care I have received over the years. I have come a long way, and I surely believe it is the exceptional level of care offered at [my school]. The boarding staff had patience with me over the years, even when I was a nuisance**

**“ My favourite thing about boarding school is they give you a lot of freedom, this is quite nice because it gives the school a more open feel**

**“ The best things are independence and socialising and extra help from teachers in the evening**

Above all other factors, most boarders were keen to share the sense of fun and enjoyment they gained from living with their friends. They repeatedly cited their friendships as a significant contributing factor to their wellbeing, with 87% reporting that they were happy or very happy with their friendships at school. However, this contrasted with their relationship with the other peers they lived with, with 38% expressing that they felt neutral about them. Some qualitative feedback indicated that issues with bullying came about as the result of living with others, which left little room to escape if needed.

**“ I get to meet new people and encounter different situations that I may not [have] had if I wasn't able to go to this school. I am very happy for the friends I have met!**

**“ My favourite thing about boarding is the people I live with and how for the last 6 years boarding has always felt like a sleepover with friends**

**“ My favourite would probably be the overall feeling if hanging out with my friends, walking to lessons with them, going to activities and studying with them – just the general sense of camaraderie**

**“ I like boarding but worry about some others who just make others very miserable especially when in the same house as you. Overall I like boarding**

Not all aspects of their boarding placement were enjoyed. Much negative feedback centred on particular aspects of their specific school, with some shared experiences. A few students felt that they were subject to overly strict or unfair rules and routines, which might reflect their feeling that they would not be subject to similar rules at home. Interestingly, only one student shared that they missed their family (though one more missed the food) and had experienced some issues with low wellbeing. Overall responses to the SDQ would indicate that many more students had experienced at least some elements of poor wellbeing too, yet they did not share it when asked what they disliked about boarding school. It could be suggested that they did not see a relationship between the two, or even that they felt the pastoral support they received was a positive indication of boarding school as a solution to their poor wellbeing.

**I don't like the fact they're very strict on rules and don't get to do as much things as you can do at your actual home**

**My least favourite thing is sometimes rules are changed quite hastily, I don't like this because I think it would be nice to get some more pupil opinions**

**I dislike having less rest time in the weekends**

**My least favourite would probably be missing my family, and sometimes feeling overwhelmed and anxious to do well in class**

**The only thing I feel like I'm missing out on is tasty homemade food**

The final question we asked the boarders was to describe how they felt their life might be different if they hadn't attended a boarding school. The responses we received were extremely thoughtful. Many used this as an opportunity to reflect on the improvements to their learning (which 87% rated as being happy or very happy with), sharing their belief that they wouldn't have received an education of the same quality elsewhere. Others were highly insightful about the influence that their boarding placement had had on the type of person they were becoming, especially due to the impact of their peers and environment.

**My social skills wouldn't be as good as they are now, living with other people has really shaped that for the better**

**I wouldn't have the feeling like I had sisters or being part of a family**

**“ I think it would be extremely different. Who you are as a person is definitely affected by the people you meet, the friends you make, and the environment you grow up in. If I'd gone to another school, or had different friends, I wouldn't be as I am now, I'd have lived through different experiences and so it would shape me to be someone else. I'm glad this is how I'm turning out though**

**“ I think overall my life would be somewhat worse and my education would be far worse**

**“ I would be not performing as well as I am now since boarding offers extra help**



# Co-Production

This year, Buttle UK has taken significant steps forward in its commitment to becoming more accountable to the children, young people, families, and professionals we support through our co-production work. This includes the young people we currently and previously funded through our Support for Boarding programme.

In our evaluation surveys, many first-year students told us that they were unsure what to expect when they started at boarding school and would have liked some advice or support from experienced boarders to help them have a smoother transition. In response, we ran the Top Tips for Boarders project in the spring and summer of this year. The aim of this project was to gather tips and advice from experienced boarders that Buttle UK were currently or had previously funded through our Support for Boarding programme, and share these with young people due to start boarding in the coming autumn.

In total, 14 young people shared their top tips for new boarding students. Seven of these young people then worked with us to turn the top tips we received into a set of videos and a digital guide\*\*. This involved gathering top tips into themes, writing scripts for the videos, recording voiceovers, and designing characters. The final videos and guide were signed off by the young people on the project and were shared with new students joining our Support for Boarding programme in the summer, ahead of them starting school in September.

