

Students with Disability Review

Survey Summary Report: Members of the Community

September 2020

Background

The CESA Students with Disability Review commissioned an independent company, Square Holes, to conduct five surveys to gain the perspective of individuals about the inclusion, learning and wellbeing of students with disability.

The surveys invited input from the following groups:

- *parents/carers/guardians of students with disability*
- *members of the community*
- *principals of Catholic schools*
- *staff of Catholic schools: teachers, positions of responsibility, deputy principals and support staff*
- *staff in the Catholic Education Office.*

The first pages in the Report present a synopsis of the responses that community members provided in their survey. It has been prepared by Ms Gerry Gray, a Disability Specialist and Advocate from NSW, whom the Review engaged to assist its independent approach.

The synopsis has been organised around the key sections of the survey that were organised to reflect each of the Disability Standards for Education. The survey synopsis begins with the general questions about inclusion. Where appropriate particular comments are selected to illustrate a feature of the responses.

Individuals who completed this survey indicated that they were either (or both) a parent/carer/guardian of a student with disability and a member of a community group, such as Autism SA.

SYNOPSIS

Members of the Community Survey Summary Report

Culture of Inclusion

It is evident throughout the responses that this was a diverse group with views that ranged from support for full inclusion to support for less inclusive processes and programs.

The majority of respondents indicated that Catholic Education is supportive of inclusion for all students.

Schools in rural settings were noted as being particularly inclusive, even though other service options, including access to allied health, are limited to non-existent. Ensuring that every child with a disability has direct attention is needed to build positive and safe relationships that consider their individual needs.

Primary schools were reported as often being inclusive compared to secondary schools.

There was a general belief that inclusivity means catering for all students, including students with disability, students with English as an additional language/dialect, and non-heterosexual or transgender students. Students can have a need, due to their disability or mental health status, and be gifted in one or many areas. School staff, including leadership and teachers, should be aware that inclusion means a whole school process of support so all students can thrive.

The suggestions for improved inclusion indicated a large range of interest and diversity within the community groups including:

- The need to strategically decide what students can be accommodated and resource schools accordingly.
- Improve staffing ratios in mainstream classes.
- Access more occupational therapists and speech pathologists.
- Continue to support special education units and increase the number of education support officers within a mainstream Catholic school.
- Developing the practice of having a student with a disability do more with other students throughout the school day, including community sports programs and team building activities.

Enrolment and transition

The Disability Standards for Education require schools to

- *Take reasonable steps to ensure that the enrolment process is accessible.*
- *Consider students with disability in the same way as students without disability when deciding to offer a place.*
- *Consult with the prospective students or their associates about the effect of the disability on their ability to seek enrolment; and any reasonable adjustments necessary.*

Responses highlighted the different way school leaders manage the enrolment process, with a range of willingness and ability for schools to manage enrolment and transition. This may be due to a lack of knowledge about Disability Standards and can be perceived as a disinclination to enrol some students with disabilities.

Examples varied from the principal who ensured that he met every family to understand the needs of the child and to establish the right resources that enable a successful transition to examples of gatekeeping where it was suggested that a student could/should/might be better off elsewhere.

Suggestions for improvement include:

- Targeting school leaders and providing information about their legal obligations and best practice so that there is a more consistent approach across all CESA schools.
- Be honest about what you can and cannot offer to the family, in terms of resources.
- Don't give ambiguous information to parents about what the school can and will do for a child with disability. Be open and work with parents and children to show what support for the child will be actioned.

Learning and participation

The Disability Standards for Education require schools to

- *Take reasonable steps to ensure participation.*
- *Consult with the student or their associate about the effect of the disability on their ability to participate.*
- *Make a reasonable adjustment if necessary.*
- *Repeat this process over time as necessary.*
- *Enable students with disability to participate in learning experiences (including assessment and certification).*
- *Consult with the student or their associate.*
- *Take into consideration whether the disability affects the student's ability to participate in the learning experiences.*

Strengths

Catholic schools are seen to be inclusive of students with special needs but they need to ensure they have the necessary resources for that student so they can learn as well as everyone else in the class.

An inclusive school is seen as one with a positive attitude and willingness to be flexible. It requires an unconditional belief that students belong, a transparency in communication with families and a strong leadership that directs an inclusive culture. A culture that personalises the process and allows time to share stories with their peers to better understand why they may do something different in an activity. This allows parents to talk freely to discuss needs. To support this process, teachers should be trained in teaching students with disabilities.

Limitations

Levels of support for students with disabilities to achieve learning outcomes and to complete adapted assessments are often limited to an hour a day or less, with this time often shared between a number of students with disabilities in the same class. This low level of support impacts on the adaptations to assessments/ learning tasks that can be offered to students with disabilities that are not independent learners.

Once a student with disability requires less support, reduce the time the support staff needs to be solely with the one student. Better use of support staff would be to help other students with disabilities who may not require one-on-one support.

Learning and participation (continued)

Suggestions for improvement include:

- Some schools provide education support officers to assist students one on one in the classroom but this tends to be a stigma in adolescence. There are no disability teaching units that are taught in Catholic schools and perhaps this could be introduced within the focus on diversity.
- There should be an increase in special education units that focus on specific learning areas at a successful level for individual students, not just swept up in the mainstream environment and left behind.
- School leaders should not assume a high level of teacher skills in this area. It varies a great deal. Willingness and skills around how best to assist participation and learning in inclusive settings are not the same thing.
- Broader class-based discussions about how different people learn or may see/hear the world, such as videos that show the behaviours so children have better understanding of behaviours and can draw parallels rather than pointing out particular children.
- Ongoing professional development for all teachers R-12 and support staff in a range of ways including individual and school-based projects and on-line learning, sharing good practice in schools and school clusters that are doing it well, and allowing time for mentoring, particularly for new teachers.

Support services

The Disability Standards for Education require schools to

- *Ensure that students with disability are able to use general support services.*
- *Ensure that students have access to specialised support services.*
- *Facilitate the provision of specialised support services.*

Allied Health reports provide a depth of assessment and information which enhances our understanding of a child with disability needs and informs the level of adjustments needed for individual students. They can also be a great resource to support for collaboration with class teachers to reach common goals.

Teachers in Catholic schools are often unfamiliar with reports provided by allied health and how to best adjust the students' learning. Reports are often put into files and ignored. Sometimes the Inclusion teacher doesn't share it for a number of reasons including lack of time and opportunity. Sometimes reports are given to teachers who do not pass them on. Often teachers appear not to fully understand reports and the implications for learning.

Suggestions for improvement include:

- Invite specialist services to speak to staff where possible.
- Provide professional development to teaching staff around reports and how to read and understand them so that they have greater insight which is then reflected in how they assist student learning.
- Schools should consider having a disability panel made up of an inclusion co-ordinator and class teachers who evaluate reports and make decisions about the aspects of these reports that need liaison with allied health workers.

Harassment

The Disability Standards for Education require schools to

- *Implement strategies to prevent harassment or victimisation.*
- *Take reasonable steps to ensure that staff and students are informed about their obligation not to harass or victimise students with disability.*
- *Take appropriate action if harassment or victimisation occurs.*
- *Ensure complaint mechanisms are available to students.*

This section received a very positive response from contributors, noting that the Catholic traditions of inclusivity based on Gospel values and living these values is the system's biggest strength.

The belief was that most schools handle most harassment issues very well. It is a key area that is evident in classroom learning, with the parent group and the wider school community.

Suggestions for improvement include:

- A system wide learning program appropriate for different year levels and child friendly procedures for dealing with harassment.
- School counsellors in every school that can support the program by counselling individual students and meeting with parents to educate and support them.
- Stop letting small incidents slide. Stop dealing with individual incidents from the same student by accepting their apologies but then they repeat the harassment. Stop expecting students/parents to work out this complex issue by themselves.
- Direct addressing of matters regarding harassment with all parties involved. There are instances where instances of harassment are brushed off and are taken very lightly. There needs to be consequences for the bully.
- Teachers should be mindful of accepting some behaviours of students with a disability that would not be tolerated by students without disability.

School structures

In this section, community members were asked to state what they regard to be the strengths and limitations of the different school structures that provide education for students with disability: mainstream inclusion, units and special schools.

Again there was a variation in responses, underpinned by different philosophical bases.

There was a call from some to provide a range of settings including special schools, units and mainstream options allowing a suitable fit for the individual.

Respondent observations about advantages and limitations of mainstream provision

A strength of Mainstream inclusion is that students that require differentiated teaching practice, or supplementary and sometimes substantial adjustments see themselves socially as being part of the mainstream and are often in the same setting as their siblings. They experience genuine friendship and acceptance from their peers and experience success and progress with their learning via differentiation and adjustments to learning. Their peers gain insight and empathy.

Limitations include the fact that students with complex needs do not cope with being in a classroom all day, but this is often what happens due to levels of support allocated to class teachers. There also needs to be flexibility of support for those students who experience meltdowns when they are overloaded by being in a busy, sometimes noisy classroom environment. Their experience of school may be marked with feelings of sadness, anxiety, loneliness, anger and frustration.

