



Green shoots and grass roots

The Coalition for Youth Mental Health in Schools

Contents

- 4** About the Coalition
- 6** Foreword
- 8** Executive summary and call to action
- 14** Methodology
- 15** Key findings
- 46** Recommendations

About the Coalition

The Coalition for Youth Mental Health in Schools is a group of schools, trusts and an allied organisation dedicated to developing and foregrounding best practice and current trends in mental health and wellbeing in school environments. With a dynamic and varied membership over the four years and two phases of its existence to date, its current iteration includes representation from over 90 schools across England. These schools span the independent and maintained school sectors, and in their two previous phases, they have produced insights and recommendations that have led the sector and contributed towards emerging national policy.

About our partners

For Phase 3, the Coalition has been joined by The Wellbeing Hub from Teen Tips. The Wellbeing Hub is a live and interactive online platform, offering a proactive approach to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Their bank of over 2000 expert-led resources are supporting over 170,000 young people in more than 300 schools across six countries. Alongside their resources, they offer events, courses, lesson plans, pupil voice and much more - all lie at the cutting edge of early intervention for young people's mental health. They have acted as the Coalition's corporate partner for Phase 3 in a pioneering addition to our work. We are hugely grateful for their support and input. Users at Ibstock Place School have offered the following testimonial:

"What I enjoy most on The Wellbeing Hub would probably be the amount of podcasts, anything to do with wellbeing and anything with mental health, all the topics it has on there and anything I can think of is covered."

"Not only does it help with you and your problems, it can also help to educate you on other people's problems just because it's got so many different FAQs there and so then you can see what sort of problems other people might be facing and I think that's really helped to grow my empathy as a person."

"I think that really sums up The Wellbeing Hub, like it really does help make you feel like there are other people that want to help."

You can find out more about their work at <https://teentips.co.uk/wellbeing-hub/>.

Phase 3 members

Lady Eleanor Holles School
Reach Schools
Hampton School
Oasis Community Learning
STAR Academies Trust
Eton College
Wellington College
Alleyn's School
The Wellbeing Hub from Teen Tips

The Coalition has had additional support in previous phases from the following schools:

City of London School for Girls
Danes Educational Trust
David Ross Educational Trust
Outwood Grange Academy Trust
St Paul's School
Westminster School
Wycombe Abbey

If you are interested in working with the Coalition in Phase 4 of our work, get in touch with Will Yates at Public First, the Coalition's secretariat. (will.yates@publicfirst.co.uk).

The Coalition thanks members of the Public First team who worked on this report, including: Will Yates; Ed Dorrell; Rhiannon McQuone; Jess Lister; El Gray; and Jules Walkden.

Foreword from the Chairs

In 2021, right in the very depths of the Covid-19 pandemic's devastating effects on schools, heads and wellbeing leads from across the state and independent sectors came together to ask what could be done about young people's mental health and wellbeing. With the support of the research consultancy Public First as our secretariat, we produced 'Fixing a Failing System', which polled young people to outline for the first time the extent to which the pandemic had affected the mental health and wellbeing of teenagers in schools.

The report received an amount of attention that none of us could have anticipated, with its findings and recommendations discussed widely in the media and picked up by policymakers of all shades. We knew from then on that the Coalition was a long-term commitment. Across the pressures and uncertainties of the next four years, we continued to work together to share best practice, investigate trends in young people's mental health and wellbeing, and showcase the lengths that schools across the country go to in order to ensure that young people get the help and support they need. This reached a new level with our Phase Two report 'Solutions for a Crisis'.

In Phase Three, we have tried to delve deeper and more broadly than ever before in our efforts to shed light on the nature of the mental health and wellbeing challenge in the school system. On the one hand, there is much to be optimistic about. Our new wave of polling outlines the concrete improvements in young people's self-reported mental health and wellbeing since 2021, and demonstrates that a majority of young people feel positive about their own mental health. Furthermore, our ways of working have reached new heights: partnering with The Wellbeing Hub from Teen Tips has allowed us to garner insight from a broader range of schools than ever before, as well as giving us access to the professional expertise and experience in adolescent mental health and wellbeing that their team has to offer.

Nevertheless, there are still many areas where improvements are not being felt by the young people who need them most. When 10% of 16-18 year olds say that their mental health is quite poor or very poor, that implies that over 50,000 older teenagers nationwide are still facing struggles on this front. What's more, the data lays bare how many of England's most disadvantaged children still feel acutely worried about school, their relationships and their futures, with many of these young people struggling to cope with the long shadows of austerity and the pandemic.

The case studies in these pages outline how schools, trusts and allied organisations have tried to meet these challenges head on, indicating that solutions to these problems continue to be developed by practitioners on the ground as much as experts operating outside classrooms. Put another way, instead of feeling disheartened by young people suggesting school can prove stressful, school staff can find inspiration in these pages from the ways in which schools overcome the challenges that the education system at large

poses to young people, and support them to live healthy, happy and confident lives inside and outside the classroom.

