

Measuring the mental wellbeing of children and young people in education

Getting started: an introduction for schools and colleges



Getting started with measuring children and young people's mental wellbeing

Schools and colleges are using a broad range of approaches to support the mental wellbeing and resilience of their pupils. Members of staff, however, do not always feel equipped to assess the particular priorities for their populations, to identify those pupils who require more support, or to evaluate whether the approaches they invest in are having the intended impact.

The Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) has over a decade of experience in measuring and monitoring children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We have put together this simple introduction to help schools and colleges develop their thinking and get started on measuring mental wellbeing.

This booklet considers:

- **Why measure mental wellbeing?**
- **What can be used to measure mental wellbeing?**
- **How could it work in practice?**
- **Things to consider**
- **Useful tools and resources**

CORC have produced a number of tools and resources that can help you get started with measuring children and young people's mental wellbeing. Please visit our website www.corc.uk.net or contact us on 0207 443 2225 to discuss the support you need.

Why measure mental wellbeing?

We know that one in ten children and young people aged between five and sixteen have a clinically diagnosable mental problem. Schools and colleges working in this context have three main reasons to consider measuring or monitoring mental wellbeing:

- 1. The big picture:** to better understand their school or college overall, including the breadth and depth of difficulties for pupils.
- 2. Identification and support:** to identify pupils that may need additional support – and to provide it in a timely way.
- 3. Evaluation and improvement:** to track changes in mental wellbeing over time, to evaluate and improve the impact of interventions, school approaches or staff development.

What can be used to measure mental wellbeing?

While a range of types of information can be used as indicators of mental wellbeing – including, for example, engagement at school – it is most often measured using questionnaires about how an individual feels or functions.

These measures can be suited to different contexts and purposes, and completed by a child or young person about themselves (self-report), or by a parent, carer, teacher, or other professional.

How could it work in practice?

1. The big picture

The Headteacher at Bluebird Secondary was clear that pupils needed additional mental wellbeing support, but was undecided about what to prioritise. She used the Wellbeing Measurement Framework to get an overall picture of emotional wellbeing, mental health issues, coping, risk, and resilience factors.

How did they go about it? Pupils in year 9 were asked to complete the set of questionnaires electronically – which made it easy to capture and analyse responses, but did require some coordination in the IT suite. Although the responses were anonymous, there was an opt-out option where parents had concerns.

What happened? The questionnaires highlighted areas of strength, for example pupils feeling supported at school; but also challenges, including high levels of anxiety for a significant minority. The Headteacher shared the data with her management team and with school governors, and together they used it to devise their support programme. Ofsted were very interested in this evidence-led approach when they visited.

2. Identification and support

At The Orangewood School, the Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire is used as a tool to identify children who may need additional support.

How did they go about it? Year 5 pupils complete the questionnaire as part of a lesson on mental health. Those who score above the agreed threshold have a one on one check-in meeting with a school learning mentor. The meeting is used to explore what is happening academically, socially and emotionally, and decide on any additional support needed.

What happens? Teachers and learning mentors find the questionnaires help identify pupils that are struggling and pick up on issues that might otherwise be missed, especially problems like anxiety and low mood. At a follow-up meeting six weeks later, pupils complete the questionnaire again. This is an opportunity to revisit the support plan if things are not getting better.