Respondent observations about advantages and limitations of special units, and a combination of special units and mainstream settings

Strengths of special units are that they provide engaging appropriate programs in a caring, respectful and safe manner by qualified and experienced teachers. They make friends with others in the unit. Transition to secondary/post school employment and interest based community options are well planned and involve the student, family and outside personnel.

Limitations of a special unit are that it results in labelling of students with disabilities and reduces the interactions between students with disability and other students. Even though it is the best learning structure for both (students with disability and other students), it does not promote connectedness and understanding.

School structures (continued)

Respondent observations about advantages and limitations of special units, and a combination of special units and mainstream settings

Strengths for students requiring substantial or extensive adjustments are that they are able to access core curricula with considerable specialised adult assistance in a small group setting and experience success and progress in their learning. At the same time these students are well accepted by their peers who have an understanding of disability, and have a sense of belonging to the school. They have the best of both worlds: specialised learning support and peer based inclusion.

Limitations include the issue of unit and general education staff who do not have the time and opportunity to liaise on a regular basis resulting in a lack of understanding and cohesion which compromises the students' learning and progress. Unless their peers have an understanding of disability and how to include them, the students from the special unit may experience harassment, lack of acceptance and loneliness.

Respondent observations about advantages and limitations of a special school

Families feel that they are unconditionally accepted and feel safe. They are surrounded by a community that they typically feel understands them

Strengths: a high ratio of specialised staff meets the needs of students so that they learn and develop on a highly individualised basis.

Limitations: Special schools are viewed generally segregated organisations. Furthermore, children with disabilities are sometimes not 'stretched' to meet their educational potential. They are without the level of positive social role modelling that they would be receiving in mainstream schools.

Final Comments

Catholic Education has ongoing challenges in promoting inclusion. Most try, and some are doing a great job.

A strategy which promotes inclusion for all regardless of context and need does not suit the needs of all students. Specialised settings are sometimes the best option for some students and Catholic Education needs to bear this in mind.

Parents' wishes are fundamental. They know their children best and in the end they have the right to decide.

When considering the needs of students with disabilities it is also necessary to include the students in every classroom who have not been diagnosed with a disability, but who have learning needs that require learning to be adjusted.

Students who have difficulty learning to read, write, spell, listen and speak, calculate number problems, solve social problems, getting along with others as well as students with anxiety and emotional needs are present in every classroom and require support to thrive.

Finally, there is a call for Catholic schools to increase resources to make sure all students receive attention from their teacher as much as students with disability.

Ms Gerry Gray

Disability Education and Advocacy Consultant

September 2020

Students with Disability Review

Members of the Community Report

CESA

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26 June to 6 August

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Methodology & Approach

Square Holes hosted an online survey on behalf of Catholic Education South Australia for the 2020 Students with Disability Review.

This report provides the results of the Community Members survey with comparisons by:

- An individual (39%)
- A parent, carer or guardian of a student in a Catholic school (44%)
- A parent, carer or guardian of a student in a school from another school sector (3%)
- A member of a group or organisation (21%)

Number of survey responses: 100

This project was carried out in compliance with ISO 20252

Detailed Findings

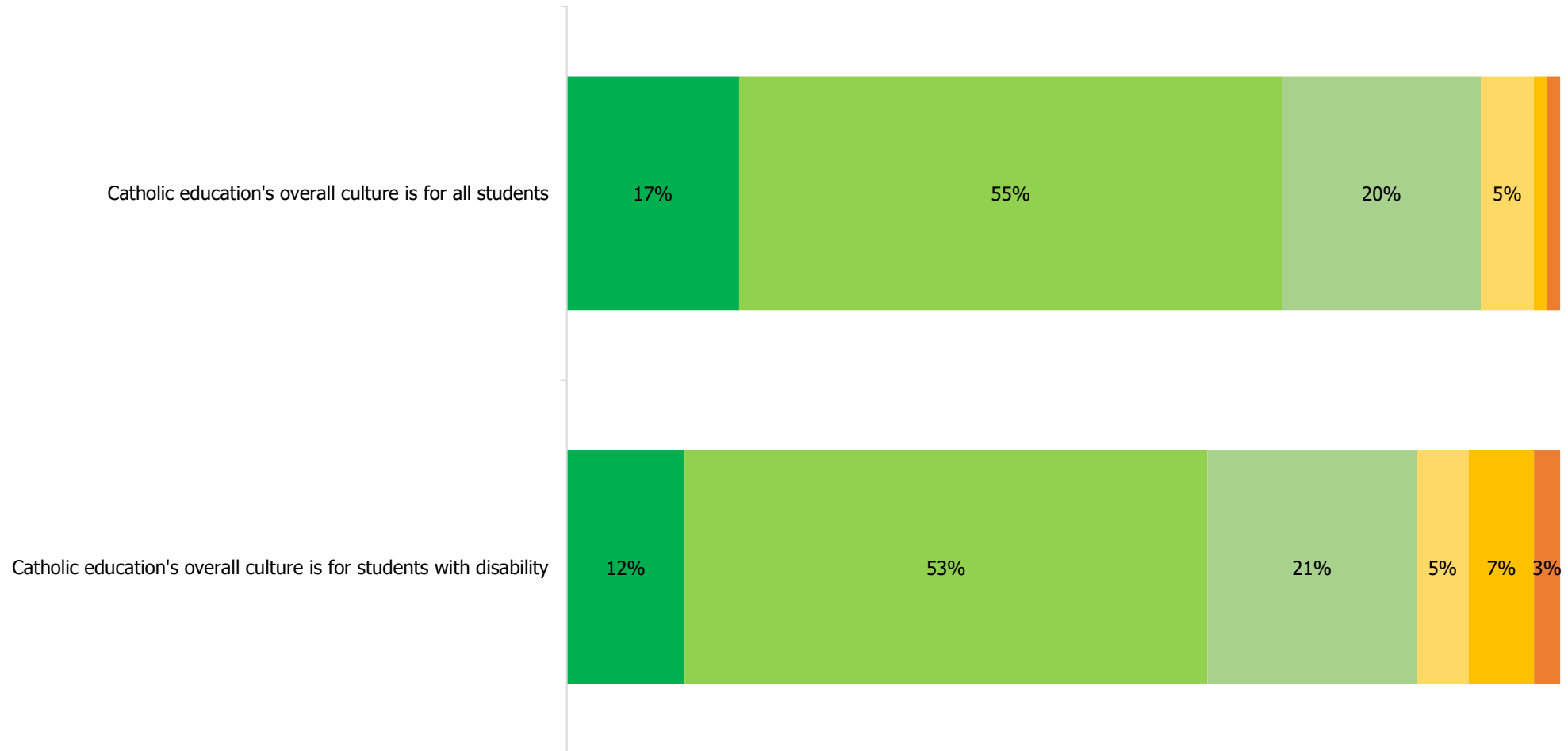
Community

Inclusion

How inclusive do you consider...

[N/A responses removed]

■ 6 Extremely inclusive
 ■ 5 Very inclusive
 ■ 4 Somewhat inclusive
 ■ 3 Somewhat not inclusive
 ■ 2 Not very inclusive
 ■ 1 Not at all inclusive



Comments about Inclusion

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statement:

Please indicate any suggestions you have about how Catholic education could be more inclusive

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

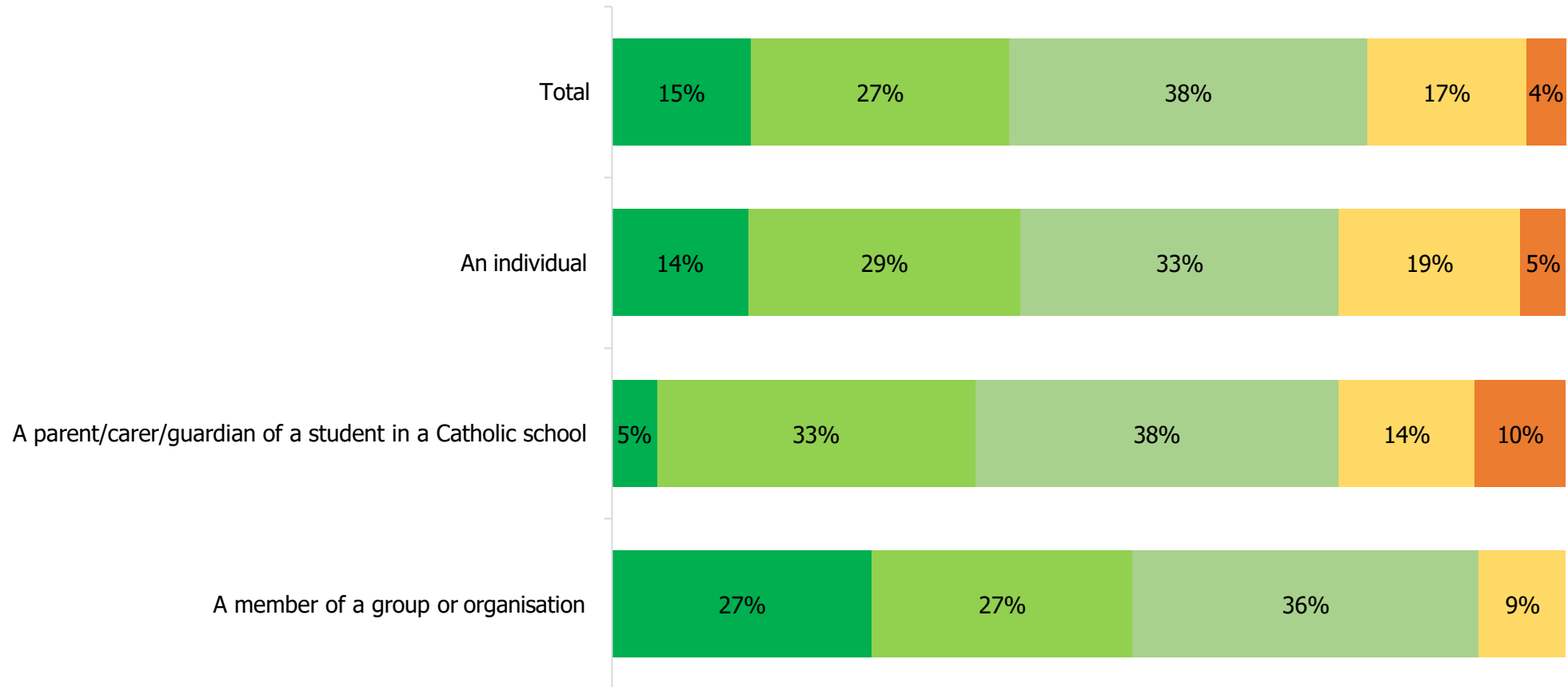
- Specialised and appropriately qualified support for students with disability
- Further promotion of interaction between students with a disability and others
- Maintaining special education units within mainstream Catholic schools