Five current and previous boarders are participating in our Investing for the Future project, which aims to engage young people from across our grant programmes in a discussion around sustainability and the investment of our endowment. These young people have been involved in numerous online and face-to-face sessions, learning about sustainable investments, environmental issues, the wider financial sector and the governance of Buttle UK. The group of 10 young people will join our Board meeting at the start of December 2023 to discuss whether Buttle UK should be investing in fossil fuels as part of its investment portfolio. This is an exciting and groundbreaking project for us, involving young people in influencing our decision making at the very top of our organisation.

We have also worked with external partners to offer personal development opportunities to our Support for Boarding grantees. Four of our previous boarders took part in a one-week internship with our corporate sponsor, Graphite Capital. Interns had the opportunity to spend a week in London learning about the private equity and wider financial sector, taking part in discussions and presenting a group case study at the end of the week. One of our young people shared her experience in a short blog for our website\*\*\*.

Previous boarders have also been involved in interviewing new trustees for our Board and recruiting our new Director of Fundraising and Marketing. The young people involved were highly professional, insightful and gave extremely valuable feedback on candidates, setting an excellent example of why it is important to involve young people in the recruitment of staff at all levels in our organisation.

\*\*[Top Tips for Boarders | Buttle UK](#)

\*\*\*[Internship at Graphite Capital | Buttle UK](#)

# Challenges, solutions and conclusions

## A year in review

Buttle UK continually reviews the application process and eligibility criteria for all our grants. It is through this process of review that our work has the best chance of supporting the children and young people who need these grants the most. This is pertinent to the Support for Boarding programme for several reasons.

Firstly, these are grants that are carried out over five, and sometimes seven, years. They create significant and life-changing upheaval, with the intention that they make a positive change to the life and prospects of the children and young people who attend boarding schools. Secondly, boarding grants are of a very high financial value. They represent a significant investment of money, for which we are accountable. Finally, we see the importance of ensuring a close match between the child, their family, and the school. Failure to ensure the strength of this match could lead to the serious repercussions of the failure of a boarding placement. Though this is impossible to avoid on occasion, it is something that should be avoided by all possible means.

This year, these 'possible means' have been carefully reviewed, resulting in two significant changes. One came into effect for current and continuing boarders from across 2023, while the other change impacts future boarders from the 2024-25 cohort onwards (whose applications are in process at the time of writing). We are also presenting here a review of the unusually high levels of mid-year leavers, some of which are a result of the changes outlined below.

## Financial evaluation

As part of the very stringent application process, parents and carers have always been required to provide evidence of their financial hardship. After this, they have been routinely asked to share changes to their financial and home circumstances in a renewal survey. This survey has been checked annually by the Boarding Grants Officer, and any causes for concern followed up with parents and carers. We have made substantial changes to this process across 2023. This year, for the first time, an independent review was conducted by an external consultant, who undertook a thorough appraisal of each family's assets and income sources. The intention of this review was to ensure that we had the fullest understanding of the current cohort's financial circumstances and could act accordingly.

As this had not been done before, we knew we were likely to encounter some challenges. Nonetheless, while the method of checking might have changed, the expectation of being kept informed of changes to financial circumstances had not, and parents agreed to this at the time of their grant being made. Sadly, the independent review did find evidence in some households where Buttle UK had been misled as to the value of assets or income. For two of these cases, the value was so significant that, after a full appraisal of each individual situation, funding for the school place was withdrawn at the end of the school year. This decision was not taken lightly and was managed as carefully as possible to reduce disruption to the boarders involved.

Going forwards, this annual financial review will become a routine aspect of receiving a Support for Boarding grant. This will ensure the utmost fairness of the application of our own criteria and allow us to prioritise support for families where there is greatest need. While the difficulties outlined here have been challenging, we anticipate that the learning from this year will lead to much better outcomes for future cohorts.