Taken together, these two sides of our report - the data-driven reasons for optimism and the school-level responses to ongoing challenges - have inspired the name of our Phase 3 report: 'green shoots and grass roots'. The green shoots are the signs of growth and progress we record in this report, but these are fragile, and in need of careful nurturing if they are to flourish. It is at the grass roots level that solutions to some of the most enduring difficulties we face with young people's mental health are being developed. The report is thus both a celebration of progress and a renewed call to action.

As Chairs, we are immensely proud of the work that the Coalition has done to get to this point. Across different areas of the country and different fields of expertise, we have continued to prioritise the work that this pioneering group has done, and we believe that our groundbreaking examination of polling data in Phase 3 is some of our most exciting work to date. We wish to extend our gratitude to all members of the Coalition who have come on this journey with us, both in previous years and in this third phase, whether as hosts for professional dialogue visits, coordinators for case studies, peers from whom we've gathered feedback, or innovators when it comes to best practice. This report is a testament to a shared vision and drive to serve the young people in our communities, and we are delighted to share it with you all. We can't wait to hear what you think.

Jane Lunnon, Dr Jon Needham and Alicia Drummond

Chairs, the Coalition for Youth Mental Health in Schools

Executive summary

The state of young people's mental health on the whole appears to be good, and shows improvements since 2021.

- **According to our most recent polling, most young people rate their mental health as 'quite good' or 'very good'.** 77% of young people rated their mental health as quite good or very good.
- **The rate of 16-18 year olds who say their mental health is 'quite poor' or 'very poor' has declined significantly since 2021.** In our 2021 sample, 21% of our sample rated their mental health as quite or very poor; in 2024, this had dropped eleven percentage points to 10% - equivalent to over 50,000 teenagers in England.
- **The frequency with which 16-18 year olds are reporting negative feelings and behaviours fell across the board between 2021 and 2024.** The proportion of those feeling lonely at least three days a week fell from 36% to 13%, and the proportion feeling depressed at least three days a week fell from 26% to 14%.
- **In 2024, 16-18 year olds were more positive about how much their schools are doing to support the mental health and wellbeing of students than they were in 2021.** The proportion of 16-18 year olds saying their school is doing everything it can to support the mental health and wellbeing of students rose from 20% in 2021 to 28% in 2024.

Although the national mental health picture is moving in the right direction, the headlines conceal disparities along gender, age, and socioeconomic lines.

- **Boys are about 20% more likely to describe their mental health as quite good or very good than girls.** 84% of boys rated their mental health as quite good or very good, compared to only 70% of girls.
- **Older teenagers also have worse mental health than their younger peers.** While 84% of 11-12 year olds rated their mental health as quite good or very good, only 68% of 16-18 year olds said the same.

- **Young people from the highest socioeconomic grades were much more likely to say that their mental health was quite good or very good than those from lower grades.** 87% of young people from social grades AB said that their mental health was quite good or very good, but this was only true for 69% of young people from social grades DE.

Young people told us that schools contribute to stress more than home life.

- **Schools and their own futures are more of a source of stress to 11-18 year olds than home.** When asked to rate the sources of stress in their lives on a scale from 1 to 10, respondents gave school-related pressures the highest average score of 4.5.
- **Concerns about school are slightly more pronounced among young people living in lower-income households.** Those who live in households with an income of less than £30,000 per annum rated their worries an average of 4.9/10, compared to 4.1/10 for those living in households on more than £60,000 per annum.
- **There is a consistent pattern of girls perceiving themselves to be more stressed than boys, particularly in school.** The average stress score reported by girls was 3.8/10, compared to boys whose average score was 3.2/10. In terms of school, girls rated their stress 4.9/10, 0.7 higher than the average worry score for boys when it came to school.
- **The biggest age-related changes in stress levels occur when young people consider their futures.** When looking at students' stress scores regarding their future, 11-12 year olds rate it as a 3/10, but this rises to 3.8/10 among 13-15 year olds, and rises again to 4.7/10 among 16-18 year olds.
- **Although most young people have been taught about mental health in the classroom, addressing poor mental health is not one of the most commonly-named topics that they have been taught.** The most common topic that had been taught was online safety and cyber-bullying (65%). Under half (42%) said that they had been taught how to look after their own mental health.
- **Young people believe that their schools are taking mental health seriously, but many also think that schools apply too much pressure.** Almost three times as many (45%) survey respondents agreed that their school provides

sufficient mental health support for students as disagreed (17%). Despite this, 40% of students agreed with the idea that schools put too much pressure on their students, with over 1 in 10 (11%) agreeing strongly and only 27% disagreeing with this idea.

- **Young people are extremely reliant on their mobile phones.** When we asked students what would be most likely to ruin their day, 11-18-year-olds were more likely to select having their phone taken away by a parent or teacher (32%) than getting detention (25%) and getting a poor school grade (23%).
- **They are also very reliant on social media, saying that they couldn't go without it.** Despite the fact that, on most platforms, the legal age to join is 13, 63% of 11-12-year-olds we surveyed reported using an account. This rose to 91% of respondents aged 13-15 and 94% aged 16-18.