Enrolment and transition

How well does the enrolment process of Catholic schools address the needs of students with disability?

[N/A responses removed]

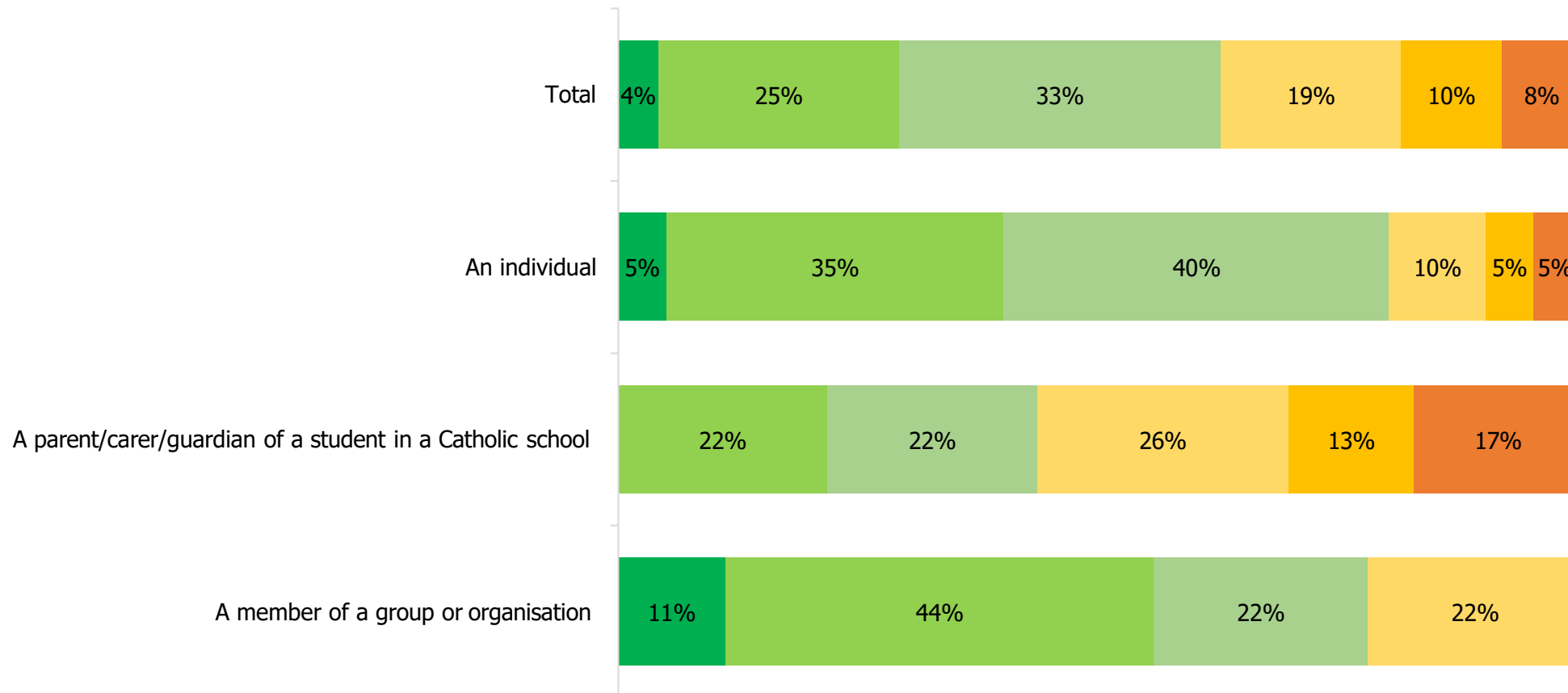
6 Extremely well 5 Very well 4 Somewhat well 3 Somewhat poor 2 Very poor 1 Extremely poor



How clearly does information provided by Catholic schools explain the choice of courses or programs for students with disability?

[N/A responses removed]

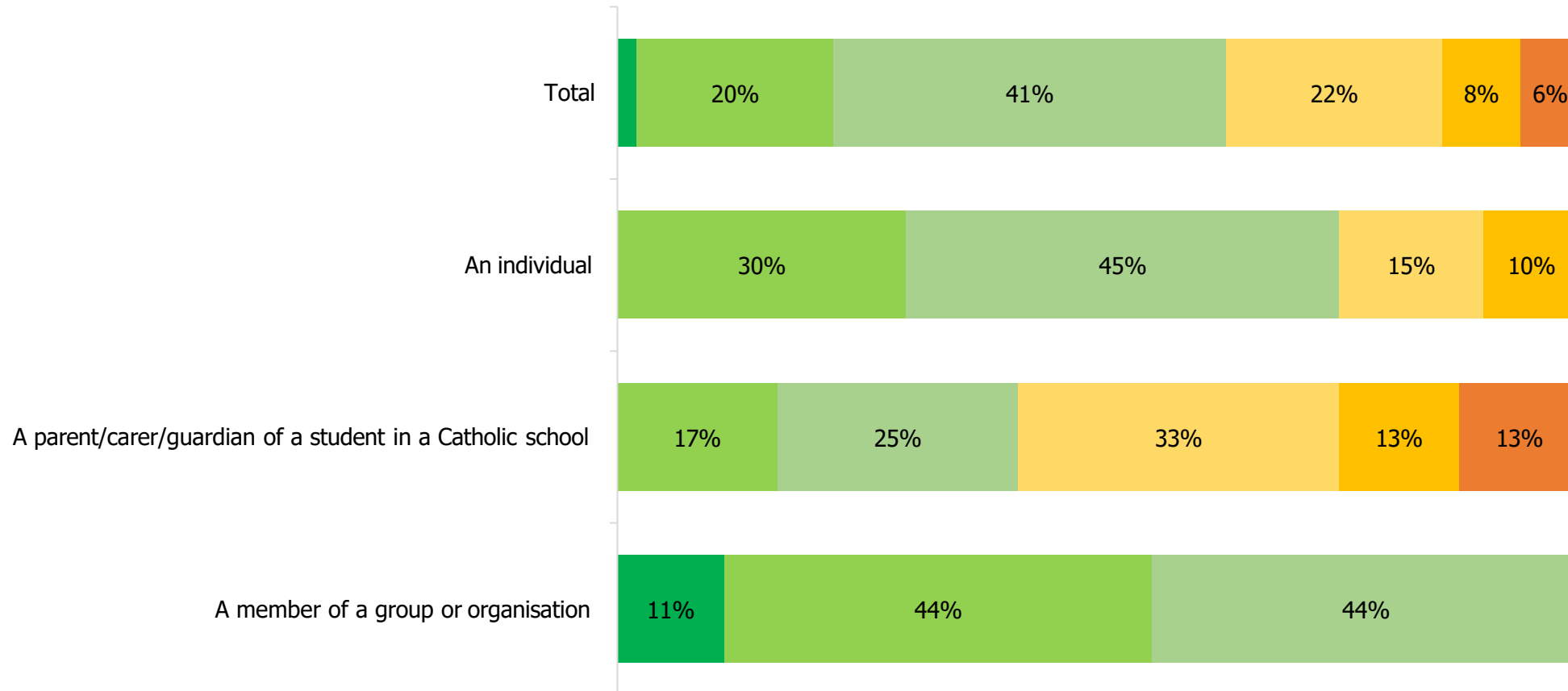
6 Extremely clear 5 Very clear 4 Somewhat clear 3 Somewhat unclear 2 Very unclear 1 Not at all clear



How clearly does information provided by Catholic schools explain about the settings in which students with disability can learn?

