National Governance Association
KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Tackling disadvantage in education

A toolkit for governing boards

December 2022

Mental health and wellbeing



The expert organisation for school governors, trustees and governance professionals

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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.

Two Ten Therapy

NGA would like to thank Two Ten Therapy for providing their expertise and support in the production of this toolkit.

Two Ten Therapy is a wellbeing service that supports individuals, schools and organisations with counselling, supervision, coaching programs and awareness training. Their service has grown out of years of listening and supporting people, with a 'people matter' vision at the heart of the work they do.

National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is part of a series aimed at tackling disadvantage in education. It identifies the link between mental health and wellbeing and educational disadvantage, signposts resources to help tackle disadvantage, and includes questions for governing boards to explore.

We recommend that you first read our Widening the lens guidance which explains how to identify key areas of disadvantage in your organisation. Other toolkits in this series include **special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**, **vulnerability**, **poverty** and **ethnicity**.

Making the link

Mental health problems are increasingly linked to educational disadvantage – 2022 NHS statistics show one in six children struggling with mental health, up from one in nine in 2017.

Children who struggle with their mental health can present symptomatic challenging behaviours at school such as aggression, emotional outbursts, or a lack of engagement. This behaviour is often wrongly interpreted leading to children and young people often either being punished or missing out on receiving the support they need.

Mental health difficulties can lead to educational disadvantage and increase the risk of:

1. poor academic performance
2. absenteeism
3. poor behaviour at school
4. challenges in forming positive relationships

What the evidence shows

- Mental health difficulties increase absenteeism (EBPU, 2019) with children facing mental health challenges twice as likely to miss school than their peers (NHS, 2022).
- Children with poor mental health are more likely to be excluded (Timpson Review, 2019).
- 79% of young people and 87% of parents and carers agree a young person's behaviour is linked to their mental health (Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, 2022).
- Place2Be research found that in a sample of primary and secondary school pupils referred for school counselling, those with a history of fixed-term exclusions were more likely to be from families with low socioeconomic status (free school meals), of ethnic minority origin (especially Black), or have SEN (Toth et al, 2021).
- More than one in ten children aged 10 to 15 have no one to talk to or wouldn't talk to anyone in school if they feel worried or sad (Mental Health Foundation, 2018).
- Four in five young people who believe that stigma exists said school is the best place to combat it (YMCA, 2016).
- 20% of children aged 10 to 15 are unhappy at school, with girls scoring lower than boys (The Children's Society, 2022).

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A whole school approach

Addressing and reducing the educational disadvantage of those struggling with mental health should be part of a wider whole school approach to wellbeing. A whole school approach focuses on promoting pupil mental health and wellbeing as well as ensuring the early identification, support and where needed, referral of those experiencing poor mental health. It also focuses on promoting the mental health and wellbeing the school staff, ensuring they are equipped and supported in carrying out all aspects of their role.

Guidance for governing boards

NGA's Pupil wellbeing: a guide for governing boards and collection of resources on staff workload and wellbeing supports boards in their role of achieving a whole school approach.

The following themes and questions are provided to prompt discussion between boards and senior executive leaders. This should focus on how your organisation supports pupils experiencing educational disadvantage due to mental health and identify priorities and areas for improvement.

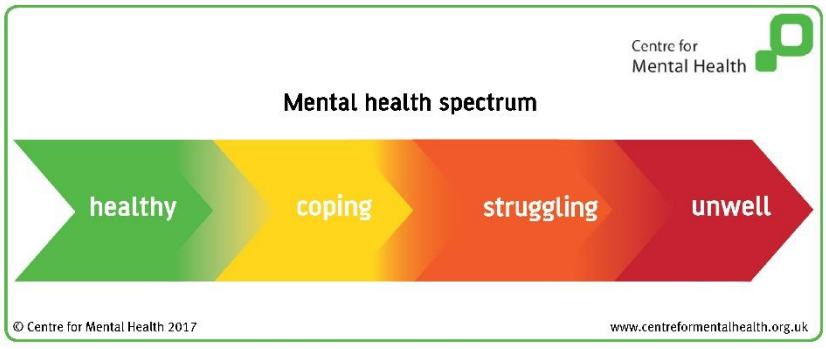
Understanding mental health and wellbeing in your context

Governing boards and school leaders need to understand the mental health and wellbeing needs of their school or trust community and who is at increased risk of experiencing poor mental health. Considerations include:

- the demographics of your school community (such as ethnicity, SEN status, socio-economic status) and the overlap with disadvantaged pupil groups
- types of mental health issues facing pupils and how these may present (such as anxiety, exam stress, conduct disorders, eating disorders and self-harm)
- wellbeing of those at different ages and school phases
- local context — socio-economic factors, issues the community is facing such as low employment, poverty and high crime rates

Mental health spectrum

Recognising mental health and wellbeing as a spectrum is important when creating an environment that promotes good mental health, prevents poor mental health and offers the right level of support to those that need it.