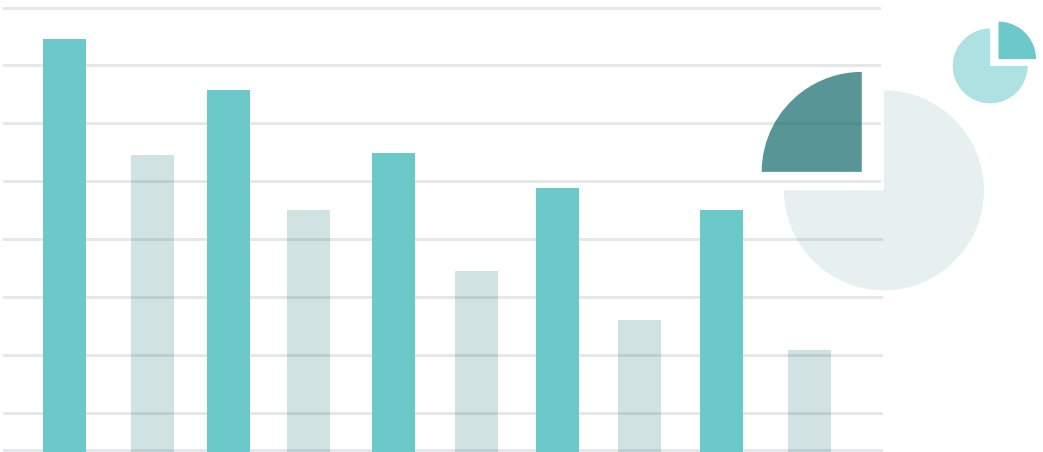


3. Evaluation and improvement

Evergreen Academy wanted to improve emotional wellbeing among pupils in year 8, and trialled a Mindfulness intervention with one class. The Head of Year, was keen to evaluate before rolling this out more widely.

How did they go about it? The Head of Year decided to ask pupils to complete the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) at the start and end of the trial period to see how things had improved. They used paper questionnaires, and the school data manager entered the answers into a spreadsheet and created useful graphs.

What happened? Although the number of pupils involved was fairly small, the Academy could see the average scores had increased. By looking at guidance and national studies for this questionnaire, the Academy knew the increase was likely to be a meaningful one. They noticed that the girls' scores tended to be lower overall, and decided to discuss what this might signify and any appropriate response.



Things to consider

Introducing mental wellbeing questionnaires can help young people actively think about how they feel, recognise or articulate issues that may be infrequently discussed. This can act as a valuable starting point for conversations, but be aware that it may also bring up sensitive issues and raise expectations.

- ✓ *Be prepared: be clear about why you are asking and what you will do with the responses you receive; consider if parents, carers, or other stakeholders also need to be communicated with.*

Information from mental wellbeing questionnaires should not be used in isolation.

- ✓ *Always apply professional judgement and consider the data in context and alongside other types of information, for example about school engagement, home environment, or appropriate benchmarks.*

Think about issues of consent and confidentiality and how these apply to your plans to collect, store, analyse or communicate about response data.

- ✓ *Give consideration to any data protection, information governance or ethical requirements.*

Where possible, we recommend using a standardised measure which has gone through a research process to test whether it is ‘valid’ and ‘reliable’.

- ✓ *Find a measure that best suits your purpose by exploring the information in the Outcomes and Experience Measures section on the CORC website.*

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Useful tools and resources

Unless otherwise noted, resources can be accessed through CORC's information hub www.corc.uk.net/information-hub.

- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit for Schools:** a detailed guide, including information about a range of validated mental wellbeing questionnaires and case studies. Produced by Public Health England, the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families and CORC.
- **E-learning module:** Measuring mental wellbeing to improve the lives of children and young people www.corc.uk.net/elearning/.
- **EBPU Logic Model:** a tool for setting out clearly what a given approach or intervention aims to achieve and the best measure(s) for evaluating it.
- **Wellbeing Measurement Framework:** sets of questionnaires selected to measure key aspects of wellbeing and resilience for primary schools, secondary schools and colleges.
- **CORC Outcome and Experience Measures:** a comprehensive hub of information and downloadable measures.
- **SPECTRUM Database:** an online database of measures, addressing social, psychological, emotional, concepts of self, and resilience domains www.spectrum-review.info.
- **Schools in Mind:** a free network for school staff and allied professionals which shares academic and clinical expertise about wellbeing and mental health issues that affect schools www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/.
- **CORC Membership:** join our network of professionals and organisations working to improve young people's mental health www.corc.uk.net/about-corc/membership-models.



The Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) is the UK's leading member organisation that collects and uses evidence to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Our support for schools

CORC's team of mental health measurement experts work with schools, colleges and other education providers to measure the impact of the social, emotional and wellbeing support they provide.

We can also offer staff training, data analysis and tailored support in the following areas:

- choosing and using measures of mental wellbeing
- advice on processes and systems for capturing the information
- guidance on interpreting mental wellbeing data and using it to inform your approaches
- guidance on identifying and developing support plans for children and young people experiencing mental health difficulties, or at risk.

CORC is a not-for-profit learning consortium with a membership that includes mental health service providers, schools, professional bodies and research institutions with a shared commitment to a improving outcomes for children and young people.

Find out more about becoming a member of CORC or accessing our support
www.corc.uk.net
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