



## **Amplified and Healthy London Partnership: Insights on young people's perspectives on school mental health support in London**

### **Introduction**

As part of the NHS England funded Amplified programme, YoungMinds worked together with Health London Partnerships to:

- Collect existing pupil insights work from London schools around mental health and analyse these to identify key themes
- Facilitate a workshop session to review these insights and develop a top ten summary of ways young people want schools to support their mental health

The workshop also explored with young people their own practical ideas and thoughts on how schools can improve provision and how young people can be involved with this, as well as with the recruitment, training and ongoing support for the role of Designated Senior Mental Health Lead (DSMHL) within schools.

10 young people (13-19) took part in the workshop including representatives from Newham Headstart, Healthy London partnership and Amplified. Discussion notes and worksheets generated by participants were analysed after the workshop and are reported thematically here, alongside the findings from the insights reports submitted by schools.

# **Pupil Voice Amplified: 10 ways young people in London want schools to support their mental health**

Healthy London Partnership and Amplified worked with children and young people across London to find out what they need to support their mental health and wellbeing in school and college.

Using reports, surveys and workshops led by schools, colleges and youth projects from across the capital, here are young people's top 10 priorities for creating a mentally healthy learning environment.

1. Every pupil knows who is responsible for and can help with mental health issues

Make sure we know who to go to in school if we are struggling and need someone to talk to- share this information in lots of ways, like assemblies and on posters

2. Every adult in the school offers a good first response if I say or show I am struggling with my mental health

We want the staff who have contact with us daily to notice if we are struggling, and know how to help us find the right person and place to get support from if we need it.

3. Bullying is dealt with effectively

If we have experienced bullying we want to get emotional support quickly and easily from school- and we want bullies as well as victims to get support and assistance from school.

4. Empower us to understand and take a role in caring for our mental health

We want useful information which is co-designed and delivered by people like us about how we can take care of our mental health and how to get help if we need it. We want this in lots of different ways like lessons as well as information resources we can use on our own.

5. Extra support for pupils that are struggling

If a pupil is struggling, we want someone such as the forum tutor to check in every day and see how they are. This can make a huge difference when you are going through a hard time. And we want personalized plans to help us come back to school if we've had to take time off because of our mental health.

6. Emotional and practical support during busy, stressful times

Exam time is a really stressful time for us. We want information and advice on how to cope with the pressure we feel and quick and easy access to support if we feel it's getting too much.

7. A place to go to on hard days

We want a quiet space designed to promote wellbeing that we can go to when we are having a hard time and feel overwhelmed. We can use it clear our heads and calm down if we need to, as well as build ourselves up to carry on for the day

8. Signposting to support in our area and beyond

We are in school so much that's it's one of the best ways for us to find out about what other things can support us outside of school. We want school to provide information about local mental health services as well as other wellbeing activities we could use locally or online.

#### 9. Pupil involvement in making the school more mentally healthy

We know what things impact our mental health and what could help school promote our positive mental health so we want to be involved in designing the policies, projects and activities that are about our mental health.

#### 10. Recognising us as individuals

We want to be recognised for all the things we do and are interested in, not just our academic achievement as that can make us feel pressured. We want school to help us take part in things we enjoy outside of lessons that help us work out who we are and feel good about ourselves.

## School Insights Reports

Schools and other organisations from London and beyond were invited to share their own insights about the support young people want with their mental health in schools. Seven reports were submitted from across London and the South East. These reports were thematically analysed and key messages reviewed with young people in the participatory workshop. These messages were built on and are presented in the '10 key things' infographic. This section presents excerpts from the submitted reports which collectively represent the views of over 1,700 young people.