## Changing applications

Buttle UK is continually working on ensuring that applicants to our Support for Boarding programme are those in greatest need of the placement. Grants are not awarded based on academic merit or parental desire for a private education, and this has been a long-standing aspect of the eligibility criteria. Nonetheless, we are not seeing enough applications from the households who need them the most. This is despite outreach from the Grants Development Officers and the ongoing work of the Boarding Grants Officer.

Therefore, the decision was made to change who can apply for this grant programme from 2023-24 onwards. Previously, parents were asked to apply themselves and supply evidence from their child's current school and other professionals regarding their suitability. Going forwards, applications must come from a suitably qualified social worker, family support worker or safeguarding/pastoral worker from the child's school.

This change will directly improve the quality and likelihood of the eligibility of the applications we receive. This is because the main applicant must be working directly with the family and will have the tools required to make a full assessment of need. Above all, it will also be a better support for families because they will at least initially be known to the frontline services that can provide wider support, beyond that of the boarding school alone, in the early transition stages to a boarding placement.

As of Autumn 2023, this new format is in place. We think it will take a few years to drive numbers up as we work, alongside the RNCSF, to encourage social services and other frontline teams to think about boarding as an option for households experiencing ongoing crisis.

## Mid-year leavers

Excluding the 20 young people finishing their secondary or further education in 2023, this academic year saw an unusually high number of unexpected leavers. In the interests of transparency, but also being mindful of boarders' rights to privacy, some of the learning is shared here to demonstrate the diversity of reasons:

- Two boarders due to significant health issues, leading to unsuitability of school placement.
- Two boarders chose to leave of their own volition.
- One boarder excluded permanently due to behavioural issues.

There is always concern for students who are required to withdraw due to mental health crises or behavioural factors. We know that many of our grantees are already more likely to face barriers to their education due to the challenges they have faced in their home environment. The changes to the application process outlined above are a direct reflection of this. By working closely with the boarding school and the social worker (or equivalent), we can create better matches between child, school and the support needed for success. This is fundamental to ensuring that our grants are inclusive of the needs of all grantees.

Boarders that choose to leave due to their desire to return to their home or undertake alternative study are never penalised for this decision. Ultimately, the wellbeing of the child, and their own autonomy in defining that, is paramount. However, it still provides an opportunity for Buttle UK to understand the factors that could predict – and overcome - this outcome. The recent projects undertaken through our Co-Production intend to address this, with the hope that future boarders will feel completely supported before, while and after they attend.

# Concluding remarks

This evaluation of the 2022-23 Support for Boarding Programme serves to remind us of the significant and enduring value of a Buttle UK grant. It is this highly tailored fund that gives opportunities to the most vulnerable of our grantees, opportunities which parents and carers routinely praise in their extensive feedback. We'd like to thank them all for the time they take annually to help us understand and improve our boarding grants.

Some of this proof is in the excellent results of the 2023 finishers. They achieved fantastic grades and exceeded national averages across the board, with all of our finishers going on to study for A-levels, degrees or apprenticeships. Even more importantly, this finishing cohort showed us the real impact of their grant; the significant improvements to their wellbeing, their strengthened relationships with family and friends, and for parents/carers, their increased capacity to love, care for and nurture their children.

These results are consistent for those that are continuing to receive their boarding grant beyond 2022-23, too. The myriad ways by which we evaluate our boarding grants against the Theory of Change and national wellbeing tools show that year-on-year, our impact is steadily positive. These outcomes are subject to the natural challenges of being a household that exists in ongoing crisis and poverty, but the boarding placement is seen as a significant positive factor in alleviating the barriers and difficulties these present.

Our support is successfully helping vulnerable children. However, after this year, it will be even more finely tuned to those that are in the most desperate need. While this has presented challenges, it paves the way for a more impactful programme in the future.

Vitality, this has been a really important year for getting our boarders more involved in our work through evaluation and co-production. Their voices are becoming louder and clearer, and their role in steering the way for future boarders should not be underestimated. We will continue to consult and involve our grantees across all aspects of our grant-making.





**Buttle UK**  
**15 Greycoat Place**  
**London**  
**SW1P 1SB**  
**020 7828 3211**

**[www.buttleuk.org](http://www.buttleuk.org)**  
**@buttleuk**

Registered Charity No - 313007  
Scotland - SCO37997