WISE UP TO WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS

YOUNGMiNDS

ncb
National Children's Bureau

Wise Up

Prioritising wellbeing in schools

Forewords

Alexia Adrianopoulos
Philanthropist supporter of Wise Up

“Growing up today seems to be harder than ever. Children and young people face a host of novel stressors that I cannot even purport to understand. In a confusing, addictive, 24-hour online world, young people need new tools and more support.

An estimated three children in every classroom suffer from a diagnosable mental health problem; I was one of them. Behind those numbers is a general trend to increased levels stress and lower levels of wellbeing.

I believe that schools are much more than centres of learning. They can and do provide the most reliable conduit to address this worrying trend, and only they can set us back on track. However, for schools to succeed in helping their students, our priorities as a nation must be realigned, and the education system must rebalance academic learning and emotional wellbeing. This is what our children and young people want, it is what our teachers and school leaders want and it is what our parents want. More to the point, it is what our children and young people deserve.

They deserve an excellent education that prepares them academically and emotionally for the challenges they will face inside the classroom, and for the world they will enter when they graduate.

There is already exceptional work being done, but these efforts remain isolated and undervalued. It should be the opposite. Such work should be at the crux of our educational system and recognised at the highest level. I believe that each child deserves a dedicated place to learn to care for their own mental health, and it is our duty as a society to provide this. With schools at the helm, we can create a generation of resilient, healthy and confident individuals. I hope the Wise Up campaign can take us a step in that direction.”

Sarah Brennan
Chief Executive, YoungMinds

“The national focus on children and young people’s mental health in recent years has been long overdue and welcome. The new funds government have invested in this area have generated a wealth of activity and momentum to transform our children and young people’s mental health services – with some success.

But no matter how much our ‘treatment’ services improve they will never reach many thousands of children and young people who are unnecessarily ill and in need of mental health services. What’s more, we are making matters worse with the reported experience of school stress and anxiety.

Students need education to include how to understand and look after their mental health – just like we learn how to look after our physical health. By shifting the focus to preventing mental health problems and building resilience we can do so much to improve the lives of so many. Good wellbeing on leaving school has a much greater impact on life outcomes than exam success.

With Wise Up we are building a movement for change to recognise that wellbeing has to be a priority for schools, and the education system needs rebalancing. Please join us, and together we can take positive steps towards building a better future for our children.”

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Definitions

For the purposes of this report, we have used the following terms in relation to these definitions.

Wellbeing

There are many ways to define wellbeing, and that is a discussion in itself. For this report, we define 'wellbeing' as referenced in the widely-accepted World Health Organisation definition of mental health:

"Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."

Schools

Under this term, we are referring to all schools and colleges, including: primary schools, secondary schools, maintained schools, free schools, academies, faith schools, further education and colleges.

Acknowledgements

Written by **Amber Cowburn** and **Matt Blow**.

Editing and contributions from **Debbie Moss**, **Marc Bush**, **Robyn Ellison**, **Tom Madders** and **Sarah Brennan**.

Executive summary

There is a growing mental health crisis in our schools. An estimated three children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental health problem, rising to one in four when we include emotional distress.

An escalating crisis

Evidence shows that across the UK, mental health issues in children are increasing while child wellbeing is deteriorating. Young people today have to navigate a complex and ever-changing world, facing challenges and pressures in numerous aspects of their life. **In fact, 90% of school leaders have reported an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety or stress over the last five years.**

Concurrently, referrals to specialist mental health services nearly doubled between 2010-11 and 2014-15. As a result, NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are overwhelmed. Currently, **just one in four children with a diagnosable mental health problem gets access to the treatment and care that they need**. Despite improvements since *Future in Mind*, waiting times remain too long, and high thresholds for access to care are causing an unnecessary escalation of need.

To reduce the burden on the NHS, there needs to be a greater focus on prevention through early identification and intervention.

90%

of school leaders have reported an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety or stress over the last five years

The role of schools

Over the course of their education, **children spend over 7,800 hours at school**. With such a huge amount of time spent in the classroom, schools provide an ideal environment for promoting good emotional wellbeing and identifying early behaviour changes and signs of mental distress. The social and emotional skills, knowledge and behaviours that young people learn in the classroom can help them to build resilience and set the pattern for how they will manage their mental health throughout their lives.

Emotional wellbeing is a clear indicator of academic achievement, success and satisfaction in later life. Evidence shows that mental health and wellbeing programmes in schools, can lead to significant improvements in children's mental health, and social and emotional skills. Wellbeing provision in schools can also lead to reductions in classroom misbehaviour and bullying.

However, despite the known benefits of good wellbeing provision, at present the education system is unbalanced. There is too much emphasis on academic attainment and not enough focus on promoting the wellbeing of students.

