

A common language and preventative approach needed to tackle the mental health emergency facing our young people, say education leaders

We were delighted to welcome a panel of experts from a range of professional arenas concerned with young people, with an international reach, to debate why, despite research suggesting that as many as five students in every classroom across the UK is suffering from a mental health illness, why we aren't declaring a mental health emergency for our young people?

While the panellists recognised it is unlikely that a universal approach will tackle these complex issues, they agreed that there needs to be a seismic shift in the conversation about mental health to tackle some of the issues young people are facing and better prepare them for the challenges of the modern world.

The suggestions included a focus on preventative measures, establishing a common approach and language to talking about positive mental health in classrooms, and greater value being placed on and measuring the impact mental health has on other areas, such as ability to learn, behaviour, progress, and attainment.

The key recommendations included:

1. **Working together** – while the conversation about mental health and wellbeing has come a long way in recent years, it is important that schools, multi-academy trusts and policymakers now work more closely together to form a common approach and expectations to teaching mental health and wellbeing
2. **Establishing consistency and structure** – by establishing a common language and structure to teaching mental health, focusing on building, and maintaining positive mental health, young people can be better equipped with the necessary skills to deal with life's challenges. It will also help to clarify the school's and teachers roles in tackling the issue and supporting other front line health services
3. **Empowering young people** – too often 'mental health' refers to 'mental health illnesses'. Instead, education should seek to empower young people to build and maintain a healthy mental state that allows them to be successful in other areas of their life and empower them with the tools and resilience to deal with mental health challenges

4. **Valuing the impact of mental health** – schools and education leaders should want to know the impact the mental health and wellbeing is having on the development of young people. In the same way that absenteeism affects academic performance, schools and governors should want to know how improving mental health and wellbeing can improve the personal development of young people
5. **Improved and focused resources** – funding and resources are already stretched and squeezed between competing priorities that often focus on academic performance league tables. While some schools have been able to invest in support for young people suffering with mental health illnesses, additional funding, resources, and development should now be targeted at allowing schools to deliver this more proactive and preventative approach to teaching young people about their mental health and wellbeing

We are now asking our members and schools to share their own experiences and share their support for these proposed changes.

After we have collated this information, we hope to share our findings with Ofsted and the Department for Education to create meaningful impact that will improve the lives of many thousands of young people in the future and provide a clearer framework and expectations for schools to teach mental health, wellbeing, and personal development to their young people.

Please add your **experiences and pledge your support** to our campaign by visiting: [Jigsaw Survey – Share your experiences](#)

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