

What should schools and local authorities do to ensure the well-being of their pupils? In answering this question, you should refer to legislation, policy, best practice and theory.

It is not an uncommon knowledge, that well-being and mental health of pupils within schools are not up to the standards that they should be. Parliament (2017), stated in one of their reports that “Children and young people’s mental health remains a key priority for the Government”. In January 2017, the Prime Minister made a speech at the annual Charity Commision meeting, acknowledging that education plays an “important” role with regards to promoting positive and improved mental wellbeing. However, in the report it stated that, the Committees appreciate the fact that teachers are not mental health professionals, and in-fact need support from specialist services. This assignment will be trying to answer the question “what should schools and local authorities do to ensure the well-being of their pupils?”.

The school policies surrounding the well-being of pupils that are in place are very limited. Overall, schools must have some type of policy in place in order to keep the well-being and mental health of a child in check. For example, School A (2017), which is based in London, states that bullying is not tolerated, and that children should confidently be able to express what is bothering them without feeling any type of stigma. The policy that School A has put in place, states repeatedly the important of well-being and mental health, whilst also discussing the fact that that wellbeing is not just an absence of mental health problems, and every pupil should feel confident in themselves, manage stress and deal with change etc. School A discuss how staff have roles to play with regards to mental health, stating that it is important to promote positive mental health and to understand the risk factors that some pupils might experience. However, they understand that some pupils may have greater needs than others, stating that there would be a range of mental health professionals and organizations in order to help those who are in greater need of it. School A believes that children should be able to experience the promotion of good mental health. Due to this they have class activities, transition programs, and through the subject PSHCE, the pupils get to learn about emotional skills that will help them become more resilient, understand about mental health problems and how to feel that they can talk to someone about how they are feeling. As well as this, an early identification program is put in place in order to identify children who may be suffering with a mental health illness, in order to prevent the situation from getting worse. All staff at School A have received training on protective risk factors, types of mental health needs and signs that a pupil is experiencing

mental health problems. If a member of staff is concerned about a pupil, they are instructed to talk to the Mental Health Leader of the school. Staff are fully aware that some mental health needs, such as anxiety, might appear as non-compliant, disruptive or aggressive behavior which could include problems with attention or hyperactivity. This may be related to problems at home, difficulties with learning, peer relationships or development. The confidentiality of the child is very important. Staff are reminded that they should stay calm, supportive and non-judgmental of the situation with the child. The emotional and physical safety of the child is the most important thing. Children are then told that their concern will be shared with the Mental Health leader, ensuring the child gets the help that is needed. School A have a system in place that ensures that if a child needs help, they will get it, regardless of the situation. This is crucial in society today, as there are so many influences on young children that can cause a mental health issue; For example, bullying. However, other schools have different policies, therefore mental health and well-being cannot be solely reliant to have the same policy as School A.

Therefore, in order to get overview, it is important to view another school's policy. School B (2018), which is based in Pontypridd, has the same values as school A. However, it does not seem to have adopted the same approaches. As school A, tries to focus on how to spot a child who's wellbeing does not seem to be in fit condition, school B does not even discuss this in their policy. The opening statement of school B's policy regards academic outcome and attendance (something which is not even said in School A's policy). School B does have a wellbeing team, exactly like school A. However, the extent of school B's policy is nowhere near as in depth as School A. When looking into reports for Wales released by the School Health Research Network (2017-2018), there are notable inequalities with regards to wellbeing and mental health. In the report, it states how females report lower wellbeing and life satisfaction in comparison to males. It also states how wellbeing and life satisfaction reduces as adolescents progress through school. One in five students reported having fair or poor health, and females and those who have poor family affluence were more likely to rate their health as being poor. Life satisfaction differed by gender and family affluence, with fewer females and those from lower family affluence families rating their life satisfaction 6 or above (School Health Research Network,2017-2018). Longterm illness and disability affects a lot of pupils, with over 41% stating that their attendance and participation is greatly affected. It is important to remember that mental health issues count as an illness, and many pupils may not even mention to the school that they are suffering. So therefore, the percentage may increase with regards to the effect of their attendance. One in seven students reported to 'not like school at

all', and over 80% of student reporting they felt 'pressured' being in school with regards to the standard of grades etc. With regards to life at home, and family communication, 16% reported that they found it difficult and 9% found it very difficult. Males found its easier to confide in their fathers, whilst females did not feel the same. The statistics when looking at emotional support from families were shocking, with twelve percent of adolescents giving the strongest disagree score (which is 1) and a further 12% were on the disagree side of a neutral response (scores of 2 or 3). There was little variation in agreement that families provided emotional help and support across the study, where it ranged from 67% in Aneurin Bevan and Cardiff and Vale to 71% in Cwm Taf and Hywel Dda.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) states that "Take stock of mental health in your workplace". This can be related to school environments. The act points out how developing a clear picture of the mental health for the organization (in this case, school) it will allow you (teachers and other members of staff) understand the factors that affect pupil's well-being in school. Therefore, the school can identify how to support those pupils who are in need. It will then allow the school to assess the impact of their current approach, which will allow for further improvements. This will hopefully then which will allow for further improvements. This will hopefully then enhance the morale of students and increase their happiness at school. By doing this, the student may feel like they have a safe space in which they can confide in their teachers, or any member of staff in the school.