[N/A responses removed]

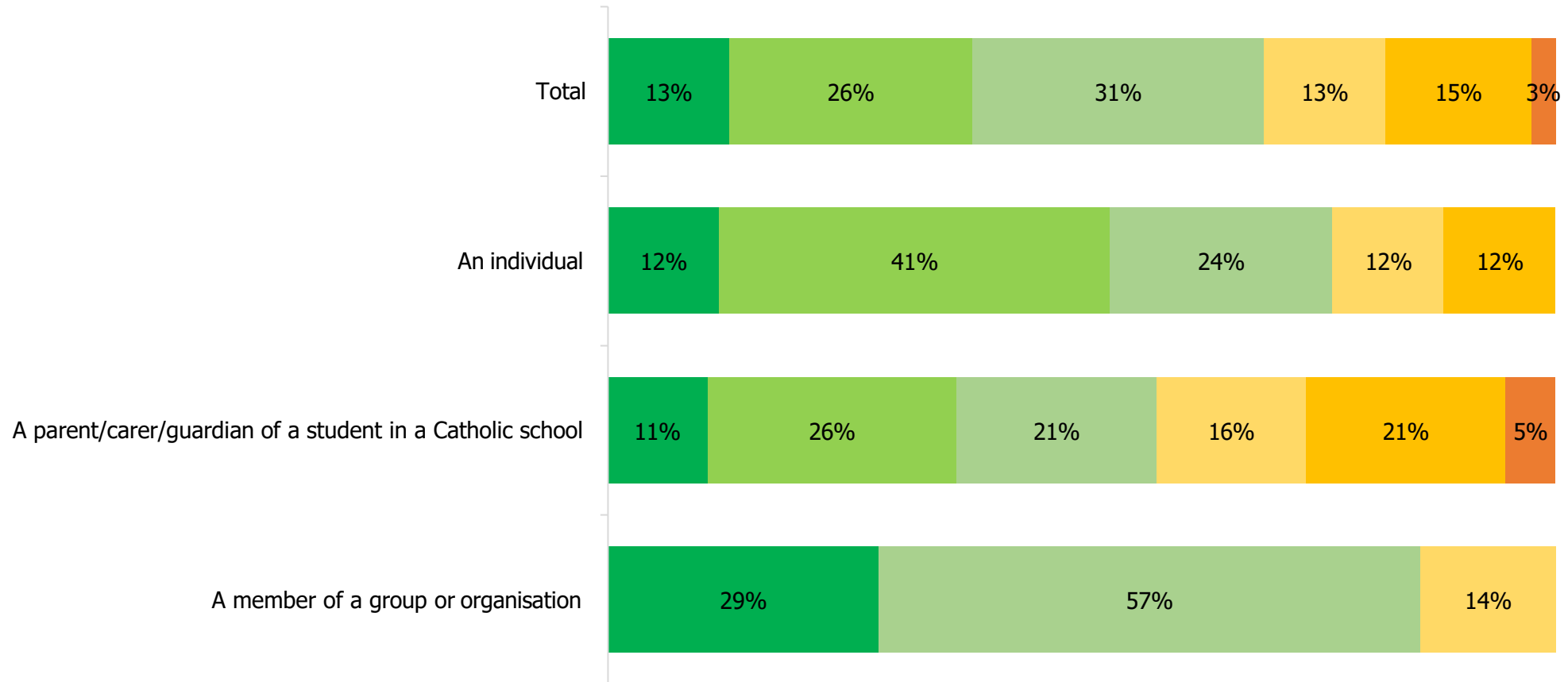
6 Extremely clear 5 Very clear 4 Somewhat clear 3 Somewhat unclear 2 Very unclear 1 Not at all clear



To what extent do parents/carers/guardians of students with disability find difficulties when enrolling in Catholic school?

[N/A responses removed]

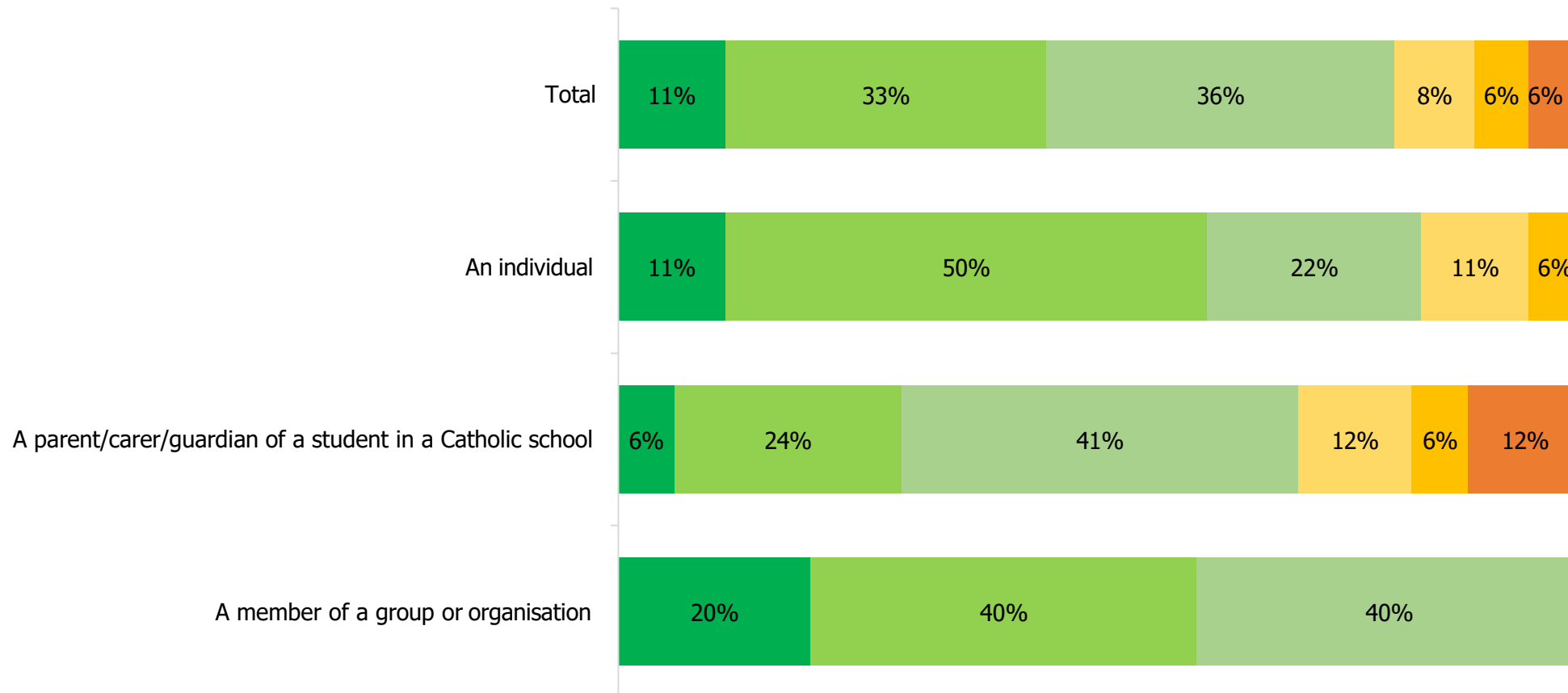
6 No difficulty at all 5 4 3 2 1 Extreme difficulty



When children with disability first enrol in Reception, how effective is the transition process from their early years setting?

[N/A responses removed]

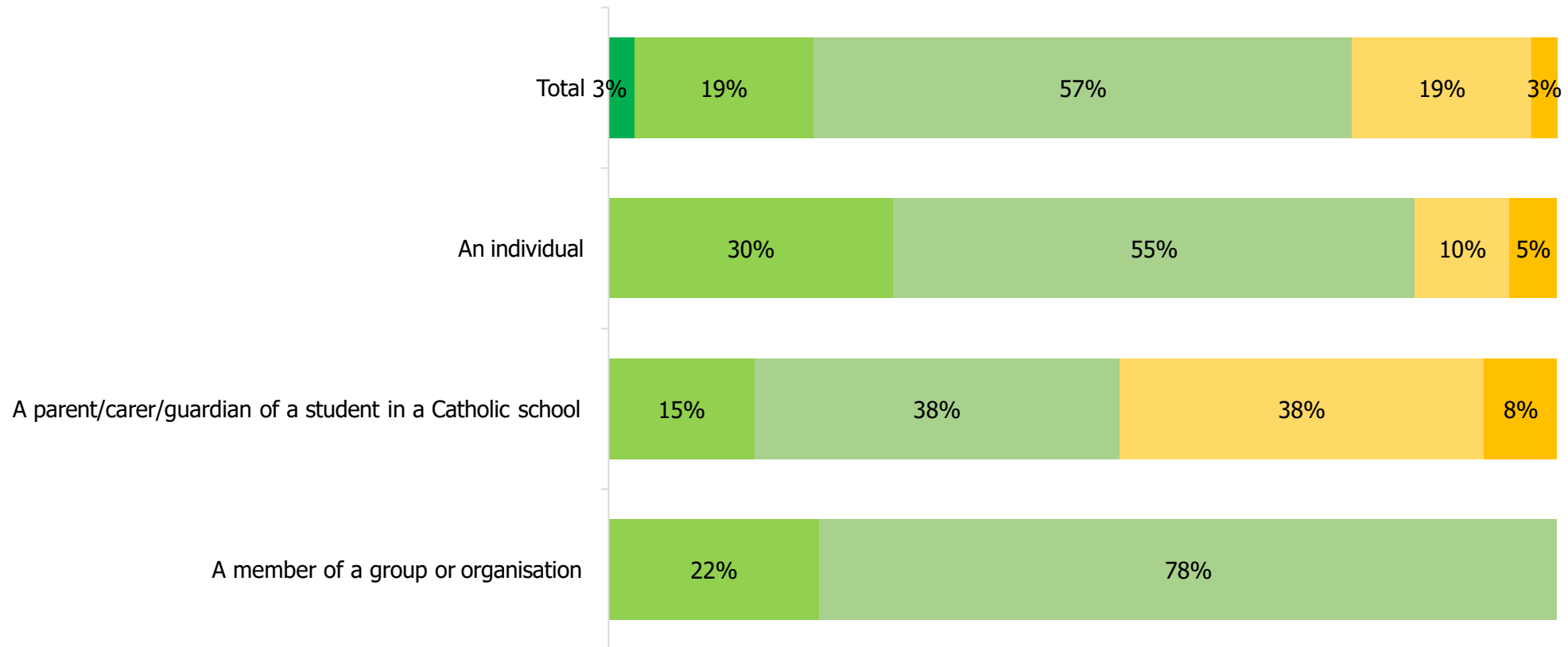
■ 6 Extremely effective ■ 5 Very effective ■ 4 Somewhat effective ■ 3 Somewhat ineffective ■ 2 Very ineffective ■ 1 Extremely ineffective



