Pupil mental health and wellbeing

A guide for governing boards

Reviewed May 2024

Tackling disadvantage: Mental health and wellbeing toolkit

NGA has developed a toolkit to help schools and trusts identify and tackle educational disadvantage of those with mental health problems in their setting. We recommend you use this guidance in conjunction with the toolkit.

Guidance

nga.org.uk

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Place2Be

NGA would like to thank **Place2Be** for providing their expertise and support in the production of this toolkit. Place2Be is a children's mental health charity providing school-based support and in-depth training programmes to improve the emotional wellbeing of pupils, families, teachers and school staff.

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Introduction

Mental health and wellbeing influences the physical and social health, attainment, and success of children and young people.

This guide:

- explains the board's responsibilities for supporting pupil mental health and wellbeing
- explains the board's role in supporting a whole school approach to wellbeing
- provides questions to ask to review and monitor implementation and impact

Schools' role in pupil wellbeing

The Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE) guidance outlines the school's role in supporting and promoting mental health and wellbeing:

1. **Prevention:** creating a safe and calm environment where mental health problems are less likely, improving the mental health and wellbeing of the whole school population, and equipping pupils and students to be resilient.
2. **Identification:** recognising emerging issues as early and accurately as possible.
3. **Early support:** helping pupils to access evidence informed early support and interventions.
4. **Access to specialist support:** working effectively with external agencies to provide swift access or referrals to specialist support and treatment.

Governing board responsibilities

Governing boards have a statutory duty to promote pupil wellbeing, as set out in the Education Act. In this context, wellbeing includes:

- physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution children make to society
- social and economic wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing should also be considered as part of governing boards' statutory safeguarding responsibilities outlined in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). Safeguarding includes "preventing the impairment of children's mental and physical health or development" and "taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes." NGA has specific guidance on safeguarding responsibilities.

For pupils diagnosed with mental health conditions, governing boards should refer to their statutory duties on supporting pupils with medical conditions at school. Where these conditions amount to a special educational need or disability (SEND) this should form part of the board's SEND responsibilities.

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A whole school approach

The most effective way for governing boards to meet their statutory duties is by promoting a whole school approach. A whole school approach embeds wellbeing in all aspects of school life and decision making, with a commitment and involvement from everyone across the school or trust community.

PHE and the DfE have published guidance outlining eight principles of a whole school approach:

- Leadership and management that supports and champions efforts to promote emotional health and wellbeing.
- An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity.
- Curriculum, teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning.
- Enabling student voice to influence decisions.
- Staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of students.
- Identifying need and monitoring impact of interventions.
- Working with parents/carers.
- Targeted support and appropriate referrals.

Whole school frameworks

There are a number of frameworks schools and trusts can use to implement a whole school approach to wellbeing. These include:

- Well Schools Movement: Steps to Success
- Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families: 5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing – a framework for schools
- The National Children's Bureau (NCB): Whole school approach

Governing boards, in consultation with school or trust leaders, can decide to make a whole school approach to wellbeing a key element of their strategy. This ensures that it runs throughout the organisation's decision making and is effectively resourced and monitored. NGA's Being Strategic guidance provides leaders and those governing with a robust framework to set a strategy for their organisation and monitor progress.

Multi academy trusts

Academy trust boards can take a similar approach in looking at how pupil wellbeing is promoted across a multi academy trust (MAT). We encourage trust boards to consider how they clearly define the role of local academy committees as regards to pupil wellbeing, with some of the following actions delegated to the local tier.

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The following describes the eight principles of an effective whole school approach. Questions are provided to prompt discussion between boards and school or trust leaders to assess your current approach and identify any areas for improvement. Consider referring to these as part of a governing board meeting or strategy discussion.

1. Leadership and management

A whole school approach to wellbeing needs coordinated change with collective and individual responsibility from all staff. It should be led and championed by school and trust leaders and at board level, to be effectively embedded in all aspects of school life.

Senior mental health leads

Schools are encouraged to identify a senior mental health lead as the strategic lead for implementing a whole school approach. The DfE offer a grant of £1,200 for eligible state-funded schools and colleges to train a senior mental health lead. Schools can claim a grant for training through over 100 different quality assured courses. Place2Be is one of these providers.

Link governor/trustee

Governing boards should consider how they will ensure pupil wellbeing is given continued focus. PHE and DfE guidance outlines that it is "highly desirable" to have a governor/trustee with knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues.

You may decide to have a link governor/trustee to work closely with the senior mental health lead, or have a committee responsible for overseeing the approach.