The priority of mental health in schools is crucial. As we are living in an age of social media, the influence others have on children is extremely worrying. The National Childrens Bureau have set up a small organization called Young Minds (2017). They have done research that shows, mental health in the classroom is the biggest issue that is having to be faced by teachers. Studies say that an estimated one in three children in every class room has a diagnosable mental health condition; And this rises to one in four children when emotional stress is considered. Suicide is now the most common cause of death for boys aged between five and nineteen, and the second most common for girls of that age. As well as this, one in every twelve young people deliberately self-harm, though this may rise to almost one in three girls aged fifteen. Rates of depression and anxiety have increased by 70% in the past twenty-five years. Childline reported that the number of young people calling about mental health problems had risen by 36% in the

last four years. A&E's across the country had stated the number young people admitting themselves into their services due to psychiatric conditions had more than doubled between 2010/11 and 2014/15. A Young Minds activist named Jessica stated

“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”

Even from the examples stated before about schools maintaining the idea that wellbeing and mental health is the most important factor, it does not mean that they fully enforce that belief. In Education policy, particularly under the Coalition Government (2010-15), there was increased pressure on academic outcomes, with more value given to league tables, and a greater focus on exams over coursework. The main factor is that schools are not encouraged or supported to help pupils to develop the crucial skills, attributes and knowledge that they will need to be successful in adult life. Yet due to funding restraints and the lack of prominence given to wellbeing in legislation and the frameworks of school inspections, schools are not encouraged to promote wellbeing. Schools are not encouraged or incentivized to direct resource to wellbeing provision. (Young Minds, 2017).

When considering the fact that schools should be promoting and helping with a pupils wellbeing and mental health, it is shocking to discover that studies taken out by UK Government (GOV,2018), have discovered that the school equality policies that they had reviewed were more likely to promote respectful school communities, rather than mental health and wellbeing. It also showed, that equality policies were mainly focused on harassment and discrimination under the duties of the Equality Act, yet very few made connections with wellbeing and mental health. It was also discovered that there were no examples of schools considering mental illness as a disability within their policies of equality. In the report, many students felt they had low mental health and that they had no one to talk to, and by secondary school this figure had increased. However, when looking at the research conducted by the School Health Research Network (previously mentioned), the figures are contradicted. The School Health Research Network's study stated that pupils felt like they had a 'safe space', and that they felt like they could talk to someone if they needed to about their mental health. Yet, when looking at organizations such as Young Minds, this could not be more opposite as to what they are saying. These types of surveys and studies taken out only brings up the question,

as to if wellbeing and mental health are essentially being ‘brushed under the carpet’, as funding from the government does not allow for sufficient help or guidance to schools.

For schools to improve the wellbeing and mental health of students, Anna Freud – The National Centre for Children and Families (n.d.) has devised a resource for schools, in order to try and support the mental health and wellbeing of students. The booklet that is provided, gives insight into issues such as anxiety, attachment, self-harm etc. The booklet states on how staff can help and support a pupil who is suffering with low mental health and gives a step by step guide on how to approach the situation with the pupil. Resources such as this, should be available in every school, therefore giving staff the opportunity to understand and talk to the pupil, therefore meaning that the pupil will feel like they have a safe space to talk with someone that they are able to trust and not feel like there is any stigma surrounding what has been said. The Anna Freud organization allows for sources of material to be used teachers and schools. The information that is relayed in these sources are trustworthy and shares clinical expertise regarding wellbeing and mental health for schools.

In order for the wellbeing and mental health of pupils to be improved, the correct methods of support need to be in place. Each child should have the opportunity to express how they feel, meaning they feel comfortable and confident expressing their concerns. With the information that has been provided in this essay, there is extensive works to be done, in order to improve the wellbeing and mental health of pupils. Schools should be enforcing policies that are purely for mental health, and teachers should be able to recognize if one of their pupils are struggling. In regard to the aspect that this cannot be achieved due to funding from the government, the Anna Freud organization proves that there are steps that can be taken in order to help and support a pupil at any point in time. To summarize, schools need to understand that not every pupil can strive for academic success due to the fact, their wellbeing and mental health is low; That low wellbeing and mental health can be related and linked to many things, such as a poor life at home, pressure from school to perform well, bullying etc. It is important that local authorities keep records of pupil's behavior, and to keep reassuring them that school is a safe space where their voices can be heard.

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (no date) *Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools*.

Can be found at:

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/7198/supporting-mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-schools.pdf>

The Future Generations Act (2015) *Mental Health in Your Workplace*

Can be found at:

<https://futuregenerations.wales/aop/take-stock-of-mental-health-in-your-workplace/>

GOV (2018) *Mental health and wellbeing provision in schools*.

Can be found at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747709/Mental_health_and_wellbeing_provision_in_schools.pdf

National Childrens Bureau (2017) *Young Minds, Wise Up- Prioritizing Wellbeing in Schools*.

Can be found at:

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/1428/wise-up-prioritising-wellbeing-in-schools.pdf>

Parliament (2016-2017) *Children and young people's mental health—the role of education: Government Response to the First Joint Report of the Education and Health Committees of Session*.

Can be found at:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/451/451.pdf>

Pontypridd School (2018) *School B*

Can be found at:

<https://www.pontypriddhighschool.co.uk/wellbeing>

Primrose School (2017) *School A*

Can be found at:

<http://www.primrosehill.camden.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Metal-Health-Wellbeing-Policy-February-2017.pdf>

School Health Research Network (2017/2018) *Student Health and Wellbeing In Wales:
Report of the 2017/18 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health
Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey*

Can be Found at:

<http://www.shrn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/SHRN-HBSC-NR-20.05.2019.pdf>