Following the initial school enrolment of students with disability, how effective is the transition process into their future pathways (e.g. from primary to secondary, or secondary into post school options)?

[N/A responses removed]

■ 6 Extremely effective ■ 5 Very effective ■ 4 Somewhat effective ■ 3 Somewhat ineffective ■ 2 Very ineffective ■ 1 Extremely ineffective



Comments about Enrolment and Transition

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statement:

Please indicate what you think are the strengths of the enrolment and transition processes in Catholic schools for students with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Dependent on the school
- Acceptance and support of disabilities
- Accommodation and openness for discussions and time given to families

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statement:

Please indicate what you think the enrolment and transition processes in Catholic schools for students with disability should do less of or stop doing

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Misleading or overpromising information about what the school can do for the family and student with disability
- Enrolling students with a disability into a mainstream setting without the appropriate resources to cater for their needs
- Making some enrolments difficult

Comments about Enrolment and Transition

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statement:

Please indicate how the enrolment and transition processes in Catholic schools for students with disability can best improve

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

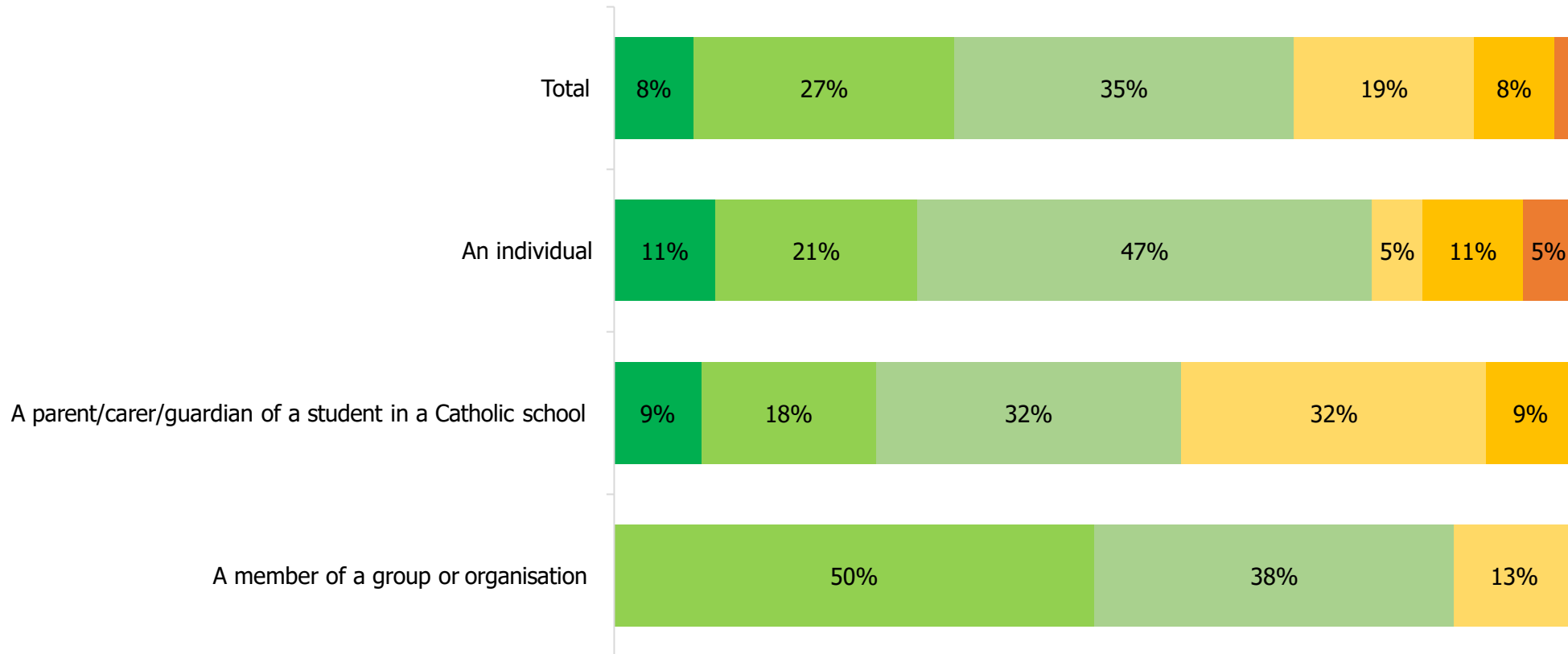
- Earlier detection of needs and subsequent individualised approach to learning
- Honest and realistic information provided
- Clearly outlined inclusivity pathways
- Increased support in place for students with disabilities

Student participation and learning

From your knowledge and experience, to what extent are the programs and learning activities of teachers in Catholic schools flexible enough for students with disability to be able to participate?

[N/A responses removed]

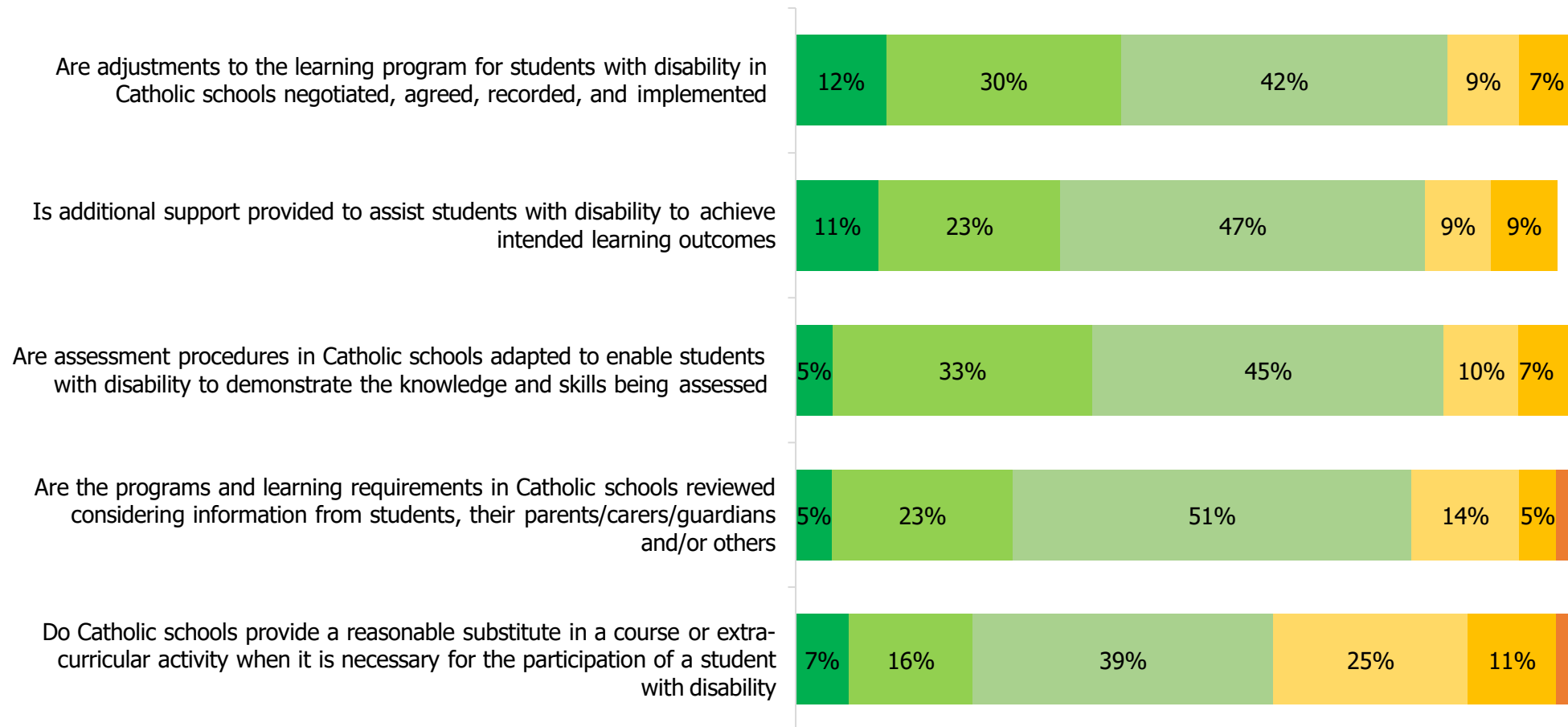
■ 6 Extremely flexible ■ 5 Very flexible ■ 4 Somewhat flexible ■ 3 Somewhat inflexible ■ 2 Very inflexible ■ 1 Not at all flexible



From your knowledge and experience, to what extent...