Submissions were:

- Summary of findings from focus groups in schools, Surrey Rights and Participation Team for CAMHS and SEND
- Findings from Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools (WAMHS) Project, East London Foundation Trust
- Feedback from Suffolk Assembly of Youth's (SAY) Emotional Health and Wellbeing Festival, Suffolk County Council
- Findings from focus groups with CYP in Hackney, City and Hackney CAMHS Alliance
- Islington Mental Health Campaign- Time to Talk Day Report, Islington Council
- Challenge 59 Final Report, University of Bath
- Islington Fair Futures Final Report, Islington Council

### Islington Fair Futures Final Report, Islington Council

*Excerpts from school and emotional wellbeing related content from Commission report.*

**21ST CENTURY SKILLS FOR GROWING UP** All children and young people with the skills to manage their emotions and feelings, health, relationships, home and money

Skills for life - managing emotions and feelings

- Develop ways that empower children and young people to manage their feelings and emotions – community spaces to go to, linking them to 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' opportunities, training for staff in schools and digital technology.
- Link young people to social action by using social prescriptions together with medical ways to address mental health.
- Train those who work with young people about mental health first aid, and ways that respond to children and young people's past negative experiences and events.
- Support young people to have the skills and understanding about mental health and asking for help.
- In organisations, consider mental health awareness training for staff who manage young people such as apprentices and young adults

Some of the issues that children and young people say affect them:

- Situations such as becoming a young carer, coming out, bereavement and exams can cause worry and stress.
- Loneliness and social isolation also happens to children and young people. Young carers, LGBTQIA young people, new arrivals to the UK and care leavers can feel like they are on their own and left to cope.

- Young people can feel pressured to have valuable things, be rich and popular. This affects how they feel about themselves and what they achieve.
- Research tells us when bad experiences and events happen in the past, many young people can go on to have mental health problems as they grow into adults and during their adult life.

A different way to support children and young people to manage emotions and feelings :

- Both adults and young people think that children and young people should have more choice and control about the support for managing emotions and feelings.
- Young people spoke about ways to support their emotional health and wellbeing that are different from the traditional health approach such as enabling young people to help themselves and their friends in different places and spaces
- Doctors could signpost a young person to community activities, groups or services to help them with their social and emotional health. This is known as social prescription.

Young people supporting themselves and each other :

- They want to be able to support themselves and other young people. They need to be able to identify signs and symptoms so they can support each other.
- Sometimes young people connect with people online when they are going through a similar issue. These young people liked being anonymous with no one to judge them.

Support from adults to manage emotions and feelings

- Sometimes parents and carers are so entrenched in their beliefs that children don't feel able to talk to them about issues.
- They spoke about forming their network for sources of support - sometimes this is an older brother, sister or cousin.
- They like the idea of having mentors who are on the journey with them and don't just turn up at a crisis point. These could be community parents – someone they trust who is looking out for and guiding them.
- Young people want to work with adults who they can relate to or who have experience of their world. They find that these are adults who understand them and the world they are growing up in.

Support from services:

- It is good that there is a mental health service in all schools. Young people said they want those in pupil referral units and young residents who go to school or college outside of Islington to get the same offer of support as students in Islington schools.
- Adults and young people suggest there could be safe spaces to go to in the community when they are not coping – like pop-up or drop ins at youth hubs, barber shops, leisure centres and libraries.
- Both adults and young people suggest that creative arts can give a voice to young people to flag up their concerns. Mentors and activities such as music and football provide similar interests with others and ways to express emotions.

## **Challenge 59 Final Report, University of Bath**

C59 worked across 3 primary schools with 6 teachers and 195 students from Years 1-4. For the evaluation, data was collected from a sample of children in the 3 participating schools across Newham and Tower Hamlets in London. These urban communities have diverse

populations, with particular low-income areas experiencing deprivation, poverty, social exclusion and inequality. C59 involved children learning about the emotional and social aspects of health and wellbeing that connects their minds and bodies through movement. The project provided children with the opportunity to dance and move freely as a way to relieve stress. This is particularly important given that children do not always have opportunities for free play living in high density housing. 100% of professionals agreed that in comparison to traditional methods, C59 was a more creative approach to children's health education because it engaged them in moving and making messages that were relevant and the report overall concluded that dance has the potential to play an important role in health promotion where movement meets creative expression.