The prominence given to exams and academic attainment within the education system is having a negative impact, with **80% of young people saying that exam pressure has significantly impacted on their mental health**.

Over the course of their education, children spend over **7,800 hours at school**

Schools are often struggling to prioritise wellbeing

Funding constraints, coupled with the lack of prominence given to wellbeing in legislation and the Ofsted inspection framework, mean that schools that are already having to make tough decisions about which services to cut are not incentivised to direct resource towards wellbeing provision.

Teachers are also feeling the pressure to meet pupil attainment targets and have reported feeling increasingly stressed, suffering from low levels of morale as a result. Teachers say they want to be able to promote the emotional wellbeing of their students but lack the support and skills to do so.

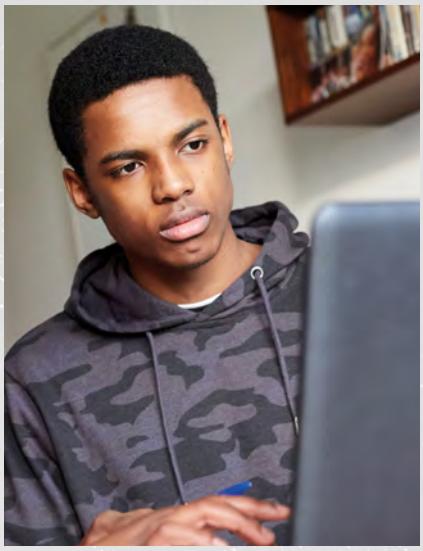
80%

of young people saying that exam pressure has significantly impacted on their mental health

Rebalancing the education system

New evidence from YoungMinds demonstrates overwhelming support among teachers, parents and young people for a rebalancing of the education system that gives a greater prominence to student wellbeing:

- 82% of teachers said that the focus on exams has become disproportionate to the overall wellbeing of their students
- 73% of parents would prefer to send their child to a school where children are generally happy, although previous exam results have not been good
- 81% of young people said that they would like their school or college to teach them more about how to look after their mental health.



Recommendations to Government

We are calling on the Government to rebalance the education system so that the wellbeing of students is considered as important as academic attainment.

We encourage the Government to adopt these five key recommendations to put student wellbeing at the very heart of the education system. We believe these changes needed to ensure that all schools help their students to build resilience, look after their emotional wellbeing and go on to thrive in adulthood.

1. **Update existing legislation to enshrine wellbeing as a fundamental priority of schools.**
2. **Establish mental health and wellbeing as a central part of school improvement, by strengthening the focus on wellbeing provision within the Ofsted framework.**
3. **Develop, trial and establish a wellbeing measurement framework by 2020.**
4. **Embed an understanding of wellbeing, mental health and resilience in all teacher training.**
5. **Provide schools with designated funding to resource wellbeing provision.**

These changes are necessary to ensure that all schools help their students to build resilience, promote emotional wellbeing and respond effectively to mental health problems

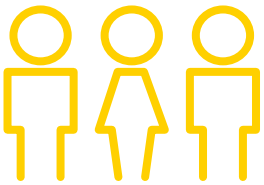
1. The crisis in our classrooms

We are facing a mental health crisis in our classrooms

The growing number of children and young people experiencing poor mental health is one of the biggest challenges facing our teachers.

- An estimated **three children in every classroom** has a diagnosable mental health problem[1]. This rises to one in four children when we include emotional distress[2].
- **Suicide is the most common cause of death** for boys aged between 5 and 19, and the second most common for girls of that age[3].
- Around **one in every twelve young people deliberately self-harm**[4], though this may rise to almost one in three for girls aged 15[5].
- Rates of **depression and anxiety in teenagers have increased by 70%** in the past 25 years[6].
- The **number of young people calling Childline about mental health problems has risen by 36%** in the last four years[7].
- The number of **young people attending A&E because of a psychiatric condition more than doubled** between 2010/11 and 2014/15[8].

International comparison studies have found the wellbeing of school-aged children in England / the UK to be 'average' or 'below average'[9]. The picture is worse still for studies that have specifically considered educational wellbeing[i].



An estimated three children in every classroom has a diagnosable mental health problem

[i] In a UN study in 2013, the UK ranked 24th out of the 29 countries for educational wellbeing, which considered participation rates and achievement levels Similarly, children in England ranked 14th out of 15 countries for overall happiness with life in the Children's World Study (2014).

School years are crucial in developing life-long good mental health and positive life outcomes

School years are key to developing social and emotional skills, knowledge and behaviours. This period sets a pattern for how a young person will manage their own mental health and wellbeing into adulthood. **Notably, half of all lifetime cases of diagnosable mental health problems begin before the age of 14**[10]. Whilst we know that one in three of all diagnosable mental health conditions in adulthood relate directly to adverse experiences in childhood[11].