A call to action

In order to continue improving young people's mental health, we believe there are six targeted solutions in schools that could make an impact.

- 1. Labour's manifesto commitment to providing counsellors in every school can act as a complement to existing teaching strategies and ensure that awareness is matched with action.**
- 2. Gender-specific interventions should form a key part of mental health provision in the coming years.**
- 3. Interventions on mobile phones and social media should bear in mind the way in which they are perceived by young people.**
- 4. Supporting young people to find ways of managing their relationships with their phones and social media must be a key priority for mental health policymakers.**
- 5. Young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds and low income households need more inclusive wraparound support and education to address the mental health challenges they face.**
- 6. More should be done to prepare 16-18-year-olds for the transition to their next stages of education and employment.**

Fixing a Failing System

The Coalition for Youth Mental Health in Schools emerged out of the well-documented mental health crisis that the Covid-19 pandemic precipitated in schools. The Coalition spanned the state and independent sectors, and undertook a Nationally Representative (Nat Rep) poll of 1000 16-18 year olds in England. The poll laid out the impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health in stark detail: 62% of respondents reported feeling anxious or worried more frequently than pre-pandemic, and 46% reported a continuous low mood or sadness more frequently than pre-pandemic.

On the basis of the poll's findings, and in consultation with experts from across the education and youth sectors, the Coalition set out its demand for a minimum entitlement in school-based mental health provision, including a designated mental health lead in every school, annual mental health training for all staff, and access to a counsellor in every secondary school. The report had a widespread impact, with the last of these proposals featuring in Labour's 2024 General Election Manifesto.

Solutions for a Crisis

Two years on from the first phase of the Coalition, Phase 2 set out its principles for a whole-school approach to mental health provision, aligned with the 2017 Green Paper Transforming Young People's Mental Health Provision. The eight principles, spanning from curriculum and teaching to working with parents and carers, represented a wide range of whole-school approaches to tackling mental health and wellbeing and the management and leadership that underpins them. For this phase of the Coalition's activity, we facilitated visits to different members' settings to investigate studying, teaching and leading in mentally healthy schools, with visits spanning from South Yorkshire to Cornwall. Alongside this, we facilitated evidence sessions with expert witnesses from the worlds of academia, school leadership, child development and policymaking.

The resulting report highlighted some of the best practice going on across both Coalition members' settings and elsewhere. It indicated how some of this best practice, such as incorporating mental health training into initial teacher education and establishing a National Survey of Youth Mental Health, could be scaled up to support greater school-led ownership of mental health in schools. The report attracted widespread media attention, and cemented the Coalition's place at the forefront of the mental health in schools debate.

Green shoots and grass roots

Phase 3 of the Coalition's work began in mid-2024, when the debate around mental health in schools was in a state of flux. The most acute experiences of the pandemic were three years in the past, but there were still widespread concerns about the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on learners' attainment, development and socialisation. Alongside this, a likely change in government was on the cards, bringing with it renewed debates around spending and policy priorities in the schools brief. Having indicated their intention to increase funding for mental health provision in schools, Labour also made a manifesto commitment to rebalancing the school inspection and accountability system, a project that would be undertaken under new leadership at Ofsted. All of these factors would come to bear on how schools approach mental health provision, and we aimed to address best practice, accountability and the state of young people's mental health in our Phase 3 work.

The Coalition's Phase 3 operation thus consisted of several facets:

- A nationally representative poll of 1000 11-18 year olds in England on topics related to mental health, incorporating a significant proportion of the questions from the Phase 1 survey of 16-18 year olds and producing new analysis about the different drivers for positive and negative mental health and wellbeing.
- Visits to different Coalition settings to observe best practice in action and document case studies.
- Insights from the Coalition's first-ever partner, The Wellbeing Hub by Teen Tips, regarding their work with a multinational audience of parents, teachers and teens.

The exact workings of each of these aspects is detailed in the methodology section.

Methodology

Public First conducted a poll of 1,000 11-18-year-olds in full time education in the UK between the 14th and 21st of November 2024. All results are weighted using Iterative Proportional Fitting, or 'Raking'. The results are weighted by interlocking age & gender, region and social grade to Nationally Representative Proportions.

Some results are benchmarked against data from a 2021 study, also conducted by Public First on behalf of the Coalition for Youth Mental Health in Schools. This poll comprised a sample of 1,010 16-18-year-olds, and fieldwork was conducted between the 30th of July and the 8th of August 2021. This data was also weighted to nationally representative proportions using Iterative Proportional Fitting.

Where comparisons have been made, the questions asked in 2021 and 2024 were kept identical, both in the question wording and answer options. Furthermore, when drawing comparisons, the 2024 data was filtered to only contain responses from 16-18-year-olds (n = 324), to ensure sample comparability with the 2021 sample.