## Findings from focus groups with CYP in Hackney, City and Hackney CAMHS Alliance

Young participants ideas for improving mental health support in schools:

- Staff to encourage more students to talk and offer help without having to ask
- Begin talking about coping strategies for stress earlier (e.g. Y9)
- Talk about the causes of mental health problems and the solutions
- Make sure that students have information on support systems available and how to access them ("a poster is not enough")
- Build trust between staff and students so that conversations can happen
- Ensure the school has activities that are orientated to fun / relaxing experiences, and not only attainment
- Offer group activities for students who are struggling

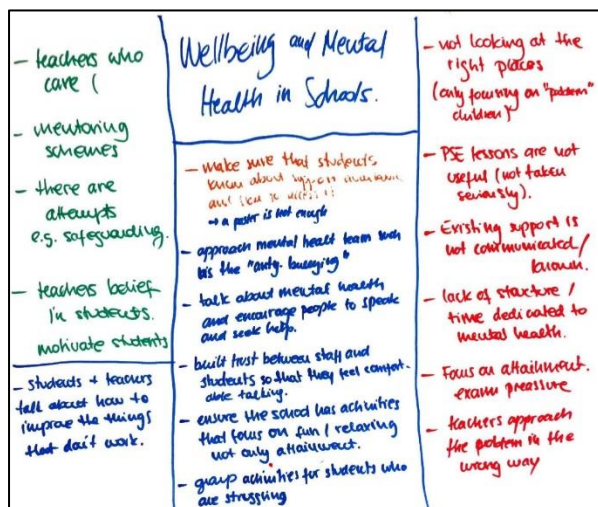


Image from Hackney focus groups with school pupils

## Summary of findings from focus groups in schools, Surrey Rights and Participation Team for CAMHS and SEND

Young participant's views on what is positive about school now:

- SENCOs are very receptive, happy to listen and very supportive.
- Amazing support with exams.

- Some schools provide own rooms in inclusion blocks to do lessons, spend the break and have the lunch, which is nice for young people to feel better when they are struggling with anxiety.
- Teachers are very helpful to explain things missed, and to get young people involved and make them to feel important, increasing their confidence. That stimulates the children to do well to make them feel proud.
- Teachers use to stay calm and level headed when young people are having panic attacks, what helps them to calm down.

Young participant's views on what is negative about school now:

- Some teachers don't have a proper understanding and knowledge about Mental Health.
- Sometimes there is a lot of pressure in schools and with greater emphasis on wellbeing rather than grades, fewer people would reach crisis points.
- There is not really any sort of awareness about Mental Health in many schools, and this makes young people with Mental Health issues to feel isolated and alone.
- Teachers, even being very helpful and caring, need to get better trainings to provide a more meaningful support.
- Some Student Wellbeing Officers should be explained better about how to keep confidentiality, and if that needs to be broken, it should be very clear about how and to whom.

What young people would like teachers to know about Mental Health, in order to support them in school:

- For teachers to understand that there are different aspects of Mental Health, and often different Mental Health diagnoses are linked together.
- To ensure good seating plans at schools, not putting students who don't get on next to each other as this can cause students to feel really uncomfortable.
- Not to force students to speak whilst in the classroom, not to randomly pick on students as this can cause anxiety.
- It can be really hard to trust people at school and ask for help. Instead of asking for help, to use a CODE word – tangle. "Do you need a tangle?"
- Educate students through PSHE lessons and try to reduce the stigma at school.
- Schools to follow through with anti-bullying policy.
- To have clubs at school where students can talk about issues and concerns.

### **Feedback from Suffolk Assembly of Youth's (SAY) Emotional Health and Wellbeing Festival, Suffolk County Council**

Young people's ideas for improving mental health support in schools:

- Assemblies about Mental Health
- Sympathetic, kind and trained members of staff
- Particular support over exam period - coping with stress and supporting pupils with worries and concerns
- Plan time to just chill
- Mental Health First Aid training for students & staff
- Facilitate yoga enrichment
- Peer support
- Reinforce with students the importance of speaking up when they are worried.
- Text a specific number safeguarding/ pastoral team

*"We want information about local emotional wellbeing support services! We want it on the back of toilet doors because that is where we will see it, read it and we can take down the numbers or websites in private"*

### **Feedback from Islington Mental Health Campaign- Time to Talk Day**

Seventeen schools including three secondary schools signed up to be involved - Forty-five classes hosted a volunteer, with over 1300 pupils participating in the discussions. The lesson involved an activity where pupils visualised a school that would help them learn and where they feel calm, happy and safe in their brains and bodies. Pupils were encouraged to think about what they would see, what people would be doing, what the space would be like, and what classroom learning was like.