Despite this, school-related stress is a serious problem. A recent survey found that two-thirds of primary school children say they worry all the time about at least one thing to do with their home life or school life[12]. YoungMinds' research with over 5,000 young people also found school stress to be one of the top five factors that contribute to their mental health problems[13].

We also know the problem is getting worse. 90% of school leaders reported an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety or stress, and low mood or depression, over the last five years[14].

These childhood mental health problems can affect academic development, and often have long-term consequences for the health, social and employment outcomes of young people.

An ONS study found that children with mental health problems are less likely than their peers to gain academic qualifications, and more likely to have significant time off school, be excluded or get into trouble with the police[15]. Furthermore, a recent analysis of the British Cohort Study[16] demonstrated that emotional health in childhood is by far the most important indicator of life-satisfaction and personal outcomes as an adult.

The economic costs associated with an increased prevalence of emotional and mental health problems in children and young people are severe. **NHS England estimates that poor mental health costs the economy, NHS and society £105 billion a year in England – roughly the cost of the entire NHS**[17]. The cost of young people's mental health problems has been estimated as £1778 per person per year, with 90% of the cost falling on the education system[18].

> "My mental health issues were made much harder at school due to the fact there was lack of understanding, stigma, no counsellor, and support officers who didn't offer any help"

Jessica, YoungMinds Young Activist

90%

of school leaders reported an increase in the number of students experiencing anxiety or stress, and low mood or depression, over the last five years

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are overwhelmed and the NHS cannot meet the demand for services

Currently, only one in every four children with a diagnosable mental health problem has access to the treatment and care that they need[19]. Meanwhile, there is evidence that the number of children in need of specialist mental health support is growing. There was a 44% increase in referrals to specialist mental health services between 2011 and 2015[20], and overstretched services are struggling to meet the rising demand.

Across the country, the lack of capacity in CAMHS leads to increased waiting times and higher thresholds for children. Recent evidence suggests that the average maximum waiting time for a first appointment with CAMHS is 26 weeks, and 42 weeks until the start of treatment[21]. Furthermore, other research has suggested that there is a ten-year average delay between the time that young people first experience symptoms of mental health problems and when they first receive help[22].

The *Future in Mind* investment, which aims to ensure that an additional 70,000 children receive mental health care each year, is a welcome step. However, despite this investment, this will still only mean that one in three children are able to access the mental health care they need[23].

There have been some improvements in waiting times and increased transparency[24]. Recent data from NHS Benchmarking shows the average time from referral to first appointment is now at nine weeks, and 17 weeks for the second appointment[25]. However, this does not hide the reality that NHS services are currently unable to support every child who is experiencing a mental health problem. We need an integrated system that provides a focus on prevention and early intervention to reduce the burden on CAMHS.

the average maximum waiting time for a first appointment with CAMHS is 26 weeks, and 42 weeks until the start of treatment

Building resilience and preventing mental health problems is key

A sharp focus on promoting wellbeing, building resilience and good mental health will improve outcomes for children and young people, and the nation as a whole. The benefits for individuals, families, business and the economy are clear – increased employability, capability and productivity, reduced absence, reduced demand on services and improved family relationships and happiness.

Currently, waiting times for CAMHS are too long and for many children and young people help is simply coming too late. There needs to be a greater focus on the early identification of problems, earlier intervention, and increased preventative work to tackle the growing crisis of undiagnosed and untreated children's mental health.

Supporting young people to build emotional resilience can help them to cope with and bounce back from adversity, and can ultimately help to prevent the development of mental health problems in later life. Schools must play a key role in turning this aspiration into reality.

"The first panic attack I had was during a tennis lesson at school, I couldn't breathe and I was visibly shaking... My teacher had no understanding of what was going on and it became clear that none of the other teachers did either, I got a detention that day for having a panic attack."

Jessica, YoungMinds Young Activist

2. The role of schools

Schools are a crucial environment for promoting emotional wellbeing and resilience

Schools are a universal service, accessed five days a week by most children. This means that over the course of their education, **children spend over 7,800 hours at school**[26]. With such a huge amount of time spent in the classroom, schools provide an ideal environment for promoting good emotional wellbeing and identifying early behaviour changes and signs of mental distress. For children experiencing adversity at home, school can also provide a consistent, protective and therapeutic environment, which can help them to cope.

"As a school that already prioritises wellbeing alongside academic achievement, we are seeing the growing benefits of placing wellbeing first"

A Head Teacher

Parents see schools and teachers as the first port of call when raising concerns about their child's emotional wellbeing and mental health

Research has found that parents of children with mental health problems are most likely to seek advice or help from a teacher rather than any other professional or service[27].