Key findings

In the years since the Covid-19 pandemic, much of the coverage surrounding mental health in schools has been of crisis and concern.¹ Much of this was attributed to the social distancing and remote learning that the pandemic necessitated,² with the cost-of-living crisis also looming large in young people's minds. Furthermore, recent DfE work³ has added to existing concerns⁴ that young people's mental health and wellbeing remains a concern, and we are still some way from concrete answers to the challenges that exist in this domain.

What our polling finds, however, is a more nuanced and cautiously positive picture. The overall picture has improved substantially since our first poll in 2021, and we now have a more rich understanding of how young people relate to their own mental health and wellbeing. Five years on from the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there are many reasons to be optimistic about young people's mental health. We lay these out below.

Alongside this, however, there are lingering worries about the distribution of poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes among 11-18 year olds. Many of the improvements in mental health and wellbeing have bypassed some groups of young people, leaving them at continued risk of falling through the cracks. While the findings suggests signs of improvement, the self-declared mental health and wellbeing of older teenagers, girls and disadvantaged young people remain sources of concern.

¹ ['Solutions for a Crisis'](#)

² ['Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic: A UK-based focus group study'](#)

³ ['Effectiveness of school mental health awareness interventions Universal approaches in English secondary schools'](#)

⁴ ['Balancing act: navigating the tensions in our school system'](#)

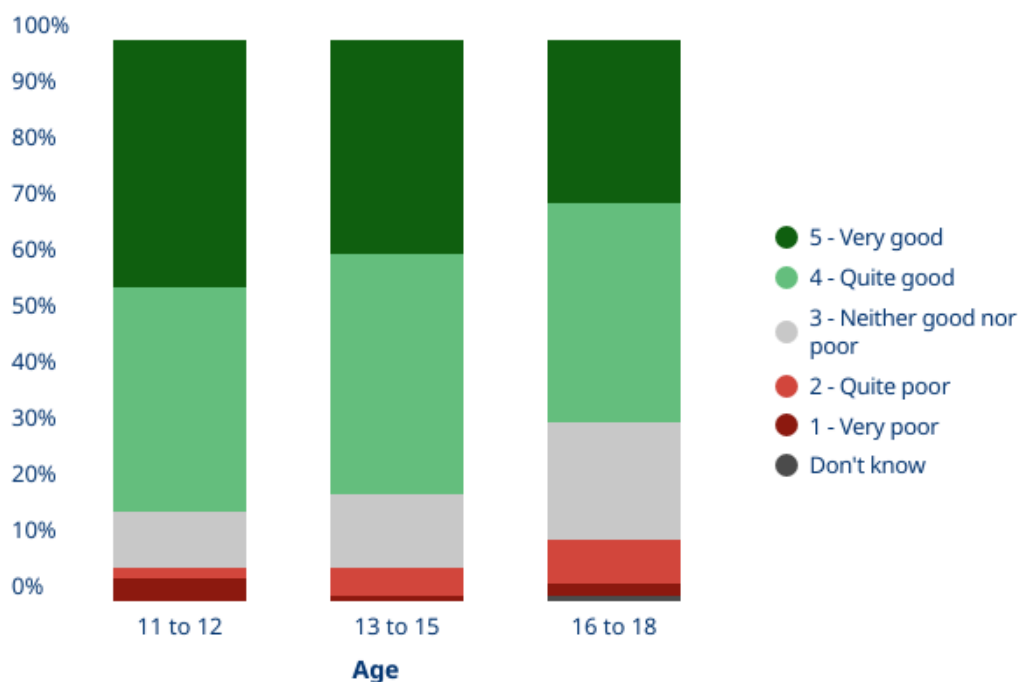
Finding One: The state of young people’s mental health on the whole appears to be good, and shows considerable improvements since 2021.

| According to our most recent polling, most young people rate their mental health as ‘quite good’ or ‘very good’.

We asked young people to rate themselves on a five-point Likert scale for a range of factors, including physical health, mental health, sleep and diet. 77% of young people rated their mental health as quite good or very good. Younger adolescents were strikingly happier, with 84% of those aged 11-12 rating their mental health as quite good or very good, compared to only 68% of young people aged 16-18.

Table One: Self-rating of mental health, by age

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate yourself for the following?: Mental health



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

Coalition members told us that one way in which younger teenagers can maintain positive mental health and wellbeing is by learning from their older peers. Gavin

English, Deputy Head (Pastoral) at Alleyn's, spoke to us about what this looks like in his school.

Case study: Pupil pastoral and social education, Alleyn's

Pastoral and social education of younger pupils by older students has been well received by our younger pupils, who report greater levels of engagement and retention of knowledge following the sessions. Moreover, the empowering and enabling impact on the older students delivering these sessions has increased feelings of contribution, efficacy and a sense of belonging within their cohort as well.

We train students to give fortnightly sessions on a range of topics, including the safe use of mobile phones, dealing with academic pressure, and other key aspects of adolescent life. As part of this, they are trained in coach-like conversations, managing a group, and oracy skills. We find that they are able to lean successfully on their own experiences and understandings of these issues when they speak to younger pupils, who themselves respond positively to hearing these messages from figures closer in age and experience to them than their teachers.