The Centre for Mental Health have produced advice on Mental health for all: working across the spectrum.

Questions to explore:

NGA's pupil wellbeing guidance provides advice on measuring wellbeing and how governing boards can monitor pupil wellbeing data.

- What are the wellbeing needs of our pupils? Are these school-related? Are these typical of local, regional or national issues?
- How do we measure wellbeing and identify those in need of support?
- Are there any concerns about the wellbeing of pupils from particular groups (such as pupils with SEND or other disadvantaged groups)? How are these concerns being addressed?
- Does the board collect data on pupil mental health and wellbeing and drill down into the behaviour, attendance, exclusion rates and safeguarding concerns for these children? Is there a correlation? And what interventions are in place to support these children?

School culture

Leaders and governing boards can champion a culture of openness and dialogue around mental health and wellbeing through the values that they promote.

This includes ensuring wellbeing is promoted through whole school events such as assemblies or participation in Children's Mental Health Week and other relevant awareness days.

The culture should also be evident across the curriculum, both in PSHE and RSE and other subjects that can have a positive impact on pupil wellbeing such as PE and school sport.

Questions to explore:

- Is our approach to wellbeing reflected in our vision, values and ethos?
- Is our school a place where pupils and staff feel safe and listened to? How do we know?
- How aware is the school community of the importance of promoting good mental health?
- Does the curriculum provide opportunities for mental health and wellbeing to be discussed in a safe and constructive way?
- Does the curriculum offer include and prioritise lessons that benefit pupil mental health and wellbeing?
- How is the school utilising 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?
- Are there opportunities for all pupils to engage in PE, together with school sport and other physical activity as part of pupils' wider development including their mental health and social wellbeing?
- Does our school run assemblies on wellbeing, and do we participate in events such as Children's Mental Health Week and other awareness days?

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Tools to promote a whole school wellbeing culture

- Place2Be has free resources for schools to support mental health and wellbeing across the whole school community.
- Youth Sport Trust (YST) has produced a range resources centred around physical and mental health to help tackle complex and demanding challenges across the whole school.
- Well Schools is an online community for school and trust staff and leaders. It is free to sign up and brings together useful tools and resources to help schools put wellbeing at the centre of their culture.
- NGA has produced guidance for governing boards on their role in ensuring the curriculum supports mental health and wellbeing:
    - PSHE education
    - PE and school sport
    - Cultural education

Policies

Governing boards and leaders should address whether school policies adequately explore the link with pupils being educationally disadvantaged through mental health and wellbeing issues. It is important to look through the lens of mental health and wellbeing when developing and reviewing the below policies:

Policies to consider
Behaviour
Safeguarding
Attendance
Anti-bullying
SEND
Equalities

Top Tip

Schools are not required to have a standalone mental health policy. Refer to existing policies that help staff respond to mental health and wellbeing issues, for example the safeguarding policy.

Questions to explore:

- How is mental health and wellbeing incorporated in our safeguarding policy?
- Do we have a standalone mental health policy?
- How does the behaviour policy consider the underlying causes of pupil's disruptive behaviour and pastoral interventions that may be implemented in response?
- How is mental health considered in other policies such as behaviour, attendance, anti-bullying and SEND? Do these policies need updating?

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NGA's pupil mental health and wellbeing guidance provides further information on governing boards' role in reviewing how wellbeing is embedded in school policies.

Staff training and CPD

School staff are on the front line of promoting the wellbeing of pupils and identifying and supporting those in need. School leaders and governing boards should consider how they ensure staff have the knowledge, skills, and training to effectively support pupils and how they support staff wellbeing.

Questions to explore:

- Have staff been trained to recognise and respond to mental health issues?
- Are you confident the training needs of staff have been met to ensure targeted support is available for pupils, such as for pastoral teams, and for those responsible for leading a whole school approach?
- How aware is the school community of the importance of promoting good mental health?

CPD resources

- Place2Be offer a free Mental Health Champions foundation programme, an online training course which aims to enhance education professionals' understanding of children's mental health: Children's mental health training course (place2be.org.uk)
- Further information on ensuring all staff and school leaders receive the right level of training to carry out their can be found in NGA's Pupil Wellbeing guidance

Interventions and support for pupils

Governing boards and leaders should ensure that the appropriate systems are in place to identify and support those pupils at risk of or struggling with poor mental health.