Emotional wellbeing is a clear indicator of academic achievement and success in later life

There is clear evidence that emotional wellbeing is a key indicator of academic achievement, and subsequently improved outcomes in later life.

The Department for Education has found that, on average, children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing, had higher levels of academic achievement and were more engaged in school[28].

Social and emotional competencies have also been found to be a more significant determinant of academic attainment than IQ[29]. This was mirrored by an international study by the OECD, which showed a correlation between emotional wellbeing and school success[30]. Further evidence points to how pupils' ability to manage emotions can support or impede their learning, their academic engagement, work ethic, commitment and ultimate school success[31].

There is clear evidence that emotional wellbeing is a key indicator of academic achievement, and subsequently improved outcomes in later life

The effectiveness of school-based approaches to wellbeing

There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of school-based approaches to promoting emotional wellbeing. Schools can play an important role in providing a safe, consistent environment for vulnerable children who may experience difficulties or adversity at home, as well as in early identification of need.

Evidence shows that mental health initiatives in schools can lead to significant improvements in children's mental health, social and emotional skills, and reductions in classroom misbehaviour, anxiety, depression and bullying[32]. Meanwhile, as discussed above, focusing on the wellbeing of students has also proven to be beneficial for a school's academic output[33]. Overall, "whole school approaches" are most effective in promoting wellbeing and good mental health[34]. These approaches can improve staff and pupil wellbeing, and have a positive impact on the prevention and reduction of mental health problems across school populations[35]. Indeed, Ofsted has identified a strong correlation between schools that achieved a high grade for personal, social, health and economic education and those that were graded outstanding for overall effectiveness[36].

By a "whole school approach", we mean involving every individual in the school community: pupils, parents and all staff and volunteers, from the Head through the caretaker and the cook. Crucially, it's also about strategy and leadership; the systems and structures within the school. Everyone has the chance to understand and implement practical things which will contribute to changes in practice and benefit all the students in the school.

Additionally, this includes the school's relationship to the local community and wider mental health system, and their confidence and ability to commission relevant services. It can include strengthening relationships with local providers and commissioners to improve pathways into services for children and young people.

"A teacher picked up on my mental health problems before I even had to speak up and immediately liaised with my Head of Year and School Counsellor. I started seeing my School Counsellor after just a few weeks and she was amazing. Although my mental health continued to deteriorate, I felt comforted knowing my school was always there to help"

Young activist

In *Future in Mind*, the Government encouraged all schools to develop whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing[37]. However, despite the development of several comprehensive frameworks for whole-school approaches[ii], and the proven benefits for both pupils and schools, the Government has stopped short of introducing specific funding streams, accountability measures, or processes for public recognition to enable schools to put this into practice.

The education system is unbalanced, with too much focus on academic attainment and not enough focus on the wellbeing of students

In recent years, children and teachers have been sent a strong message that the main purpose of school is to gain qualifications and pass exams[38]. Education policy, particularly under the Coalition Government (2010-15), increased pressure on academic outcomes, with more value given to league tables, and a greater focus on exams over coursework. Evidence also shows that

In recent years, children and teachers have been sent a strong message that the main purpose of school is to gain qualifications and pass exams

[ii] The World Health Organisation, Public Health England and Professor Katherine Weare, on behalf of NCB, have all developed comprehensive frameworks for whole-school approaches

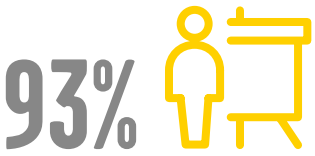
accountability measures, such as league tables and the Ofsted framework, dictate the focus of school life[39].

Worryingly, the prominence of academic attainment within accountability measures has also been shown to encourage schools to exclude disadvantaged and SEND pupils from assessment processes[40].

The result is that schools are not encouraged or supported to help pupils to develop the crucial skills, knowledge and attributes that they will need to be successful in adult life.

Demands on the teaching profession are increasing

Pressure to meet targets related to pupil attainment is taking a heavy toll on the teaching profession. Despite Ofsted committing to more light touch inspections to reduce stress, the Guardian teacher network have reported increased instances of poor mental health and low morale[iii]. A recent poll conducted by the network also found that 79% of schools were struggling to recruit or retain teachers, whilst 43% of the state school teachers polled were planning to leave the profession in the next five years[41]. Furthermore, the National Union of Teachers found that a staggering 93% of teachers agreed that their stress levels 'sometimes impact' on the way they interact with pupils[42].



of teachers agreed that their stress levels 'sometimes impact' on the way they interact with pupils

Teachers and other school staff do not feel they have the competencies to promote the emotional wellbeing of their students

Teachers and school staff have reported that they have insufficient knowledge about wellbeing or mental health to be able to confidently support their students.

