

Action for Children response to Indicators of a school's contribution to well-being – Consultation

Action for Children welcomes the opportunity to respond to this key document. We fully support the development of indicators to help schools to evaluate their contribution to pupil wellbeing. This is an opportunity to promote wellbeing further within education settings to both support children and young people's academic progress and promote their emotional resilience as they move through the different stages of their lives.

Action for Children has been highlighting the importance of emotional wellbeing for some time through our Growing Strong campaign, as we believe it is instrumental in helping a child realise their full potential in life. Developing qualities such as self-confidence and resilience equips a child with the emotional skills and inner belief to make the most of opportunities, and overcome any challenges, that they may have in the future.

We will only be responding to the questions in this consultation that relate to our direct work with children and young people

Action for Children

Action for Children helps nearly 170,000 children, young people and their families through nearly 450 projects across the UK. Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

Action for children supporting children and young people through schools

Action for Children run 6 schools, working with children and young people in education settings as a part of multi-agency teams and work with families supporting the emotional resilience of their children.

Action for children schools work with children and young people who cannot be taught within mainstream education. Currently we are working with just over 100 young people within our schools and have, in the past five years supported just over 350 children and young people.

The children and young people who attend our schools are amongst the most vulnerable and excluded children in the UK.

Action for Children's work is built upon combining a structured education with emotional support and guidance, we encourage children and young people to make their own choices and achieve their own positive outcomes. Action for Children is committed to creating a caring and safe environment where children can realise their full potential.

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Action for Children response to consultation questions

Question 1 Do you agree with this view of schools' accountability for wellbeing?

Action for Children's Growing Strong campaign has been highlighting the huge impact emotional wellbeing has on young people's futures. At the beginning of our campaign we published the 10 steps to growing strong and what we felt needed to change to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing. In relation to schools we said:

We want schools to help children develop emotional wellbeing and support those who particularly need emotional support. Recognising that children's emotional wellbeing is critical to their learning, some schools have set up buddy schemes and circle time and have trained staff to spot potential problems early. Action for Children wants this to be standard practice in all schools.

We want the government to set targets that are based on positive measures of emotional wellbeing – not just the reduction of harmful behaviour. The government is committed to introducing targets but has yet to work these out or how they will be measured. Action for Children has devised outcome-based measures to assess the impact of our services and we are keen to share this information.

Action for Children is therefore very pleased that the government is promoting wellbeing in schools and ensuring that it will be recognised in Ofsted inspections.

Schools accountability for wellbeing

Yes, we agree that "schools can influence a range of outcomes beyond those relating to achievement¹ and that this should therefore be assessed through Ofsted inspections. However we do recognise that there are limitations to how far schools can be accountable for external factors.

Statistically there are a number of children and young people who do not achieve the same academic standards as their peers when they have chaotic lives; however by bringing more consistency, stability and positive relationships into their lives we can increase their outcomes.

This is why we believe that children and young people's educational attainment should be viewed in the context of their lives not focusing solely on attainment as equalling their success.

Multiagency working

We know schools have a huge role to play within the promotion of emotional wellbeing, however schools do not work in a vacuum and there is a real need for joined up services especially from those who provide support for the most vulnerable groups.

For example Action for Children's Chance for Change project works in a multidisciplinary team to support school children in Northern Ireland.

Action for children Chance for Change project

The Chance for Change project is targeted at 7-11 year old children who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is delivered through a strategic partnership between the Western Health and Social Care Trust and Action for Children. The project was initially

¹ Indicators of a school's contribution to well-being pg 9

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funded by the Children's Fund until March 2008, with further support from the DHSSPS committed until March 2009.

The service has been developed within the broad context of Family Support Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Tiers 1-2) as an early intervention prevention initiative, the project aims to improve outcomes for children, particularly their emotional health and wellbeing.

The Chance for Change programmes involve 8-10 children and 12-16 carers/parents, although all programmes are tailored to meet the specific support needs of participating children and their families.

A recent evaluation of Action for Children Chance for Change service that supports young people who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties in Northern Ireland has highlighted that:

"Chance for Change provides a unique model for effective partnership working, through a successful tripartite approach involving children, parents, and teaching staff. It's operational effectiveness has enabled the project to achieve its aims in relation to addressing a number of issues and good outcomes concerning primary school children experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. The evaluation also highlighted that these benefits could not have been achieved without the integrated, holistic approach adopted by the Chance for Change project."

Action for Children's schools

Action for Children Schools know it is important for all children and young people to achieve their full potential and recognise the importance of wellbeing as being a key factor in their development.

Our commitment to influencing the range of outcomes important to young people's development can be seen through the following example of best practice from Action for Children Westwood School. Westwood School is a Non-Maintained Special School that provides for the needs of children with emotional, behavioural and associated learning difficulties. It offers 38 weeks of full time education for boys and girls aged between 11 and 16 years.

Action for Children Westwood School

The school works an interactive curriculum. The model recognises that children have primary, social and interactive needs. Unless the primary needs are addressed it is not possible to move on to their interaction with others and subsequently their ability to work within the academic curriculum of the school.