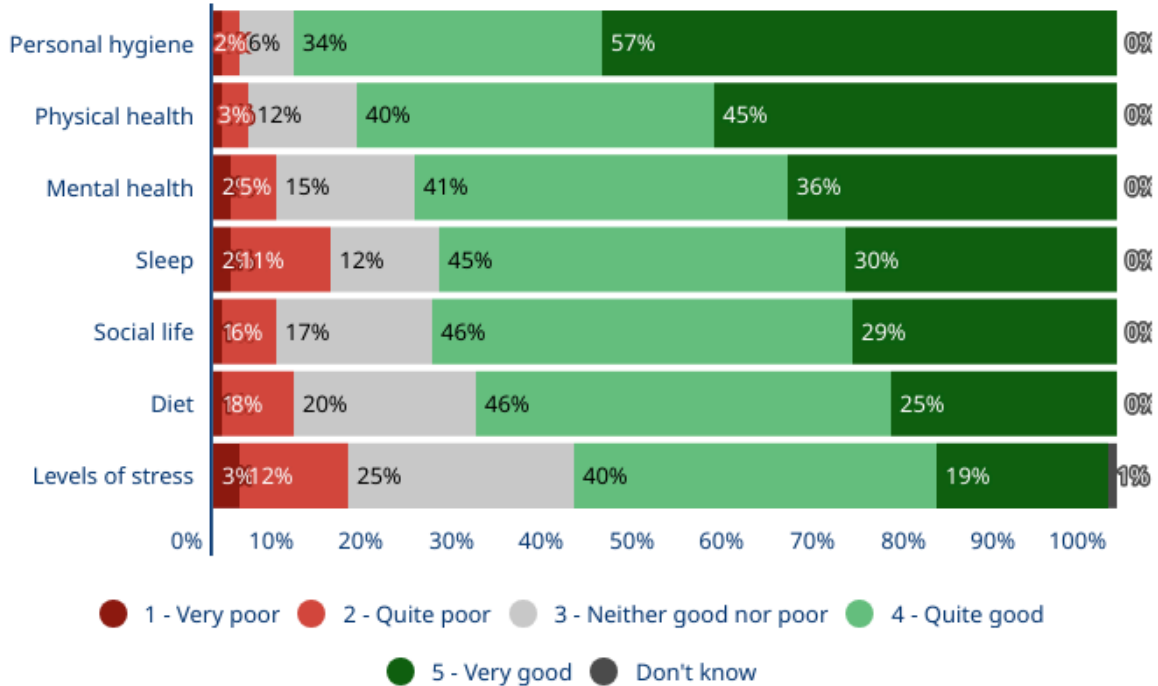
The benefit to our leaders and our ability to deliver or reinforce important messages and information has been significant. The strategy also provides an excellent mechanism for gathering student voice input in a candid and honest way from younger students, affording them agency and a feedback mechanism that is important to their wellbeing.

Gavin English, Deputy Head

To put their self-assessments into some context, we also asked young people to rate a number of other health and wellbeing proxies in their lives. These six other proxies were personal hygiene, physical health, sleep, social life, diet and stress. A majority of young people self-assess fairly positively on these proxies for wellbeing, suggesting that four years on from the rolling back of pandemic-related restrictions, they are in a buoyant mood. Their views of their own mental health situate this particular proxy in the middle of the array, just behind self-assessment of physical health.

Table Two: Self-rating of various health measures

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate yourself for the following?



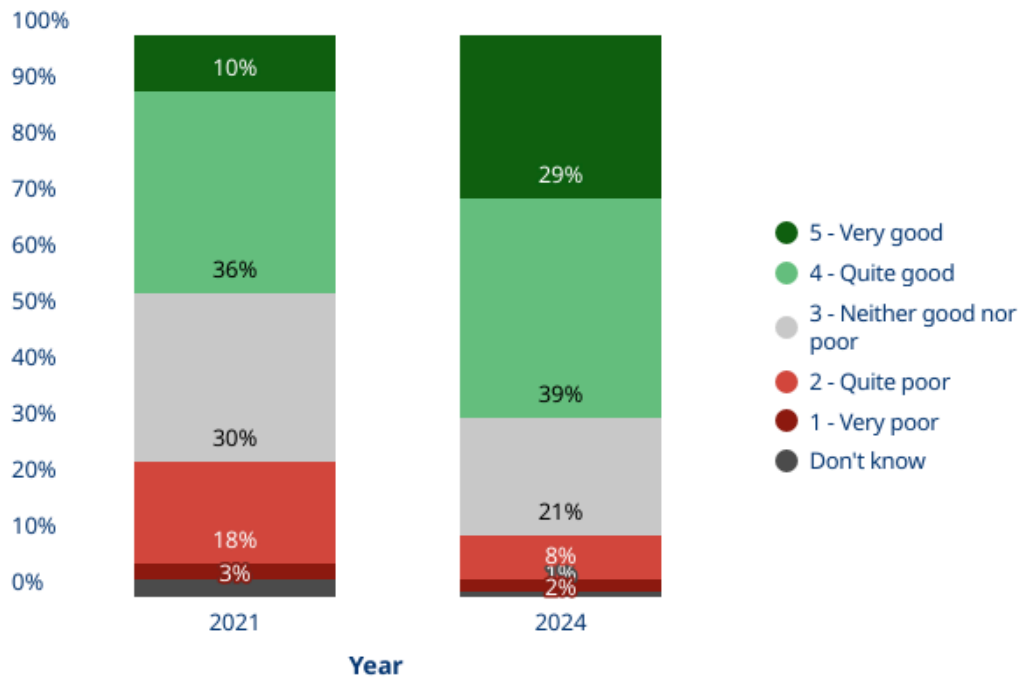
Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| The rate of 16-18 year olds who say their mental health is 'quite poor' or 'very poor' has declined significantly since 2021.