In June 2015, the Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey reported that two thirds of teachers felt they lacked the appropriate training to help identify mental health issues in pupils[43]. Just 32% felt they had received appropriate mental health awareness training for their job role, and over half of teachers named training on mental health and wellbeing as one of the most useful strategies a school can employ to support pupils' mental health. **Indeed, a recent survey of primary head teachers found that less than 40% felt confident that their staff would know how to respond if a pupil had a mental health crisis**[44]. Teachers want to be able to promote the emotional wellbeing of their pupils, but need the training and support to do so.

The current Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provision does not provide newly qualified teachers with any substantial knowledge of mental health or emotional wellbeing. Similarly, the Continued Professional Development required annually of all teachers does not include any mandatory training on mental health awareness.

> "I think it is really important that all schools have proper training on how to deal with mental health. I think everyone needs to communicate more about mental health, including the teachers."
>
> *Alex, YoungMinds Young Activist*

[iii] Moreover, 98% of 4450 teachers said they are under increasing pressure & 75% say their workload is having a serious impact on their mental health. Only 12% say they have good work-life balance.

In January 2017, the Prime Minister announced that basic Mental Health First Aid training would be provided for a member of staff from each secondary school in England. However, training just one member of staff within a school gives the impression that pupil wellbeing is a specialist issue, rather than something that all staff should take ownership of. To effectively promote the emotional wellbeing of students, an understanding of wellbeing, mental health and resilience needs to be embedded throughout schools and this requires the training or upskilling of all staff.

A teaching profession that feels sufficiently trained to speak about mental health and approaches issues confidently, would lead to an open and inclusive culture that would benefit students and teachers, and reduce stigma about discussing mental health in the classroom.

Schools are not encouraged to prioritise wellbeing

The prioritisation of wellbeing by schools is hindered by funding constraints and the lack of prominence given to wellbeing in legislation and school inspection frameworks. Schools are not encouraged or incentivised to direct resource to wellbeing provision.

Policy and legislation

Maintained schools are under statutory duties[iv] to promote wellbeing and mental health[45]. However, these duties are not supported by comprehensive guidance on how schools should be promoting wellbeing, and, in practice, the balance of responsibilities between wellbeing and attainment has not been achieved. Furthermore, as the legal duties relating to wellbeing provision only apply to maintained schools, and the majority of secondary school pupils attend academies (66% in January 2016[46]), **this means the existing legislative framework does not cover a growing number of children.**

School inspection and accountability

The Ofsted inspection framework heavily influences the behaviour of schools. It is notable that changes to the Ofsted inspection framework in September 2015 added references to pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health. However, there are currently fewer references, and a less significant focus on health and wellbeing than there were in the inspection framework a decade ago[47].

"My child's school seems reluctant to accept that they have pupils experiencing mental distress as they assume this will reflect badly on them."

Parent (anonymous)

[iv] Section 10 of the Children Act 2004, provides a duty for schools to cooperate with local authorities to improve the wellbeing of children and young people, including physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing. Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 provides a duty on maintained schools to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 amends Section 21 of the Education Act 2002, to state that "The governing body of a maintained school shall, in discharging their functions relating to the conduct of the school – (a) promote the well-being of pupils at the school." This section only applies to maintained schools and doesn't cover academies, unless transposed into their individual funding arrangements.

Worryingly, a recent analysis by The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) of a sample of 50 Ofsted inspection reports that took place after September 2015 shows that just one in three reports (32%) include an explicit reference to pupils' mental health and wellbeing. IPPR concluded that many Ofsted inspectors are not routinely assessing schools' mental health provision, despite the recent changes to the framework[48].

A recent NUT survey found that 84% of teachers agreed that 'the focus on academic targets means that social and emotional aspects of education tended to be neglected'[49]. Consequently, we believe that the current Ofsted framework should be further revised to explicitly describe a requirement for schools to promote the mental health and emotional wellbeing of students, and a mandate to create a positive learning environment to foster resilience, wellbeing and healthy development. Furthermore, we believe that a pre-requisite for a school to be graded as outstanding by Ofsted should be for it to demonstrate exceptional wellbeing support for pupils.

At present, schools that are doing great work on wellbeing feel like their efforts are not getting recognition, and those who are not feel unable to divert resource to this area when they will gain no recognition for doing so. When a school has prioritised supporting their students' mental health and wellbeing, this should be celebrated as best practice. Increased recognition and transparency around schools' wellbeing provision would allow it to be a key criterion for parents choosing a school.