Questions to ask

- Have we identified, and trained a senior mental health lead? Do they have the resources and capacity to effectively lead the approach?
- Do we need a governor/trustee identified to lead on pupil or whole school wellbeing? Do they have the knowledge needed to undertake this role?
- How does the governing board and senior leadership visibly champion and lead by example on wellbeing?
- Are appropriate budget and resources available and directed to our specific priority areas of wellbeing?

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2. Ethos and environment

The ethos, environment and culture of schools can affect the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of pupils and staff. Characteristics of an ethos, culture and environment:

- diversity and inclusion are respected and valued
- pupils feel supported, safe and listened to
- pupils are empowered to look after their own wellbeing where possible
- pupils know where/who to go to if they want to talk about something
- a commitment to positive relationships across all school life
- a commitment to wellbeing which is visible in school (clear, accessible signposting, displays)
- an approach to behaviour is supportive and seeks to understand the underlying emotions

Policies

Real and lasting change comes from effective policies and practice. Governing boards should ask questions about how policies embed pupil wellbeing, including in:

- behaviour and anti-bullying policies
- equalities information
- attendance policy
- SEND policy
- child protection and safeguarding policies

Consider how policies:

- **Positively (or negatively) affect the wellbeing of pupils** – for example, evaluating how the SEND policy promotes an inclusive culture for all pupils
- **Consider the influence of poor mental health** – for example, how a behaviour policy focuses on trying to understand the underlying causes of pupils' disruptive behaviour and pastoral interventions that may be implemented in response. The DfE has specific guidance on the link between mental health and behaviour.
- **Ensure clear routes and procedures to respond to mental health concerns** – schools are not required to have a standalone mental health policy but should ensure that there are policies and procedures in place to help staff respond to mental health and emotional wellbeing. This is also part of Safeguarding responsibilities outlined in KCSIE.

Questions to ask

- Is our approach to wellbeing reflected in our vision, values and ethos?
- Is our school a place where pupils feel safe and listened to? How do we know?
- How aware is the school community of the importance of promoting good mental health?
- Are there trusted adults that children can turn to when they are troubled?
- Are there visible signs around school to show mental health and wellbeing is a priority?

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3. Curriculum

As part the health education curriculum, all pupils should be taught about mental health. This forms part of the Personal Social Health and Economic education (PSHE) curriculum – including statutory content regarding Relationships Education (RE) for primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education for secondary schools.

It is also important to consider how wellbeing is embedded and promoted in other lessons across a broad and balanced curriculum. There are lessons that are proven to have a positive impact on pupil mental health such as PE and school sport, music and other arts subjects and food education. To learn more about how governing boards can influence and support the curriculum, including ensuring it supports the wellbeing of pupils, read our curriculum guides:

- A guide to curriculum effectiveness
- PSHE education
- PE and school sport
- Cultural education

Questions to ask

- Does the curriculum provide opportunities for mental health and wellbeing to be discussed in a safe and constructive way?
- How does the school use lessons proven to have a positive impact on pupil mental health such as PE and school sport, music and other arts subjects and food education?
- Do we encourage any whole school activities on wellbeing such as involvement in Children's Mental health Week or assemblies on wellbeing?

4. Pupil voice

Governing boards are expected to ensure their schools or trusts give pupils the opportunity to express their views. Pupil voice is an expression of children and young people's rights and contributes to the success and wellbeing of pupils. It supports buy in to decision making, promotes feelings of agency, and is a vital way to understand and meet the needs of pupils.

In your support and challenge to school or trust leaders, we recommend considering how effective pupil voice is in your school or trust. Effective pupil voice includes:

- fostering a listening culture where pupils feel safe and confident to share their views
- having multiple methods for pupils to share views or get involved in decision making
- being inclusive to all pupils, ensuring that any communication or other barriers to participating are reduced
- pupils seeing how their voices are used and acted on

Governing boards can also ensure that they have opportunities to directly engage with pupils. Examples of how governing boards can do this include talking to pupils on monitoring visits, inviting pupils to present at governing board meetings, attending pupil councils or action groups and receiving pupil reports.

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Questions to ask

- How does pupil voice feature in our values, ethos and vision? Do pupils have a say in what they want to leave school knowing, thinking and having done?
- Is our pupil voice approach inclusive? What pupils are we not hearing from?
- Do our pupils feel comfortable sharing their views?
- What common themes are arising from pupil wellbeing surveys? Have we acted on these?
- Has the governing board heard directly from pupils? How do we ensure that this happens on a regular basis?