Young people's ideas for aspects of a mentally healthy school environment:

Interactive, good discussions	Funny
Circular tables	Fairness
Input from everyone, inspirational learning	Good communication
Safe open spaces	Loyal
Collaborative environment	Generous and selflessness
Individualism	Balance between fairness, rules and safety
Outdoor classrooms	Inspirational people
Less homework	Teachers asking why people are crying
No need for complete silence except for during tests	
Independent learning	
More space, music, posters	
Teachers adapt to different learning techniques to accommodate everyone	
Different seats each week	
5 minute breaks in class	
Rooms for socialising	
Healthy food	
Lounges	
Supportive posters	
Use classrooms as activity rooms	
A students' room for relaxing	
Good seating in the lunch hall	
A calm room	
Lively and friendly school	
Bean bags, carpets, sofa, blinds	
Equal opportunities for everyone	
Comforting	
Non-judgemental	
Kind, understanding	
Trusting	
Teamwork	
Encouraging	
Respectful	
Allowed to express ourselves	
Teachers who are like friends	
Honest	



# Workshop Insights

This section sets out the insights generated by the participatory workshop with young people.

## Defining mental health

To start with, young people were asked to give their views on the definition of mental health. Young people said they would like to see a definition that doesn't discriminate or mention mental illness, communicates that mental health is as important as physical health and includes some of the issues that can impact on mental health.

## In-school support

Participants then mapped opportunities for how schools could improve the support they offer for pupils struggling with mental health.

When asked to prioritise, young people said the following are most important:

- Knowing who to go to for support in school i.e. named leads and counsellors with contact information clearly promoted
- Training for staff on how to detect and support young people struggling or suffering with mental health issues
- Wide promotion in schools of available facilities (through lessons, assemblies and awareness campaigns; information boards, posters, dedicated clubs, videos and social media messaging e.g. *Being in your mate's corner – snapchat ad.* (Involving CYP in the design and delivery)
- A wellbeing zone, quiet space for young people to go to
- Clear information and communication – make it readable, accessible and avoid jargon. (Involve CYP in the design and content)
  - Offer young people *life skills* during lessons and provide support with setting personal goals
  - Provide specific support for young people being bullied
- Provide education from a primary school age about issues surrounding mental health and discrimination.

Young people identified things that could be set up in school, for:

### Teachers

- Provide teacher training on mental health – teachers should be trained to detect and support students with mental health issues:
  - Engage Head teachers, Head of Years (management levels) to be more interested with mental health support so that other teachers are influenced
  - Offer staff mentoring
- Provide on-site mental health first aid support for young people who may be self-harming and/or experiencing panic attacks
- More understanding of student absenteeism due to mental health wellbeing

### Young people

- More counsellors in schools, have a counsellor talk at an assembly to 'normalise' who they are and what they do and can offer in terms of support
- Access to a quiet room and trained supervisor, offer a clear explanation of confidentiality agreements and co-develop crisis plans

- Peer mentor programmes and after school and/or lunchtime support group provision (CYP could co-design)
- Advice and support for young people on how to deal with extra pressure / stress near and during exam periods
- Fairer penal system: implement positive ideas from a young age and give the same treatment for all (CYP could co-design)
- Both victims and bullies should be offered help – it is important to address underlying issues and not just behavioural issues.

Direct support that could be given to struggling pupils include:

- In school support teams
- Before and after school check ins
- Personalised plans
- Support plans for exams
- Sessions for pupils to know how to identify, ask for help and manage their mental health.