[N/A responses removed]

■ 6 Extremely high extent ■ 5 High extent ■ 4 Some extent ■ 3 Low extent ■ 2 Very low extent ■ 1 No extent at all



Comments about Participation and Learning

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate the strengths of how Catholic schools assists the participation and learning of students with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Dedication and willingness of teachers and staff to engage with students with disability
- Flexible learning environment
- ESO support and learning programs

Please indicate what you think Catholic schools should do less of or stop doing to assist the participation and learning of students with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Greater inclusion for students with a disability
- Expecting too much of teachers
- Fitting all students with a disability under one category

Please indicate how Catholic schools can best improve the participation and learning of students with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

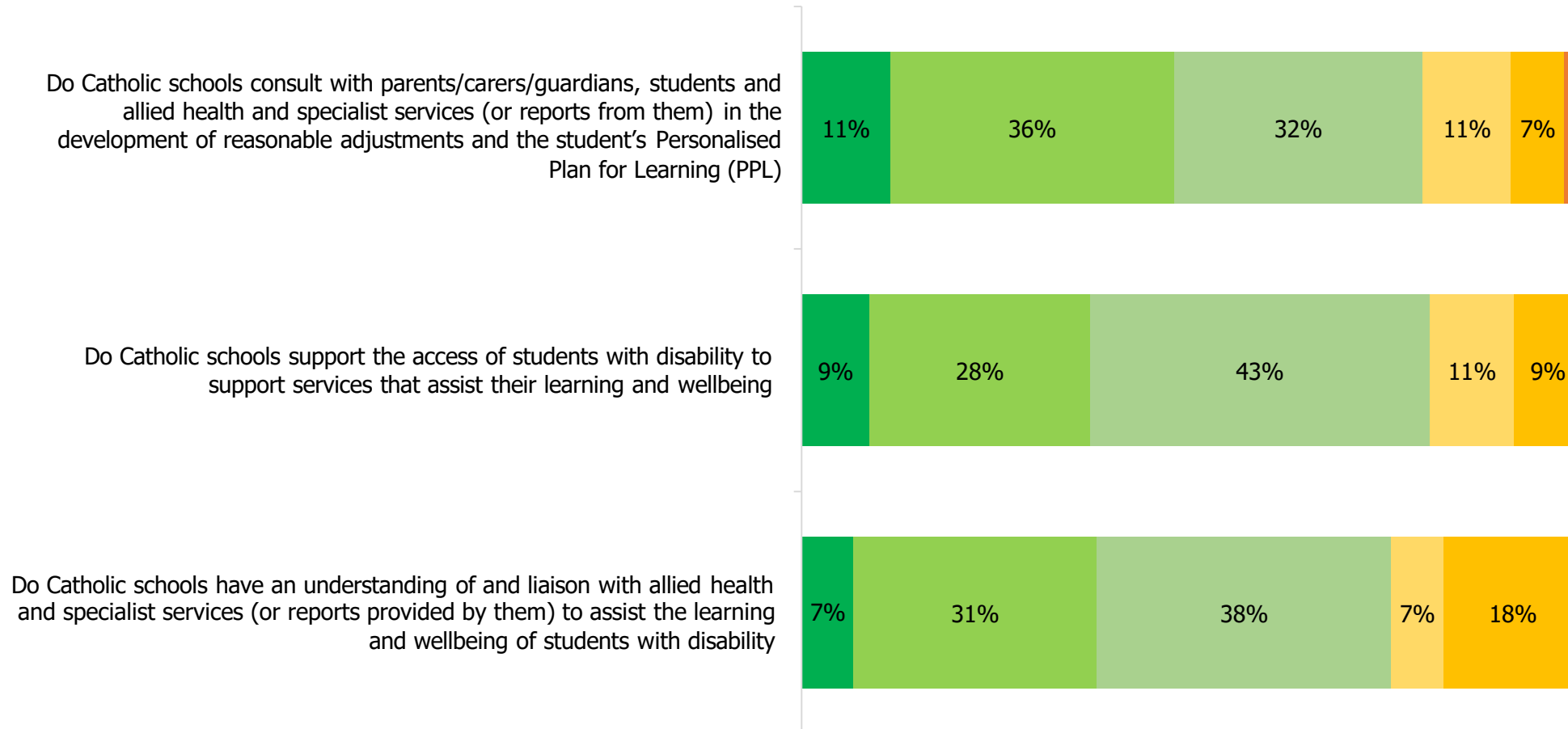
- Improving level of support given to both teachers and students and quality of training
- Disability education for students to promote acceptance and inclusion
- Specific learning for students with a disability and smaller class sizes

Support services

From your knowledge and experience, to what extent...

[N/A responses removed]

■ 6 Extremely high extent ■ 5 High extent ■ 4 Some extent ■ 3 Low extent ■ 2 Very low extent ■ 1 No extent at all



Comments about Support services

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate the strengths of Catholic schools' liaisons with and/ or use of the reports provided by allied health and specialist services in providing reasonable learning and care adjustments

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphasis in the comments:

- Eagerness to seek information to best cater to student needs

Please indicate what you think Catholic schools should do less of or stop doing in liaison with and/ or using reports from allied health and specialist services in assisting your child's learning and wellbeing

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Teachers being uninformed or kept out of the communication process
- Somewhat poor understanding of reports and not implementing recommendations appropriately

Please indicate how the Catholic schools can best improve the use of information from allied health and specialist services in assisting your child's learning and wellbeing:

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

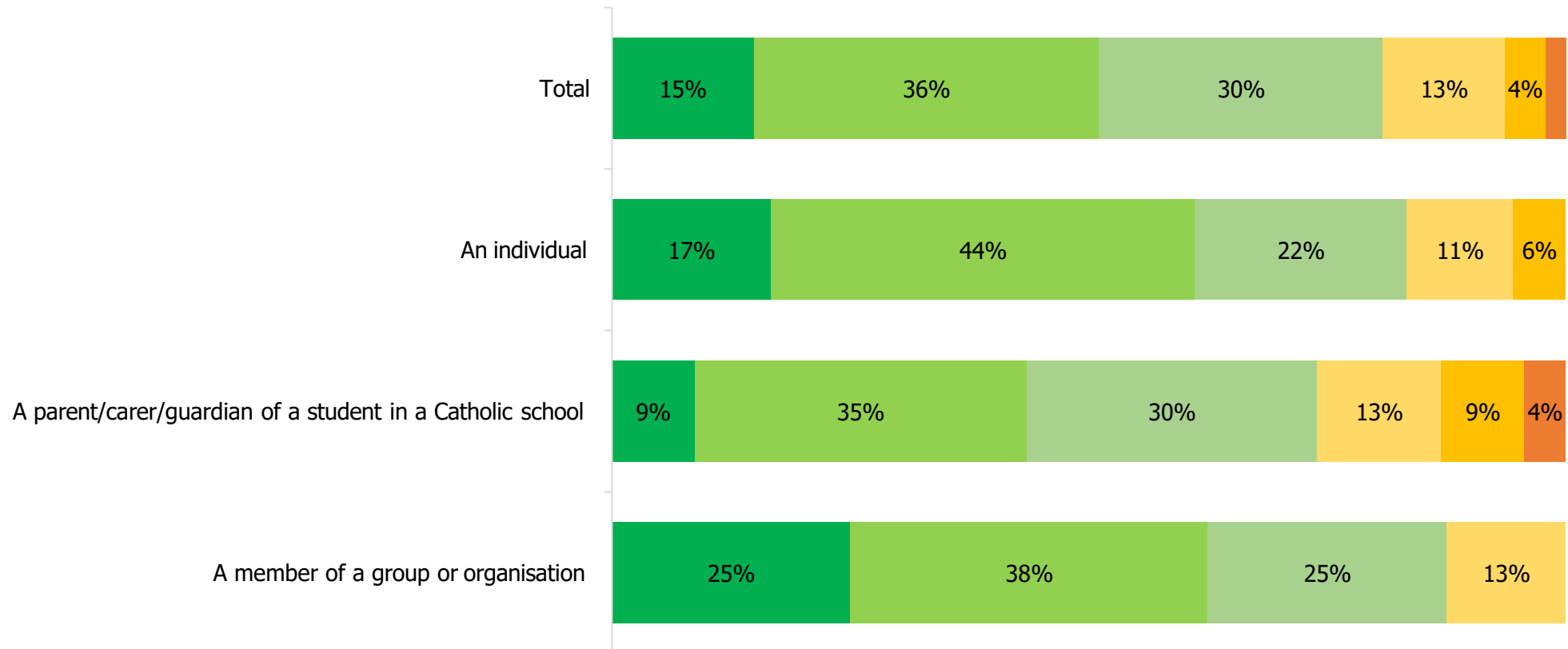
- More effective sharing of information (through school hierarchy) to ensure the best implementation of recommendations
- Utilisation of specialist services to provide the best learning environment possible
- Be active with information

Eliminating harassment

From your knowledge and experience, to what extent do you consider the strategies and programs of Catholic schools effective in preventing harassment of students with disability?

