

Curriculum and assessment review- CYPMHC response

54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

The curriculum is one key mechanism through which children and young people's mental health and wellbeing can be supported at school. Curriculum, teaching and learning that promotes resilience and supports social and emotional learning is one of the eight principles of a whole school and college approach to mental health and wellbeing (DfE & OHID, 2015). Government guidance indicates that all schools and colleges based programmes of learning have the potential to benefit pupils' health and wellbeing (Ibid). These opportunities currently exist through dedicated Personal Social Health and Economic education and Relationships, Sex and Health Education. Other parts of the wider curriculum such as arts, sports and drama can also complement these programmes.

However, our members have previously raised concerns about the limited opportunities within the curriculum to support and promote mental health and wellbeing (Rainer & Abdinasir, 2021; Rainer et al., 2022). This can be attributed to over prioritisation of school performance and attainment (Abdinasir, 2019). For example, a survey conducted by the Association of School and College Leaders found that eight in ten leaders said that reformed GCSEs have created greater levels of stress and anxiety among their students. One of the most cited reasons for this was students having to memorise more content (85%) followed by students having to sit more exams (83%) (ASCL, 2018). Furthermore, eight in ten young people surveyed by YoungMinds say that academic pressure has significantly impacted on their mental health (Young Minds, 2019).

Social and emotional learning is a key aspect of a curriculum that supports mental health and wellbeing and there is wide ranging evidence of its benefits. For example, evidence has suggested that it can tackle the risk factors for poor mental health (CASEL, nd), has a positive impact on mental wellbeing (Taylor et al., 2017) and is more important than cognitive ability for future life satisfaction and mental health and wellbeing (Goodman et al., 2018). The Government's decision to make Relationships, Sex and Health Education a compulsory part of the curriculum, including mental health as a key part, is an important step however more can be done to ensure that all children and young people are able to have access to a curriculum that supports mental health and wellbeing.

The Education Endowment Foundation identified what effective practice of implementing social and emotional learning in schools looked like and this included: an explicit curriculum composed of structured lessons and key teaching elements such as storytelling, cognitive modelling, teacher instructions role- play and multi- media stimulus (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Building on this, it is important that schools are resourced and adequately supported to embed social and emotional learning into the curriculum.

There are also a range of additional subjects that are beneficial for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and a truly inclusive education system is one that allows all children and young people to access the subjects that reflect their interest, skills and abilities. Sports and arts are two amongst many examples of subjects that benefit children and young people's wellbeing. For example, research from Youth Sport found that greater sports participation was associated with higher levels of wellbeing and was a significant predictor of self-belief and mental resilience (Youth Sports Trust, 2023). Furthermore, an evidence review conducted by University College London for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and

Sport noted that there is promising evidence that arts engagement can support wellbeing in young people (Fancourt et al., 2020). However, both subjects have undergone significant cuts leading to reductions in pupil's time spent on these subjects. Data from the Government highlight a loss of 4000 hours of PE from the curriculum in state funded secondary schools in the previous academic years (Youth Sport Trust, 2023b) and fewer arts GCSEs are now studied across England's schools compared to a decade ago (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2020) amounting to a decrease of 40% since 2010 (The Guardian, 2023).

It is essential that all pupils can access a curriculum that supports social and emotional learning and provides access to subjects that supports their wellbeing. This should be embedded as a key part of a whole school and college approach to mental health and wellbeing

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