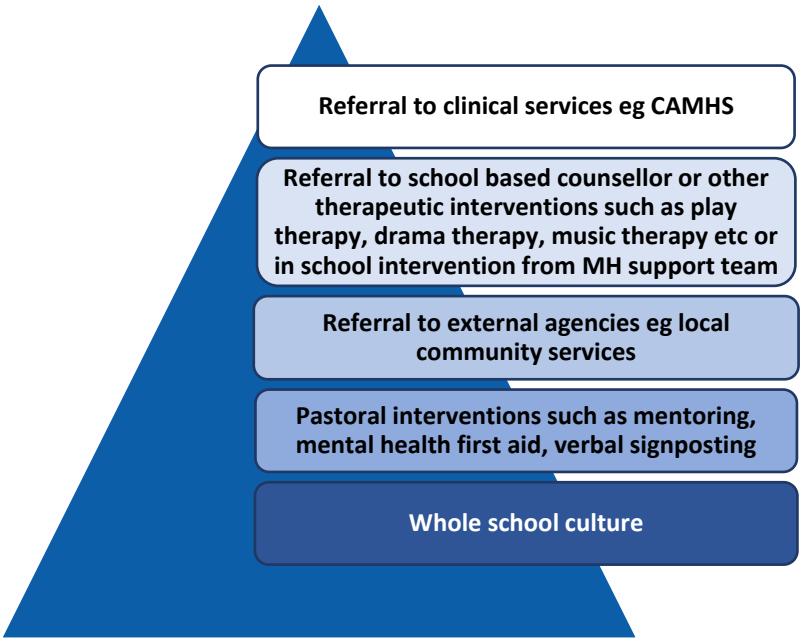
Questions to explore:

- What assurances do you have that you are effectively measuring pupil wellbeing and identifying those in need of additional support?
- Do we have targeted support available for pupils on site such as counselling?
- Is there evidence of the impact of school based interventions on pupil mental health and wellbeing?
- Have we pooled our knowledge of local support and services?

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Top Tip

Creating a tiered approach to addressing pupil mental health and wellbeing can ensure pupils gain the right and appropriate level of support at the right time.



Relevant resources

- 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.
- The Department for Education (DfE) have published guidance on Mental Health and Behaviour aimed at school leadership and governing boards.
- There are lots of local and national organisations that offer additional support to schools and trusts. The Youth Wellbeing Directory list services that can be filtered by name or region.

Stakeholder engagement

Engaging with families is fundamental to identifying pupils who are at an educational disadvantage due to challenges with their mental health and wellbeing. Creating links with parents and carers and encouraging them to share thoughts and opinions has been proven to have a positive impact on the pupil's wellbeing and wider educational journey.

Collaboration with external organisations can bring in expertise to support schools/trusts with any stage of their intervention model. This includes working with the police and other local organisations to get a broader understanding of community issues that may have an impact on mental health and wellbeing.

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Questions to explore:

- Is there evidence of appropriate interventions in place that support pupil mental health and wellbeing including external stakeholder engagement?
- Have we considered how best to work with parents and the wider community?
- How are you engaging with the local authority, mental health services, children's services, voluntary sector providers and others?
- How do you know your engagement with families is working and effective?

Relevant resources

- Joint guidance from the National Governance Association and Parentkind combines extensive knowledge on engaging with parents effectively
- The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families have practical resources for schools and trusts on engaging with parents and carers as part of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing
- NGA's collection of resources on staff workload and wellbeing offers guidance for governing boards in their role of creating a healthy working environment.

Further reading

- The Good childhood report 2022 from The Children's Society
- Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022: Official NHS statistics report
- Timpson Review of School Exclusion
- School behaviour policies: advice from Children & Young People's Mental Coalition
- Research paper: From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem — Place2Be
- Mental Health Foundation: One in ten children have no one to talk to in school when they are worried or sad
- I am Whole: the stigma faced by young people experiencing mental health difficulties

Place2Be services and support

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.

In 2021/22, the charity provided an embedded mental health service in over 500 UK primary and secondary schools, supporting a school community of around 243,000 children and young people.

Place2Be offers a variety of different mental health and counselling services for schools, including in-school support, expert training and resources. Their free Mental Health Champions – Foundation programme, and Senior Mental Health Leads Training, enhance professionals' understanding of children's mental health.

View Place2Be services

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