Only

32%

of Ofsted inspection reports include an explicit reference to pupils' mental health and wellbeing

Curriculum

The Government has committed to introducing mandatory Relationships Education for all primary schools, and Relationships and Sex Education for all secondary schools. DfE will also consult on introducing mandatory Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons for all schools. This provides an important opportunity to embed wellbeing and resilience into the curriculum. Alongside this, DfE has announced new Randomised Control Trials to test the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting good mental health[50].

However, changes to the curriculum are only part of the solution to improving wellbeing in schools. Lessons should form part of a wider "whole school approach".

The funding context

Schools are under growing financial pressure, with many schools expected to cut their budgets significantly within the coming years.

A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report, the *Financial Sustainability of Schools*, found that mainstream schools will have to find savings of £3 billion (an 8% real-terms reduction in per-pupil funding) by 2019–20 to counteract cumulative cost pressures, such as pay rises and higher employer contributions to national insurance and the teachers' pension scheme.[51] The Education Policy Institute (EPI) have estimated that these funding pressures amount to an average real terms loss of £74,000 per primary school and £291,000 per secondary school. This equates to two teachers in an average primary school and six teachers in an average secondary school[52].

£3 billion

The savings mainstream schools will have to find by 2019–20 to counteract cumulative cost pressures

In December 2016, the DfE set out detailed proposals for a new national funding formula (NFF). However, the EPI have estimated that, taking into account the NFF, inflationary pressures and the removal of the Education Services Grant, there are unlikely to be any schools in England which avoid real per pupil cuts in funding between 2016-17 and 2019-20.

In the face of these cuts, schools will have to make savings and potentially reduce their staff numbers. Pastoral care and wellbeing programmes are likely to be de-funded first as they have been traditionally viewed as 'nice to have', 'soft services'. Moreover, in this context of funding constraints and a strong focus on academic attainment, it is unlikely that schools will be able to divert resource towards wellbeing initiatives, which they are not accountable for – despite the proven benefits for behavioural and educational outcomes.

Teachers, parents and young people want the education system to prioritise wellbeing

YoungMinds can now present extensive new polling evidence collected in February 2017, which demonstrates that teachers, parents and young people all feel that there is currently too much pressure on exam results and an insufficient focus on wellbeing in the school system[53]. The polling results highlight overwhelming support for a rebalancing of the education system to give a greater priority to student wellbeing. We found that:

- **82% of teachers said that the focus on exams has become disproportionate to the overall wellbeing of their students**
- 70% of teachers agreed that the Government should rebalance the education system to focus more on the wellbeing of students
- 91% of teachers would welcome greater recognition of the work that teachers do to support the wellbeing of their students
- 73% of teachers would welcome a change to the Ofsted framework, so that student wellbeing is given a greater focus with other areas reduced
- 71% of teachers said that they would welcome a duty on schools to promote student wellbeing
- **92% of parents think that schools have a duty to support the wellbeing and mental health of students**
- 73% of parents would prefer to send their child to a school where children are generally happy, although previous exam results have not been good
- **More young people felt that their school cared about their grades/ results than cared about them being happy: 81% to 67%.**

70%

of teachers agreed that the Government should rebalance the education system to focus more on the wellbeing of students

73%

of parents would prefer to send their child to a school where children are generally happy, although previous exam results have not been good

In March 2017, YoungMinds also carried out a survey of 452 children and young people aged 11-18 on behalf of the Health and Education Select Committees to support their joint inquiry into mental health and education. The results from this survey reaffirm the overwhelming support for rebalancing the education system:

- 80% of the young people who responded to the survey said that exam pressure had a big effect on their mental health, whilst in total 96% of young people said that exam pressure had an effect on their mental health[54]
- 81% of young people said that they would like their school or college to teach them more about how to look after their mental health
- 90% of the young people surveyed said that they would like mental health to be more important to their school or college.

90%

of the young people surveyed said that they would like mental health to be more important to their school or college

3. Promoting wellbeing in schools

Schools have a crucial role to play in transforming children's mental health. The Government must send a clear message that a good education promotes health and happiness, not just good grades.

Rebalancing the education system

Currently, there is too much emphasis on exams, qualifications and academic attainment, and not enough focus on the wellbeing of students. (See Chapter 2.)

Wellbeing provision in schools is inconsistent and varies greatly across the country. This has created a postcode lottery, where some schools effectively support children to build resilience and develop their social and emotional knowledge and skills, whilst other schools do not.

We welcome the Government's commitment to providing a good school place for every child. **However, a "good school place" must be one which promotes good mental health and resilience, as well as academic achievement**.

