



Centre for Young Lives – Call for Evidence: An aspirational vision for inclusive schools

Place2Be evidence. May 2024

Q: What would a truly inclusive education system, in which all young people thrive, look like?

Place2Be has 30 years' experience providing school-based mental health support, based on robust evaluation and evidence, promoting a whole-school approach to mental health. This involves counselling support for pupils, mental health training for staff and coaching for parents. Our embedded mental health practitioners are available to support the school to develop their mental health policies and build an inclusive education setting.

We believe that inclusive schools have whole-school policies and practices in place that prioritise mental health and wellbeing. This involves:

- Identifying children and young people who are at higher risk of school suspension or exclusion (e.g. those who are care-experienced, those with a mental health condition, Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND); those from minority or disadvantaged communities) and providing relevant early intervention and support;
- Understanding that behaviour is a form of communication; and therefore it is important for school staff to respond positively and constructively, not punitively;
- Having systems in place to understand barriers in access to education and engagement in learning, and overcoming these in a way that meets that child's needs;
- Engaging with parents and families to support the whole-school approach to wellbeing, through training, family practitioners, coaching and support;
- Working with other providers (e.g. NHS, Alternative Provision (AP), mental health services), to deliver a more connected local system. This would allow every child to access appropriate support, including specialist care, to deliver the best outcomes for all children and young people.

When schools commit to an inclusive ethos, backed up with an on-site expert mental health service, there are widespread benefits for school communities, where all young people thrive. Place2Be research, based on our services in schools, shows that:

- Intervening early with mental health support and increasing connection, belonging and enjoyment of school, is associated with decreased rates of persistent school absences.¹
- Mental health support is associated with reduced school suspensions.²
- Our services are also key to supporting academic progress.
 - o Children between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 who received counselling keep pace academically with their peers.³

¹ Education Select Committee, [Written evidence submitted by Place2Be](#), 2023

² Toth, K., Golden, S., et al, [From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem: fixed period school exclusions and mental health outcomes from routine outcome monitoring among children and young people attending school counselling](#), 2022

³ Place2Be, [25 years' learning from practice and evaluation](#), 2021



- We consistently see an improvement in pupils' attitude to learning: teachers reported an improvement in classroom learning for 64% of children who had one-to-one counselling with Place2Be.
- After Place2Be support, 65% of pupils caused fewer problems to their teacher or class.⁴
- Independent experts [Pro Bono Economics](#) found that Place2Be's one-to-one support could generate an average of £8,700 in economic benefits over the lifetime of the individual child, through higher employment prospects and wages, decreased truancy, school exclusion, smoking and criminal behaviour.
- Around 75% of children who come to us with severe difficulties record an improvement in wellbeing after Place2Be support.⁵

"Following the one-to-one sessions, we noticed a remarkable difference... Ceri⁶ enters school happy, independent and settled. She has responded extremely well to the sessions and presents as a totally different child – her head is held high, she smiles, she engages and attends school regularly. More importantly, she has equipped herself with the skills and confidence and is now ready for her next step in education." - Headteacher

Q. What prevents us from having a truly inclusive education system now?

Place2Be has identified four key barriers that inhibit schools from prioritising mental health, wellbeing, and inclusion.

1. Funding

The primary barrier schools face is the lack of dedicated funding for mental health provision. A study by the [NAHT](#) found that almost half of teachers said their school was preparing to cut back on non-essential services, including mental health services, as a result of budgetary pressures. Schools need funding and resources to implement a whole-school approach to mental health that supports the wellbeing of every child in the school. Schools are continually at the frontline of challenges facing children's mental health, with a high demand for help supporting pupils' mental health.

Place2Be supports schools to build an inclusive setting for young people – yet most schools commission this service using their existing budgets. Without statutory provision, or service delivery funded by local authorities and local health services, school-based mental health services are unsustainable. Other programmes, such as NHS Mental Health Support Teams, are beginning to provide a base level of support to schools, yet these are only available to 44% of pupils and 34% of schools and colleges in England, and their long-term expansion is unclear. These teams consist of Educational Mental Health Practitioners (EMHPs) who provide lower-level interventions for mild-to-moderate mental health issues. To ensure more pupils' needs are being met, MHSTs should include expert, qualified child counsellors.

To make every school inclusive, they need to be able to fund and deliver an on-site mental health service.