Asking many of the questions from our 2021 poll in our 2024 survey has allowed us to draw some comparisons between the mental health and wellbeing of 16-18 year olds then and now. In 2021, more than 1 in 5 (21%) of 16-18 year olds rated their mental health as 'quite poor' or 'very poor'; by 2024, this had dropped eleven percentage points to only 10%. While 10% of 16-18 year olds saying their mental health is 'quite poor' or 'very poor' is tens of thousands across the population, and further steps are needed to protect this group, the proportion rating their mental health as 'quite good' or 'very good' increased from 46% in 2021 to 68% in 2024 - an increase of almost half.

Table Three: Self-rating of mental health, 2021-2024 comparison of 16-18-year-olds

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate yourself for the following?: Mental health 16 to 18 Year Olds

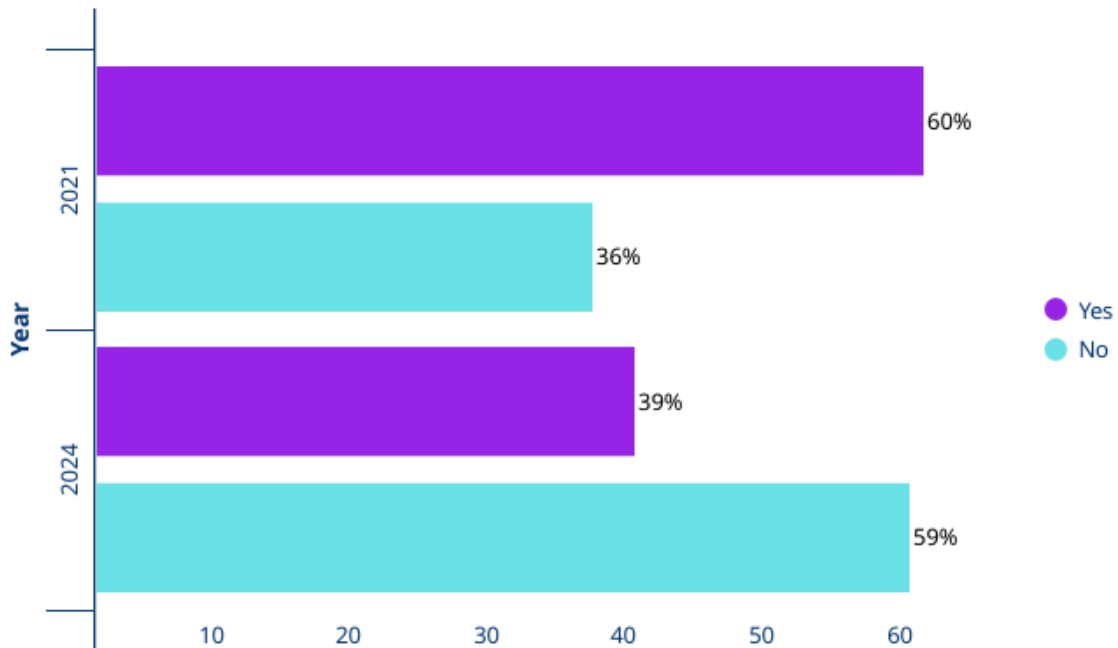


Public First | 2021 Data: Nationally representative sample of young people aged 16 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,010 | Fieldwork 30th July to 8th August | 2024 Data: Nationally representative sample young people aged 16 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 326 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

Similarly, the rate of 16-18 year olds worrying about their mental health (including stress and anxiety) in the last year fell by more than a third. In 2021, 60% of 16-18 year olds were worried about their own mental health, including stress and anxiety; this number had fallen to 39% in 2024. Correspondingly, while just over a third (36%) said they were *not* worried about their own mental health in 2021, this has risen to a significant majority (59%) of sixth-form aged young people in 2024. Seeing nearly 40% of the 16-18 year old population worried about stress and anxiety suggests that there is still much to be done to support this group, which amounts to tens of thousands of young people. That said, the fall from the highs of 2021 comprises an almost total reversal of the trend among 16-18 year olds regarding their stress and anxiety levels in the last four years.