> **"Looking back, I could have really benefited from having people to talk to as opposed to everyone just being concerned about my academic progress. I was repeatedly told I would be a failure if I continued to fall behind at school, which is the last thing you should be telling somebody who struggles with mental health problems."**

Alex, YoungMinds Young Activist

Enshrining wellbeing as a fundamental priority for schools in legislation

The Government must take direct action to improve wellbeing provision in schools. The existing legislation that lays out the responsibilities on schools to promote the wellbeing and mental health of their pupils needs to be clarified and enhanced. A clear, statutory duty that applies to all schools is necessary to drive transformative change and create the right balance between academic achievement and wellbeing.

Coupled with this legislative change, DfE must also issue clear and detailed statutory guidance to schools about how they should respond to, and promote, the emotional wellbeing and mental health of all students. Early intervention is key here, so this guidance should include information for schools on ways to improve the emotional literacy of all children, not simply those where a mental health concern has already been identified[v].

Making wellbeing a priority in school improvement plans

School improvement and development plans set the strategic direction for school development, and determine how progress is measured over time. Given the context of reduced Ofsted inspections for schools judged to be 'good' or 'outstanding', in the future, school improvement plans will assume even greater importance. As such, inclusion of wellbeing provision as a key focus in school improvement plans would be an ideal vehicle for enacting real change within individual schools.

Increasing the prominence of wellbeing and mental health in the Ofsted inspection framework

Whilst school improvement plans are important for setting the internal agenda of a school's development, the Ofsted inspection framework still influences wider school behaviour. It is important that promoting mental health and wellbeing is recognised as a key priority of schools and that this is reflected within the Ofsted inspection framework.

The DfE has recently commissioned a Healthy Schools Ratings Scheme for primary schools that provides recognition of schools that are promoting the health of their students in three key areas: physical activity, healthy eating and emotional wellbeing. Importantly this incentivises schools to improve in these areas.

> "I believe the education system needs to be changed to create a more caring and diverse population. At the moment, it seems schools are only concerned about grades and statistics but some students will need additional support, not because of learning difficulties but just because of they how are."

Tonia, Parent

[v] The existing DfE advice on mental health and behaviour in schools is due to be updated in the coming months. We believe the scope of the guidance should be extended to provide more extensive advice on how to build resilience, and promote the emotional wellbeing of all students. Furthermore, we believe the guidance should be issued on a statutory basis, to provide a blueprint of what the promotion of wellbeing must look like for schools

An extension of the Healthy Schools Rating Scheme to include all secondary schools would provide recognition of the work schools do to promote and nurture the mental health and emotional wellbeing of their students. Moreover, it would incentivise secondary schools to improve in this area, and to direct resources to wellbeing provision.

Promoting an effective measurement framework

As outlined in Chapter 2, there is a significant body of evidence that illustrates the effectiveness of wellbeing interventions in schools on child wellbeing, academic attainment and other social and emotional outcomes. However, there is still a need for further research to provide stronger evidence about which wellbeing approaches and interventions are most effective in schools.

We welcome the research and evaluation programme that is currently being commissioned by the DfE to provide robust evidence about a selection of universal programmes with a focus on prevention and promoting wellbeing[55]. This evaluation offers a real chance to build on the existing evidence-base by identifying and promoting best practice in school-based interventions.

However, any attempt to further prioritise universal wellbeing provision within schools requires the effective measurement of wellbeing within the school environment. The implementation of a wellbeing measurement framework is necessary to be able to measure progress over time[vi].

Establishing a measurement framework would be especially beneficial in helping schools to identify the interventions that are most likely to be effective given the unique characteristics and culture of the school. If schools are to invest in wellbeing approaches, they want to be able to invest in the most effective, cost-effective and appropriate interventions for their students[vii].

Equipping teachers to improve wellbeing

Teachers and school staff must be well-equipped to provide the right environment for learning and wellbeing. Teachers have reported that they are acting outside of their competence and capacity in relation to children's mental health. Teachers are often not sufficiently trained to identify signs of mental health issues or to approach these issues confidently. Despite being well-intentioned they are often unable to signpost their students to get help.

> **"I do remember an individual teacher understanding the stress I was under though and helping me manage this. It was really nice to feel like someone understood that I was struggling."**
>
> *Eliza, YoungMinds Young Activist*

[vi] There are already wellbeing measurement frameworks that could be adapted for use within schools, such as the Children's Well-being Measures data-set used by the Office for National Statistics , or the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWS) , both of which measure objective and subjective measures of wellbeing.

[vii] YoungMinds currently work with school leadership teams to help them identify their school's wellbeing strengths and weaknesses, and audit their processes to choose interventions and behaviours that will best support pupils. To learn more about YoungMinds' work in schools, and to see good practice examples, visit youngminds.org.uk/schools.