[N/A responses removed]

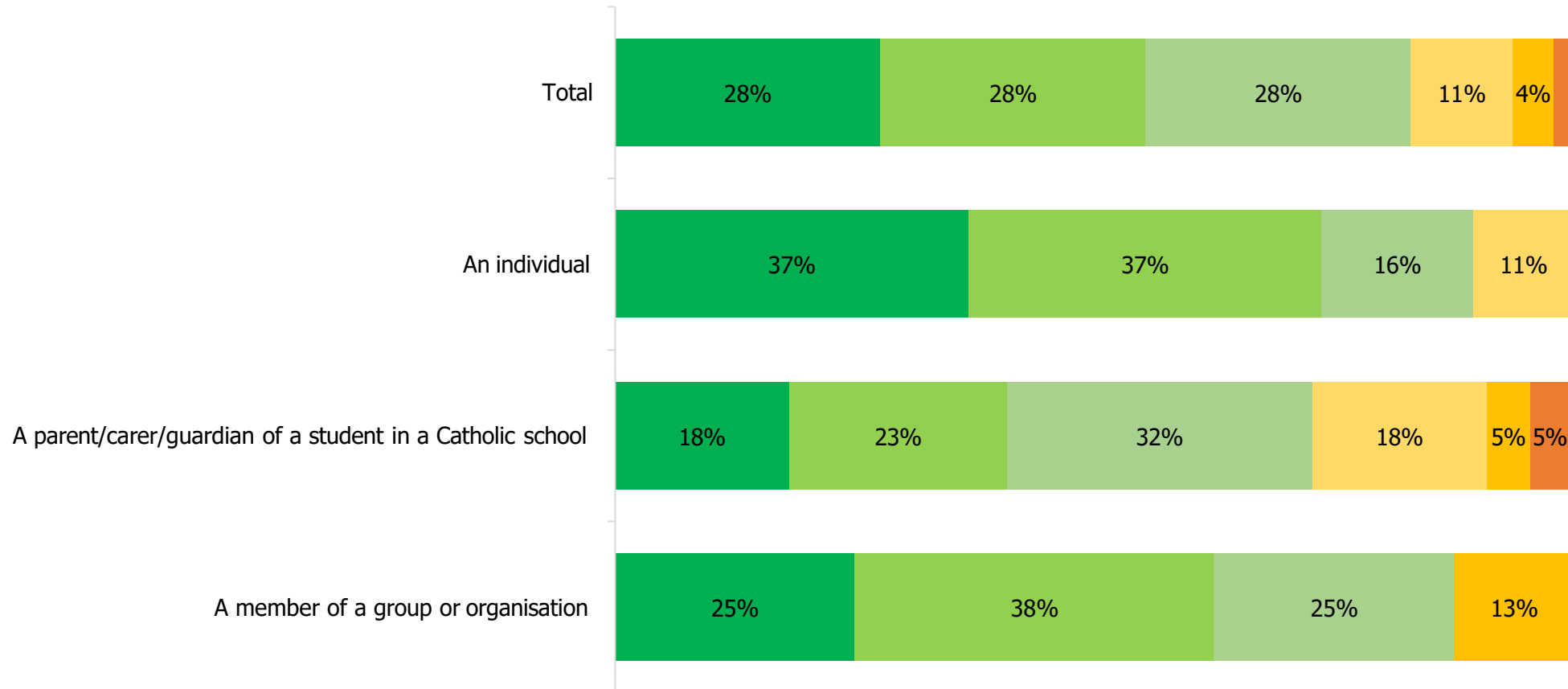
■ 6 Extremely effective ■ 5 Very effective ■ 4 Somewhat effective ■ 3 Somewhat ineffective ■ 2 Very ineffective ■ 1 Extremely ineffective



How satisfied are you with how Catholic schools make it clear that all students have the obligation to ensure students with disability are free of harassment?

[N/A responses removed]

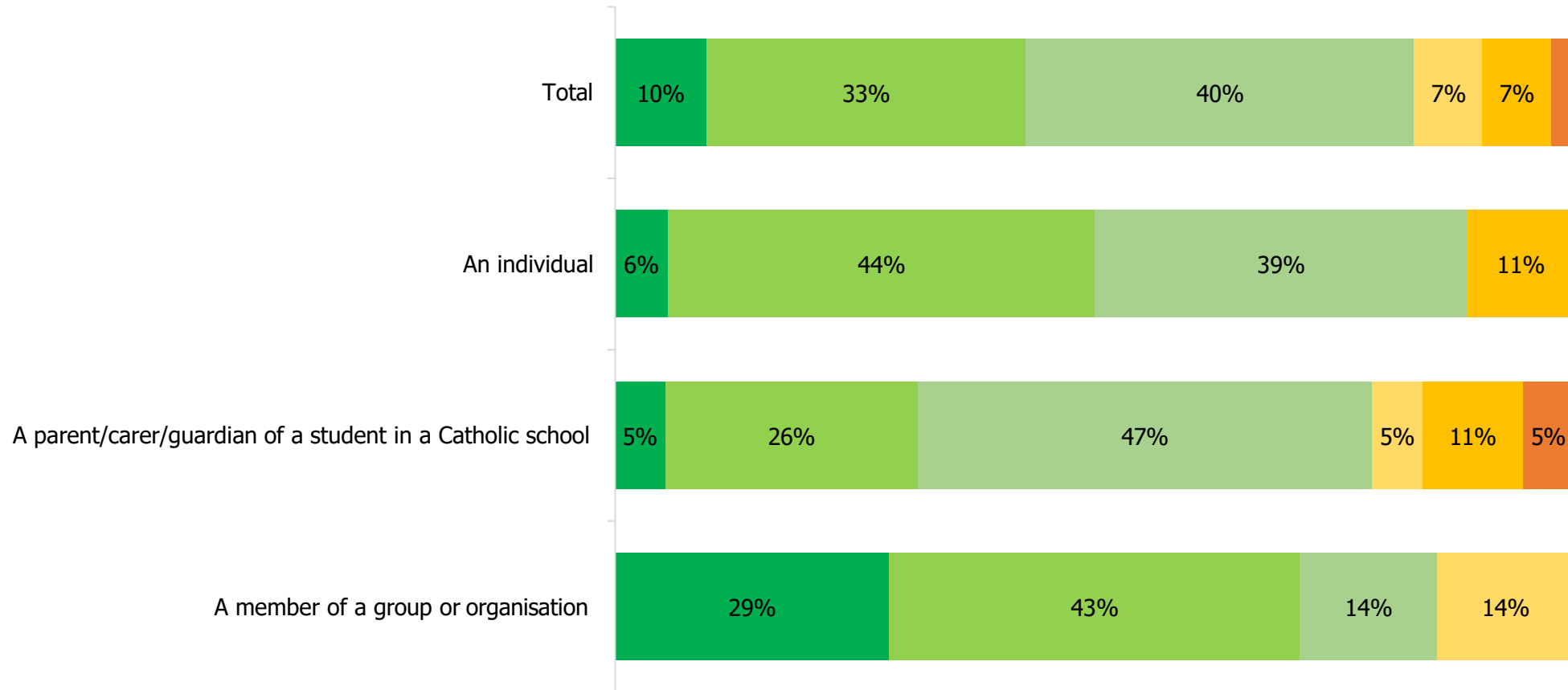
■ 6 Extremely satisfied ■ 5 Very satisfied ■ 4 Somewhat satisfied ■ 3 Somewhat dissatisfied ■ 2 Very dissatisfied ■ 1 Extremely dissatisfied



To what extent are the complaint mechanisms of Catholic schools effective for a student who is harassed?