Table Four: Worries about own mental health, 2021-2024 comparison of 16-18-year-olds

Have you been worried about your own mental health, including stress and anxiety, in the last year? 16 to 18 Year Olds



Public First | 2021 Data: Nationally representative sample of young people aged 16 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,010 | Fieldwork 30th July to 8th August | 2024 Data: Nationally representative sample young people aged 16 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 326 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| The frequency with which 16-18 year olds are reporting negative feelings and behaviours fell across the board between 2021 and 2024.

When we asked 16-18 year olds how often they were feeling or behaving in various negative ways in 2021, they indicated that they were doing so fairly often. Looking across the different ways of feeling or behaving, we found that in 2021, 38% of 16-18 year olds had trouble keeping their mind on what they were doing at least three days a week, 36% felt lonely at least three days a week, 33% experienced restless sleep at least three days a week and over a quarter (26%) felt depressed at least three days a week.

In our 2024 polling, the corresponding figures were lower in every single category, with the biggest change in feelings and behaviours reported in loneliness. The proportion of those feeling lonely at least three days a week had fallen by almost two-thirds from 2021 (36%) to 2024 (13%). As the 2021 survey was administered around the time that schools in England were emerging from pandemic-related restrictions, the dramatic

drop in this category speaks to the crucial role of schools as places in which young people connect with one another as they learn.

It appears that this improved capacity for connection in schools might also have a positive impact on focus and energy levels. The proportion of young people having trouble keeping their minds on what they were doing more than three days per week also dropped 13 percentage points in the intervening years between surveys (38% in 2021 and 25% in 2024), as did those feeling that everything they did was an effort at least three days a week (38% in 2021 to 25% in 2024).

Table Five: Behaviours and feelings displayed, 2021-2024 comparison of 16-18-year-olds



Public First | 2021 Data: Nationally representative sample of young people aged 16 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,010 | Fieldwork 30th July to 8th August | 2024 Data: Nationally representative sample young people aged 16 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 326 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

We spoke to students from Wellington College about the things they do to foster a sense of connection and combat loneliness in the school environment. This is what they told us.

Case study: Student mental health ambassadors, Wellington College

Serving as a chair on the student mental health ambassador team has been a really rewarding opportunity, affording me the chance to help organise impactful initiatives across the school community. These activities have ranged from house events, such as brownie-baking sessions while watching the Six Nations and inter-year football tournaments, to speaking in assembly during Children's Mental Health Awareness Week. The latter proved particularly impactful, allowing us to communicate the importance of self-care strategies during both challenging and seemingly stable times.

Our regular ambassador meetings have served as a crucial bridge between the student body and teachers, providing open dialogue on areas where there could be improvement in school life. Looking ahead, I am particularly excited about contributing to our annual Wellbeing Festival, where pupils can choose from activities including dog walks, yoga sessions, and talks by external speakers on mental health issues. This event demonstrates the school's commitment to holistic wellbeing, offering a chance to refresh and providing a break from the frenetic pace of school life. I look forward to it every year.