Therefore, it is essential that an understanding of children's psychological development, wellbeing, resilience and mental health is embedded into Initial Teacher Training and Continued Professional Development. This is necessary to ensure that all teachers have the basic knowledge and skills to be able to promote the wellbeing of students and to respond effectively to mental health concerns[56].

Furthermore, without a basic provision of mental health awareness training, we have no way of measuring teacher knowledge on mental health. It also becomes impossible to vouch for the consistency or quality of teachers' mental health awareness knowledge across the country.

Giving schools the resources they need

Schools are operating in a challenging financial environment, and cannot be expected to do more with less. The Government must recognise schools as playing a key role in promoting good mental health and wellbeing and resource them accordingly.

Schools must be part of an integrated system for tackling children and young people's mental health, particularly in relation to early identification, intervention and prevention. Schools need to be involved in local transformation processes, as the associated funding provides an opportunity to fund interventions in schools that can reduce the demand on CAMHS and the economic costs of long-term mental health problems.

They must also receive appropriate support to deliver a whole-school approach to wellbeing and resilience through the curriculum, school culture and beyond.

"I would encourage all school leaders to join YoungMinds in the call for not just 'education, education, education' but 'wellbeing, wellbeing, wellbeing', celebrating what schools do best in the interests of the children."

A Head Teacher

4. Recommendations to Government

We are calling on the Government to rebalance the education system, so that the wellbeing of students is considered as important as academic attainment

To tackle the mental health crisis in our classrooms, and to transform outcomes for young people, the Government must put wellbeing at the very heart of the education system.

We know that many schools are delivering high quality, innovative programmes to make sure their pupils are happy and healthy, but too often they face significant barriers.

Currently, schools are incentivised to focus on exams, without the capacity, time, and resource to invest in students' social and emotional development.

These five key recommendations are necessary so that all schools can help their students build resilience, promote emotional wellbeing, and respond effectively to mental health problems. These changes would mean all young people leave school with the skills they need to thrive in adulthood.

Recommendation 1: The Government must update existing legislation to enshrine wellbeing as a fundamental priority of schools

Primary legislation must contain a clear duty on all schools to promote wellbeing and good mental health for their pupils. The Government should also develop new, detailed statutory guidance, so that schools have a blueprint for delivering this duty.

Recommendation 2: The Ofsted inspection framework should be updated to emphasise the importance of a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing in schools

To enable the wellbeing of students to become an integral part of school improvement and development plans there needs to be a much stronger emphasis on mental health and wellbeing within the Ofsted inspection framework.

Schools must be inspected on how effectively they promote good mental health and wellbeing, as well as their academic results.

The Ofsted inspection framework must include a description of how schools can create a positive learning environment, which fosters resilience, wellbeing and healthy development.

Recommendation 3: The Government should develop, trial and establish a wellbeing measurement framework by 2020

Schools will have different baseline standards of wellbeing, based on demographics and other factors. Comparing schools directly may be misleading, but measurement is essential to drive improvement.

The Government should provide schools with the tools to measure their own progress in this area, and results should be published and available to pupils and parents.

Recommendation 4: Embed an understanding of wellbeing, mental health and resilience in all teacher training

The framework of core content for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) is inadequate. To ensure all teachers are able to confidently support their students' mental health and wellbeing needs, the ITT framework should be expanded to include a designated component on mental health awareness.

However, simply upskilling newly qualified teachers is not the whole answer and will lead to further inconsistencies in the provision of wellbeing. All teachers should have a fundamental understanding of mental health and wellbeing and this needs to be reflected in mandatory Continued Professional Development such as INSET days.

Recommendation 5: The Government should provide schools with designated funding to resource wellbeing provision

The Government must provide additional resource, including ring fenced funding for evidence-based wellbeing interventions and culture change within schools. This will enable schools to meet their legislative duties and the requirements laid out in any strengthened inspection framework.

There are also clear benefits for schools in collaborating with local health partners to resource wellbeing provision in schools through Local Transformation Plans or other collaborations. The Government should encourage schools to be active partners in their Local Transformation Plans and the wider Sustainability and Transformation Plans as this could lead to interventions within schools being funded by the connected funding streams.

As a part of this, the Government should establish a mechanism whereby all schools are required and are able to effectively communicate and collaborate with local health partners, including Clinical Commissioning Groups, local authorities and public health, to identify opportunities for joint-funded interventions.

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About YoungMinds

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people. We exist so that young people have the strongest possible voice in improving their mental health. We strive to make sure everything from practice in schools and services to Government policy is driven by young people's experiences and aspirations.

We support parents to help their children through difficult times, we equip professionals to provide the best possible support to the young people that they work with, and we empower young people to change their world.

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