[N/A responses removed]

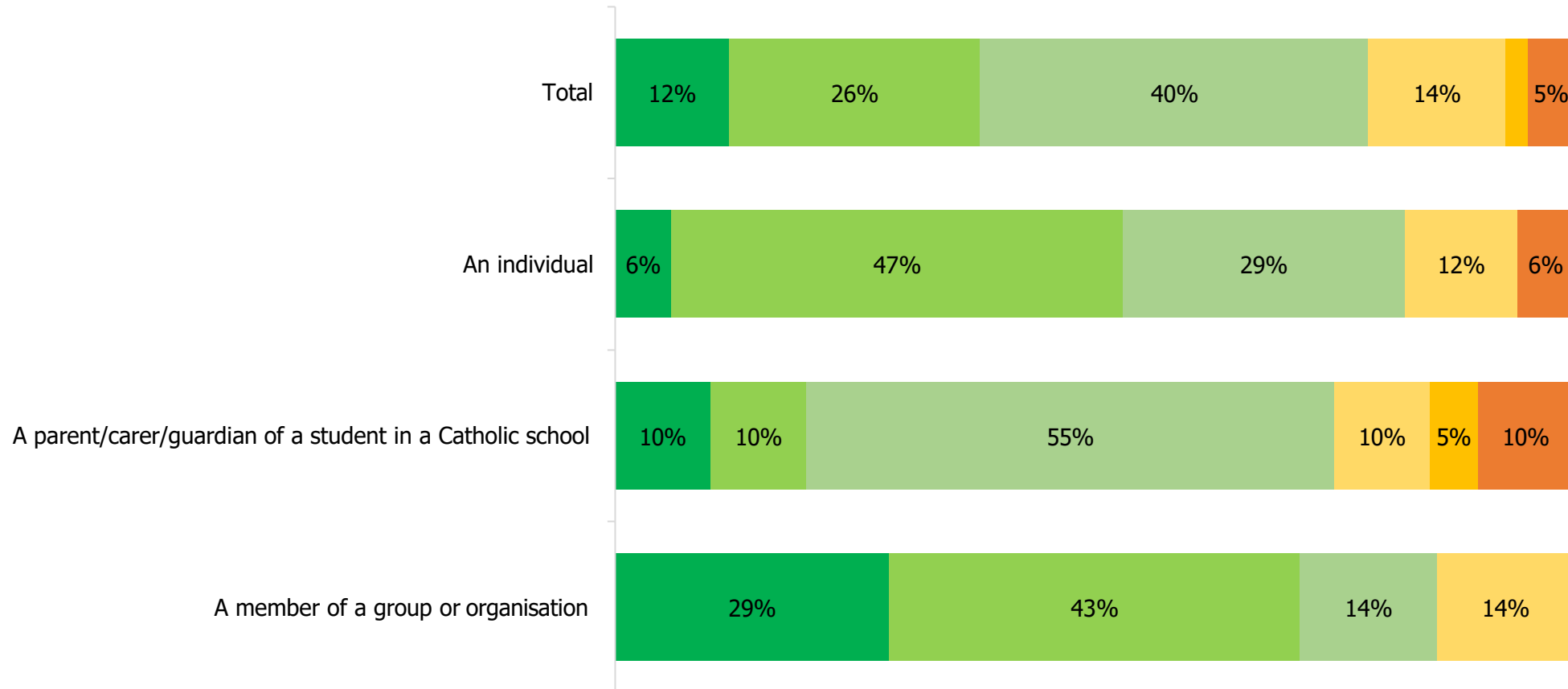
■ 6 Extremely effective ■ 5 Very effective ■ 4 Somewhat effective ■ 3 Somewhat ineffective ■ 2 Very ineffective ■ 1 Extremely ineffective



To what extent are the actions of Catholic schools effective in resolving instances of harassment?

[N/A responses removed]

■ 6 Extremely effective ■ 5 Very effective ■ 4 Somewhat effective ■ 3 Somewhat ineffective ■ 2 Very ineffective ■ 1 Extremely ineffective



Comments about Harassment

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate what you think the strengths of the culture and the strategies of Catholic schools for dealing with the harassment of students, including those with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Inclusivity and acceptance
- Communication

Please indicate what you think Catholic schools should do less of or stop doing in its culture and strategies for dealing with the harassment of students, including those with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphasis in the comments:

- Poor reaction and handling of harassment issues

Please indicate how Catholic schools can best improve its culture and strategies for dealing with the harassment of students, including those with disability

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

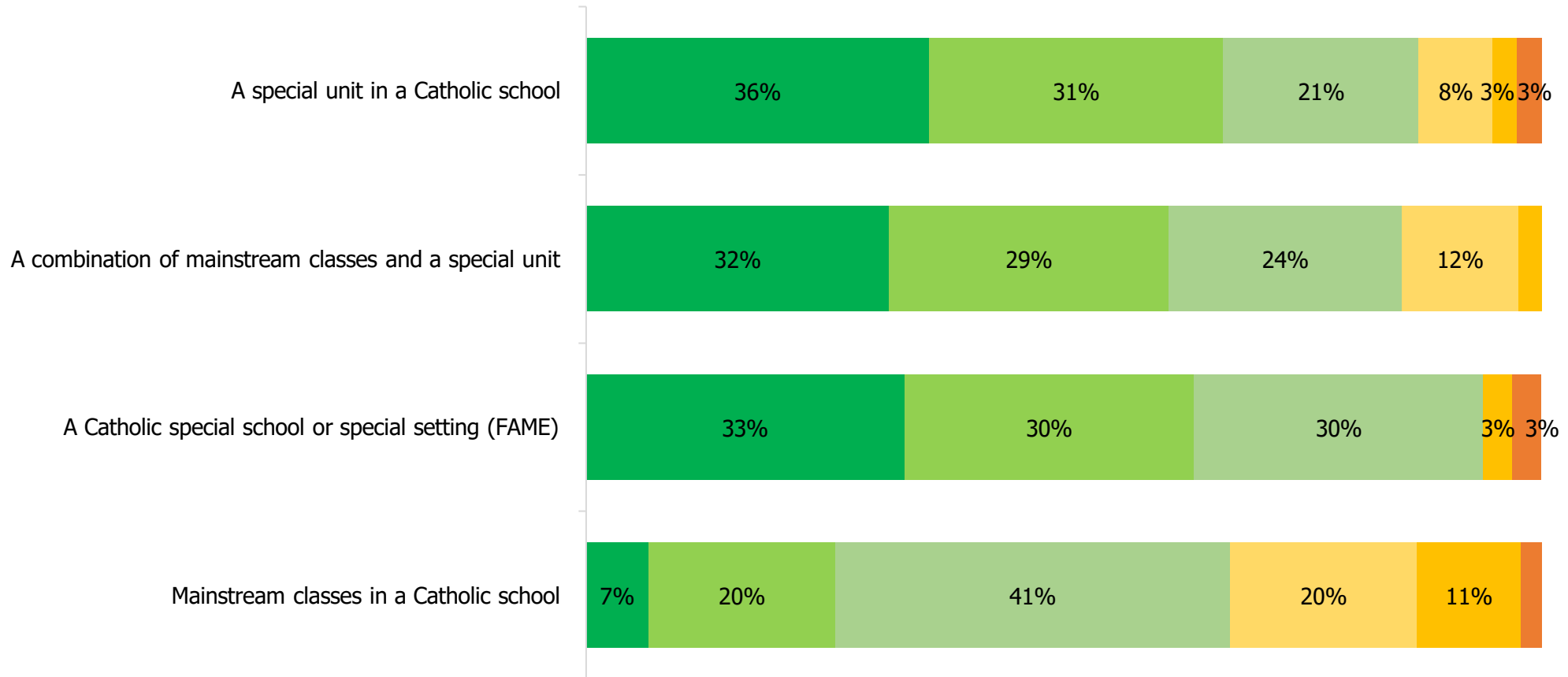
- Actionable consequences for bullying and harassment
- Education and learning programs
- Ownership of staff and teachers to deal with harassment issues

School structures

To what extent do you consider these structures (below) as effective in providing inclusion, learning and wellbeing of students with disability?

[Don't know responses removed]

■ 6 Extremely effective
 ■ 5 Very effective
 ■ 4 Somewhat effective
 ■ 3 Somewhat ineffective
 ■ 2 Very ineffective
 ■ 1 Not at all effective



Comments about mainstream provision

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate the strengths of mainstream classes in a Catholic school

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Students with disability feel a sense of connection to their community and fulfilment
- Valuable life experience/ knowledge, normalisation and acceptance of those with a disability

Please indicate the limitations of mainstream classes in a Catholic school

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Dependent on the disability, teachers may be unable to cater to their specific needs given available resources, support and capacity
- Students with a disability may feel excluded (whether perceived or actualised) and experience harassment

Comments about special units

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate the strengths of a special unit in a Catholic school

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Specialised learning and support catered to the specific needs of students with disabilities
- Smaller classes
- Inclusion without disrupting other students' right to learn

Please indicate the limitations of a special unit in a Catholic school

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Limited interactions and opportunity for relationship growth with other students
- Potential for marginalisation and exclusion
- Funding necessary to provide a specialised unit

Comments about a combination of mainstream classes and a special unit

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate the strengths of a combination of mainstream classes and a special unit in a Catholic school

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Exposure to mainstream schooling and other students, whilst still experiencing dedicated and specialised learning
- Inclusion
- Teaching of acceptance and normalisation of disabilities

Please indicate the limitations of a combination of mainstream classes and a special unit in a Catholic school

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Lack of time, confidence and opportunity of teachers to best engage with students with a disability
- Potential disruptions to their learning

Comments about special schools and special settings

Respondents were invited to provide comments in response to the following statements:

Please indicate the strengths of a special school or a special setting

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- High number of specialised/qualified staff
- Caring and engaging environment
- Best resources, understanding and professionals to meet specific needs

Please indicate the limitations of a special school or a special setting

A range of comments were provided. The Square Holes analysis identified the following main emphases in the comments:

- Does not foster an environment of connection and interaction with other students
- No social modelling present from other students

Square Holes

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