5. Staff development, health and wellbeing

An integral principle of the whole school approach is promoting wellbeing for everyone in the school community. Staff are on the front line in this work and need suitable training and to be supported with their own wellbeing in order to effectively support their pupils.

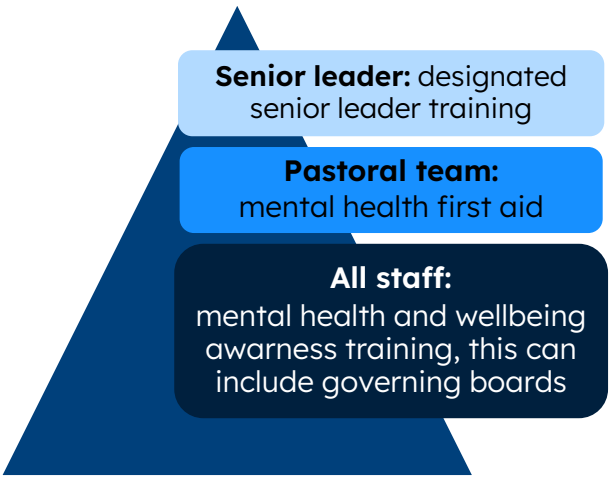
Staff wellbeing

School and trust leaders and governing boards have significant responsibilities to support the wellbeing of those employed in their organisation, including their work-life balance. NGA has guidance on governing boards' roles in supporting staff wellbeing and an evaluation tool for school and trust leader wellbeing.

The DfE has developed an education staff wellbeing charter, which sets out commitments to the wellbeing and mental health of everyone working in education. The charter also encourages measurement of staff wellbeing to monitor and respond to any changes.

Staff development and training

Schools staff are not expected to act as mental health professionals but should have the skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to promote pupil wellbeing and have a clear understanding of the routes and processes in place for when a pupil needs further support.



Governing boards should discuss the CPD and training staff are given to both understand and respond to mental health needs of pupils.

Schools will have varying levels of training needs depending on the roles, for example:

- basic mental health awareness training for all staff
- mental health first aid training for your pastoral team
- training for senior mental health lead

Place2Be offer both Senior Mental Health Leads' training.

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Questions to ask

- How are staff supported in relation to their own mental health and wellbeing?
- How do we monitor staff wellbeing? How have we responded to the results?
- Do staff have access to adequate training and professional development to support pupil wellbeing and to identify common symptoms of poor mental health?
- How aware is the school community of the importance of promoting good mental health?

6. Identifying need and monitoring impact

As well as working to promote positive wellbeing and prevent children and young people from developing poor mental health, a key part of the whole school approach is identifying and supporting those pupils in need.

Measurement

There are a variety of survey tools schools can use to measure the wellbeing of pupils, identify those in need and monitor the impact of the support put in place. Governing boards can consult with school or trust leaders about the tools the organisation uses. Measurement tools allow schools and trusts to:

- measure overall wellbeing of pupils (identify a baseline)
- measure the impact of any wellbeing initiatives, policies and support
- identify types of need of pupils
- identify any wellbeing concerns for particular pupil groups (eg by age, gender, SEND, vulnerable children)
- benchmark data against other schools in the local area or schools within a MAT (depending on the tool)

Well Schools have produced a practical guide to measuring wellbeing in schools. It can be accessed by signing up to the Well Schools community for free.

Questions to ask

- How do we measure the wellbeing of our pupils?
- What are the wellbeing needs of our pupils? Is this typical of our wider community?
- How have we acted on the results of wellbeing data? What progress has been made?
- Do we have any wellbeing initiatives in place? What has the impact of these been?
- Are wellbeing interventions appropriate for our pupils (their age, or mental health needs)?
- How do we support pupils with transition between school phase and/or new schools?
- Are there any concerns about the wellbeing of pupils from particular groups (such as pupils with SEND or those who are disadvantaged)? How are these concerns being addressed?

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7. Working with parents, families and carers

An effective whole school approach means involving everyone in the school community. Schools and trusts should communicate their mental health and wellbeing offer to parents and carers, and ensure there are methods to listen to their views and involve them. This can also include how schools support parents and carers with their children's wellbeing and their own.

Governing boards should consider how they engage with parents and carers and understand their local community, in particular considering any barriers to engaging around issues of mental health and wellbeing. NGA and Parentkind have produced specific guidance for governing boards on engaging parents and carers which includes addressing barriers to participation.