⁴ Place2Be, [Impact Report 2023](#), 2024

⁵ Place2Be, [Impact Report 2023](#), 2024

⁶ Names have been changed



2. Capacity

School staff and leaders should be offered training to better understand children’s mental health as part of their continuous professional development, as well as in initial teacher training. Place2Be runs two mental health training courses for school staff: [Senior Mental Health Leads](#) and the [Mental Health Champions Foundation programme](#) to build school staff’s understanding of the importance of creating a positive inclusive culture. After the Senior Mental Health Leads course, 85% of participants had a clear plan on how to prioritise their school’s mental health activity, compared to 25% at the beginning. 90% of Foundation programme completers have used or intend to use one or more approach from the programme in their work. Senior Mental Health Leads should be supported by the DfE to embed the learnings of their training into school procedures, adapt their provision based on the school’s unique needs, in order to ensure the course is being implemented effectively.

However, capacity remains limited for teachers to make time for training and development. A DfE commissioned research report in April 2023 “Working Lives of teachers and leaders – wave 1” found that the biggest barrier to accessing CPD was the lack of time for CPD due to workload or competing priorities (66%), although the cost of CPD (42%) and lack of cover (41%) were both commonly mentioned barriers.

Most teachers are struggling to carry out core teaching responsibilities, meaning also providing mental health support represents an additional strain on their workload and headspace. [An NAHT report](#) found that staffing cuts are disproportionately likely to affect pupils with SEND, vulnerable pupils, and pupils with mental health needs. An expert, on-site counsellor would lift this strain from school staff, allowing them to focus on teaching and educational support.

3. Role of school governors, trustees and leadership

Governors are responsible for holding the school to account for their policies and procedures. There needs to be better recognition by governors of the importance of embedding inclusion within school practices – for example, the 2023 survey by the National Governance Association (NGA) found a 6% decline in measures supporting pupil mental health and wellbeing, with this issue placing eighth on the list of governor strategic priorities, with only 16% of governors reporting this as a key priority in 2023.⁷ We support the work of the NGA in promoting information and resources on wellbeing among their members.

Trustees and governors should be better informed on the benefits of inclusion for their school. Inclusion and positive environments can most benefit vulnerable pupils, with poor mental health and SEND, as well as those from socially deprived or racialised communities. Governors and trustees should understand the impact of poor mental health on pupil learning, and see the value of investing in mental health initiatives, particularly in supporting these disadvantaged learners.

A lack of investment and direction from governors and trustees fails to ensure inclusive procedures are appropriately followed. We recognise that governors and trustees are often time-stretched, volunteers, and face external pressures from the DfE, Ofsted, parents and more – these factors can limit the ability

⁷ National Governance Association [Annual Report 2023](#)



to focus whole-heartedly on wellbeing. We will continue to work with organisations such as the NGA to understand the barriers facing members in promoting wellbeing, as well as sharing best practice.

4. Ofsted and accountability

Ofsted's primary focus on academic attainment may lead schools to deprioritise other outcomes such as inclusion and pupil wellbeing. We welcome the moves indicated by the new HMCI around mental health training for inspectors, however we need wider reforms to the inspection and reporting process that incentivise schools to focus on inclusion and positive cultures. This will form Place2Be's submission to Ofsted's Big Listen Consultation.

Pressures imposed by Ofsted around academic success can result in so-called 'problem' children sometimes being excluded from school (known as 'off-rolling'), to minimise their impact on a school's performance. These young people are often vulnerable, with poor mental health, resulting in issues with attainment, behaviour and school attendance. This practice fundamentally opposed inclusion, therefore we need greater understanding of when this is happening, and provide support to schools to prevent it.

Q. How should a future government remove those barriers; and what specific policies could bring about the change we seek?

Place2Be's policy recommendations propose that schools should be inclusive environments that understand and nurture wellbeing. To achieve this, we recommend the following measures:

- DfE and NICE guidance on a whole-school approach to supporting pupil wellbeing should be followed by every school, with schools being given the necessary funding and resources to do this.
- School staff should be equipped with knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing relevant to their roles – with modules embedded from initial teacher training, through the career framework, and up to senior leadership.
- School ethos should commit to uplifting wellbeing, building resilience and the emotional strength of school populations including staff and pupils. This should form a key part of school accountability and oversight metrics.
- Schools should routinely collect data on pupil wellbeing and work with the NHS to more effectively utilise this information locally and nationally to gain a clearer understanding of mental health needs.

Every school needs to have the right tools to make their school inclusive, which can be brought through the expertise, capacity and support of an embedded, mental health service. To achieve this, we need to see:



- Government investment in mental health programmes and services delivering early intervention, prevention, and providing support further 'upstream';
- Collaborative approaches to commissioning children and young people's mental health services - involving local schools, voluntary and community organisations, local government and Integrated Care Boards. We recommend that schools have greater input in ICB commissioning, so that schools have the funding and resources needed to deliver mental health interventions. By reforming commissioning of school-based mental health services, education budgets can be instead put towards teaching, enrichment and development.

If you would like further information on Place2Be's support in schools, please contact Angel Strachan, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Policy@Place2Be.org.uk