Things teachers could do to support struggling pupils:

- Weekly check ins with form tutor
- Acting a point of contact for the pupil
- Mentoring
- Use a range of teaching methods that have more of a wellbeing focus
- Use confidence building and positive reinforcement approaches.

### Parents

- Parent courses and allow parents to make positive impacts e.g.
  - Parent run workshops
  - Parents talking to students
  - Parents speaking to other parents
  - Parents shouldn't impose extremist views on their children.

## **Designated Senior Mental Health Leads (DSMHL)**

Participants said they would like every school to have a DSMHL and identified a number of personal and professional qualities they would expect to see demonstrated by the member of the staff recruited to the role. The most popular being:

- Approachable and a good listener
- Kind and trustworthy
- Open minded
- Understanding
- Non-judgemental.

Other qualities and skills also mentioned include:

- Well trained and knowledgeable
- Respectful and empathetic
- Compassionate and caring
- Positive and genuine
- Provide good advice and take action when needed
- Keep confidentiality and seek permission from student to share with others.

It was strongly felt that the role must involve and support pupil participation in the design, delivery and evaluation of the work of a DSMHL. Pupils identified the following opportunities for participation:

### Recruiting someone

- Writing the job description
- Being part of the interview panel
- Promoting the role within the school.

### Getting them ready

- Writing criteria for training
- Providing training, use personal experiences
- Workshops with young people, with various mental health problems, to help convey the range of illnesses
- Practice taster sessions
- Observing period so employee can warm up to work environment.

### Doing the job

- Help provide feedback
- Give ideas for approaches to different situations
- Young people work alongside the mental health lead as a peer mentor
- The mental health leads should advertise themselves to the students
- Termly meet ups to see how they are doing.

## **Factors young people perceive as impacting their mental health**

### **Support for positive mental health**

Participants then mapped assets they knew played an active role in their positive mental health:

- YoungMinds workshops!
- Having a member of staff that you can speak to about mental health
- Having a counsellor
- Peer mentoring workshops
- Quiet room
- Having teachers trained in how to respond to a panic attack/meltdown
- Mental health first aid
- CAMHS liaison with school
- Help within a group (so people are not singled out)
- Intervention groups
- Head of year support
- Staff mentors for pupils
- Safeguarding team
- Support staff
- Pastoral care
- Mental health assemblies
- Staff mentors
- Awareness workshops
- PSHE lessons
- Mental health awareness week
- More choice and flexibility in curriculum
- Participation
- Good teaching
- Happy environment
- Eco-friendly
- Good community partnership.

### **Barriers to positive mental health**

Participants also mapped issues they knew had a negative impact on their mental health:

- Mental health/mental illness not being part of the curriculum
- Stigma towards mental health (from staff/teachers and peers); only talking about mental illness when it is relevant or 'trending'
- Not knowing what services are available
- Poor liaison with inpatient services and schools
- Poor inpatient services available in borough
- Lack of safeguarding team
- Not having access to help for as long as is needed
- Presentations - do not work!
- 'Labelling theory'
- Use of language - normalising negative terms

- Not reaching learning and development milestones or achieving grades
- Not being listened to or trusted
- Work load, exam stress and pressure
- Teachers not understanding
- No quiet space/space to 'let it out'
- No confidentiality
- Bad students, smart, less smart students get the most attention
- Cyberbullying and bullying.

## About Amplified

Funded and supported by NHS England, Amplified is a multi-year programme, led by YoungMinds and NEL Commissioning Support Unit, to support and build participation in every part of the children and young people's mental health system. This means both:

- The participation of children, young people and their families in the commissioning, design and delivery of the mental health services they use.
- The participation of children and young people and their families in decisions about their individual mental health and care and treatment

Our goals are to:

- Build the knowledge, confidence and skills of professionals across the mental health system around participation
- Increase the participation of young people and their families in the children and young people's mental health system – at individual, organisational, local and national levels by helping more settings embed participation in what they do.

[www.youngminds.org.uk/amplified](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/amplified)