Questions to ask

- How are we (the governing board) ensuring effective engagement with parents?
- Are parents provided with accessible information about the school or trust's approach to mental health and wellbeing?
- How do we engage and work with parents for pupils needing additional support?
- Are we facing any barriers to engaging with parents on mental health and wellbeing? How are these being addressed?
- Do we provide parents and carers with support or signpost to resources to support their child's wellbeing? Such as local support and Place2Be resources for parents and carers.

8. Targeted support and appropriate referrals

For those at risk of, or experiencing poor mental health, schools should have an effective system in place to provided targeted support and specialist provision. This may involve having a tiered approach, which ensures pupils can access the right support at the right time and emphasises the importance of early intervention.

Early intervention is crucial to ensuring mental health issues are identified and addressed before they may require more specialised support. The principles identified in the previous sections of a whole school approach contribute to ensuring schools can provide early intervention.

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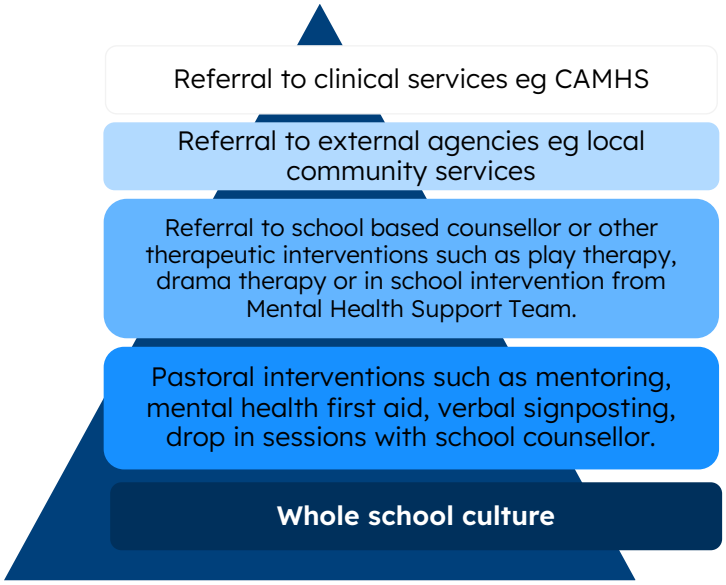
Example tiered approach

Governing boards should ensure there are clear systems and processes in place for identifying mental health problems and routes to escalate and access referral systems as part of their safeguarding responsibilities outlined in KCSIE.

Governing boards can also evaluate the targeted support their school or trust offers, as well as how they work with external agencies, to identify strengths and areas for improvement or where additional resource may be required.



Discussions with school or trust leaders may focus on:

- **The targeted support offered** – who delivers it, what the impact is and how this is monitored.
- **Resources and budget allocated for interventions** – including reviewing current expenditure, resources available for further intervention, sources of funding (using Pupil Premium funding for example), or investigating local or national funding opportunities.
- **How the school/trust works with external services –** how this is done effectively, areas for improvement, any gaps or difficulties accessing services (such long waiting lists for clinical services) and how these can be mitigated.

Questions to ask

- How do we ensure that our targeted support offer meets the needs of our pupils?
- What provision is in place for those with mental health conditions, or those at increased risk of experiencing poor mental health?
- Are we making best use of local support services?
- How do we minimize the risk of unintended adverse consequences and stigma around target support?
- Is our targeted support accessible for all pupils? Are there barriers for any groups of pupils?
- Are we aware of any local partnership, commissioning or funding opportunities such as from the Integrated Care Board, NHS Trust or Local Authority?

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Monitoring impact and outcomes

Evaluating the approach to wellbeing requires careful consideration and discussion between governing boards and school/trust leaders about:

- ways of measuring pupil wellbeing, including wellbeing surveys from pupils, parents and teachers, but also considering other sources and data (attendance, behaviour incidents, first-hand experience from school visits)
- the data and information available to measure progress and outcomes
- balancing the requirement for data, information and reports against other workload demands for staff

Governing boards can use a combination of the following sources to monitor evidence of the impact of wellbeing initiatives in their schools and trusts:

- reports from their school or trust leaders
- feedback received from a link governor/trustee
- reports from the senior mental health lead
- analysis and scrutiny carried out at committee level (if applicable)
- engagement with pupil and parent forums
- feedback from monitoring visits

Monitoring both the wellbeing of pupils, the implementation of a whole school approach and its impact should be part of a continuous cycle, which recognises both the successes and areas for improvement and ensures action is taken to address these.

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