The primary needs include the child's self esteem and confidence and how these are promoted will be different for each child. Each child's primary needs are addressed within the behaviour management plan. The child's progress on the behaviour management plan is then monitored and reviewed.

We have also included a case study of one of the young people we work with at Action for Children Headlands. Headlands is an independent co-educational special school, providing support for pupils with challenging behaviour and autistic spectrum disorders. We feel that Dan's story illustrates why schools are so much more than education facilitators.

Dan's story

'These days I feel like I really want to go the distance'

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'I first got involved with Headlands, one of Action for Children's schools, about four years ago when my parents sought out help with my autism. Back then I wasn't a great brother or a son – I was noisy, obnoxious and bad tempered when I didn't get my way. I was a terror really.

When I was 10 or 11 years old it started to get worse and I was constantly getting angry. I was afraid one day I'd leave my parents and something would happen and I wouldn't be able to survive.

After about a year of being at Headlands, I got a bit steadier and started being a bit more friendly with people. My key worker really helped. He was always the guy who helped me through things and gave me advice. Now I'm beginning to feel a lot more confident. People have said I'm a lot more respectful and more honest, and people have given me their trust.

These days I feel like I really want to go the distance; I want to run all the way and never stop and keep on until I reach my true potential. I just want to say thank you to my key worker and thank you Action for Children – you've made my life a lot better, you've made me the man I am now.'

Question 3 Do you agree about the use and limitations of indicators?

We agree that the indicators must be useful to schools in undertaking self evaluation and in improving the quality of the education and care they provide for children and young people.

We do recognise that with wellbeing and crucially emotional wellbeing that there will be limitations to the indicators that should be recognised. We feel that as much support as possible should be provided to schools and staff to develop a clearer understanding of what emotional wellbeing is, how to promote it and why it is important to their pupils.

Question 6 Will the items listed in paragraph 26 yield appropriate indicators of pupils' wellbeing and the schools contribution to it?

Measuring / defining emotional wellbeing

We appreciate the difficulties in identifying appropriate indicators for wellbeing as these can be very subjective and difficult to measure especially in terms of emotional wellbeing.

Action for Children has for example developed a definition of emotional wellbeing as follows:

An emotionally well child or young person has empathy and self-awareness. They are able to manage their feelings, are motivated and have good social skills. A child or young person who is Growing Strong is one who works well, plays well, loves well and expects to achieve their full potential.²

This definition was developed from the following two literature reviews we commissioned to tell us about the nature of resilience, and the implications for the provision of services to improve outcomes for children and young people.

² **Emotional wellbeing and social mobility – a new urgency to the debate, Action for Children (2008)** <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/29/3663.pdf>

Literature Review: The Emotional Harm and Well-being of Children
<http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/36/1583.pdf>

Literature Review: Resilience in Children and Young People
<http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/36/1582.pdf>

Emotional Wellbeing indicators

We understand the problems of defining emotional wellbeing indicators, and with this in mind, below is an extract from an evaluation which looked at the impact of our promotion of emotional wellbeing within three of our specialist schools. We have identified the following themes as being key to this success: Self esteem, Peer relationships, Targets and rewards, Multi disciplinary approach, Healthy Lifestyles and Adult Role Models/Staff Groups/Communication. We feel that these headings may assist with your thought process when developing the most appropriate indicator set.

The outcomes from our research have shown that our schools have been successful in improving their pupil's emotional wellbeing under these themes and identifies how this was measured.

Self esteem - A common approach for all the schools is to start by looking at the level of a child's self esteem. There is a clear indication from schools of the value of using reliable baseline information developed with young people themselves and reviewing this information as a young person develops in order to gauge progress or otherwise.

Peer relationships - Each school promotes the development of positive peer relationships, for example using an interactive curriculum model which recognises that children have primary, social and interactive needs which all need to be addressed if they are to effectively access the academic curriculum. All the schools use assemblies as a public opportunity with their peers to report on and celebrate achievements.

Targets and rewards - Each school includes the children in the setting of targets for behaviour and achievement and these targets are included in the child's individual crisis plan or daily living plan.

Multi disciplinary approach - All the schools combine a multi disciplinary staff group working on site. There is a tremendous advantage in being able to access immediately services needed for children on site without having to refer on to outside services with waiting lists. It also means that the additional professionals have a working relationship with the staff or school and a better understanding of the approaches needed to contribute effectively to the children care plans.

Healthy Lifestyles - A common theme was the promotion of "Healthy Schools" covering a range of issues including diet, smoking, exercise, bullying and self care skills.

Adult Role Models/Staff Groups/Communication - The benefit to the children of having staff available to them in both care and teaching capacities who are consistent and caring probably cannot be underestimated but is undoubtedly the hardest area to measure. All the schools emphasised the need to keep close and good working relationships with the children's parents and carers and also those professionals involved with each child and had systems and staff in place to enable this.

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The availability of positive adult role models, consistent and positive care and close liaison with family and other professionals is likely to be where the most benefit will be for a child as far as their emotional well being is concerned.

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