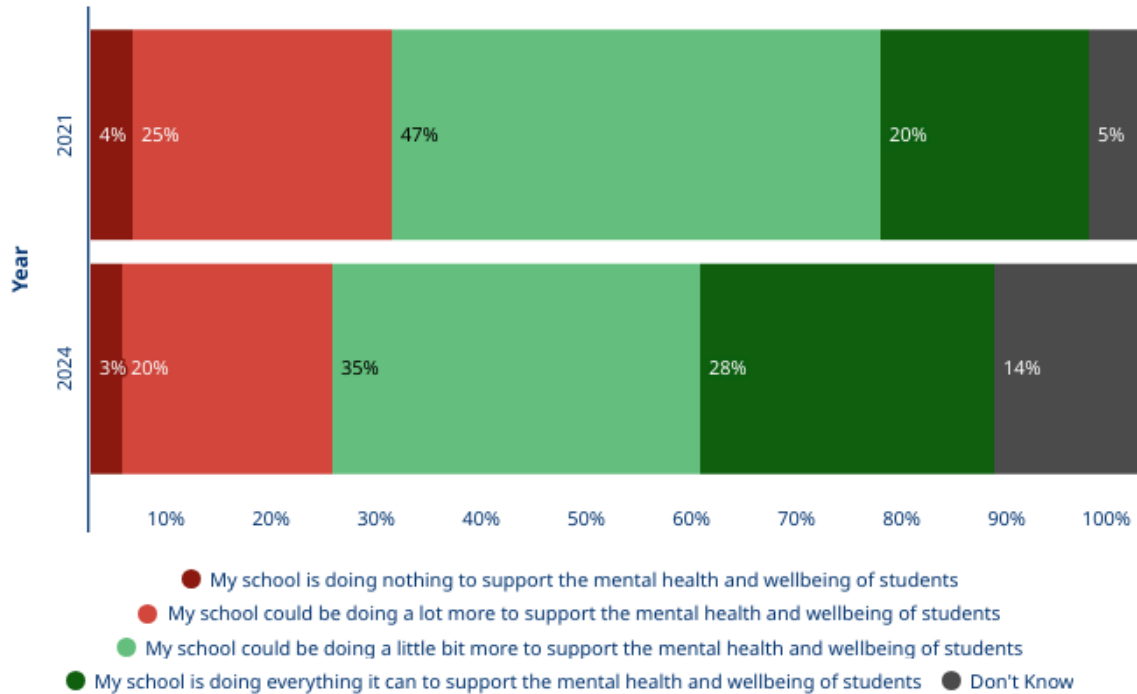
Izzy, L6th student

| In 2024, 16-18 year olds were more positive about how much their schools are doing to support the mental health and wellbeing of students than they were in 2021.

Having understood the extent to which young people were struggling with their mental health in 2021, our new polling finds that students feel that their schools are working hard to support them. When we asked 16-18 year olds in 2021 about how much their schools do to support their mental health and wellbeing, only 1 in 5 (20%) said that their school was doing everything it could to support the mental health and wellbeing of students, with 1 in 4 (25%) saying that their school could be doing a lot more to support the mental health and wellbeing of students. However, when we asked the same question again in 2024, the proportion of 16-18 year olds who said that their school is doing everything it can to support the mental health and wellbeing of students had risen to 28%, and the proportion of students who felt that their school could be doing a lot more to support the mental health and wellbeing of students had fallen to 20%.

Table Six: Extent of school support, 2021-2024 comparison of 16-18-year-olds

Please select the statement that most closely reflects your experience *16 to 18 Year Olds*



Public First | 2021 Data: Nationally representative sample of young people aged 16 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,010 | Fieldwork 30th July to 8th August | 2024 Data: Nationally representative sample young people aged 16 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 326 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

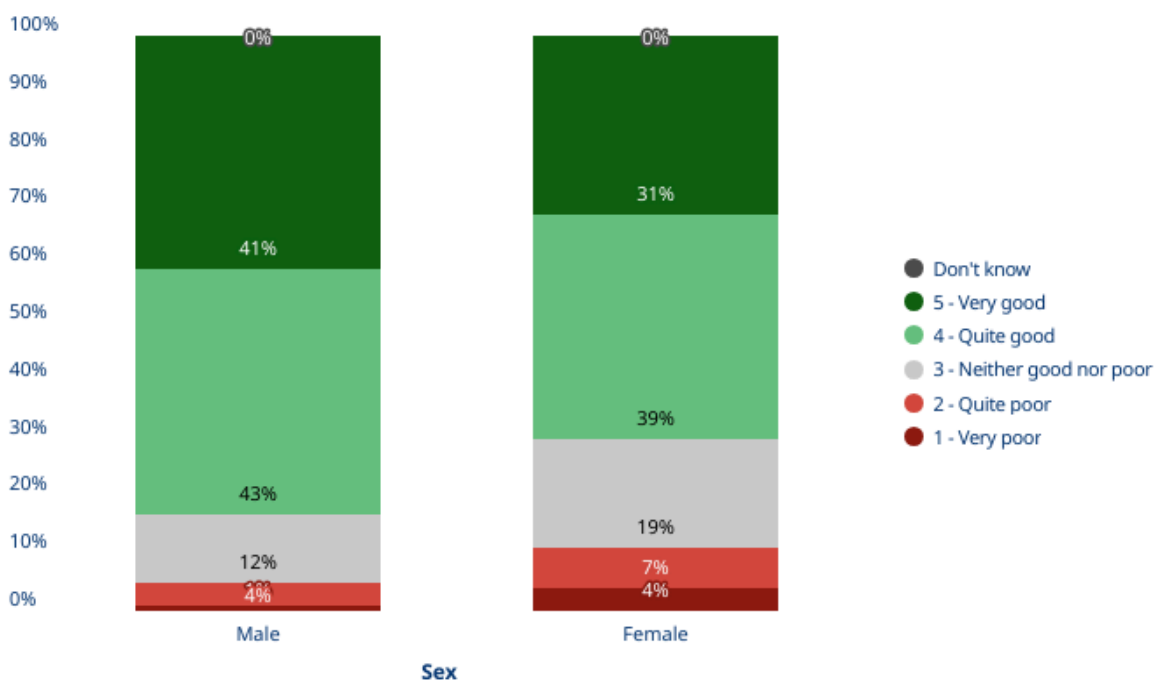
Finding Two: Although the national mental health picture is moving in the right direction, the headlines conceal disparities along gender, age, and socioeconomic lines.

| Boys are about 20% more likely to describe their mental health as quite good or very good than girls.

It appears that boys and girls perceive their own mental health fairly differently. When we asked young people how they would rate their own mental health, there was a 14 percentage point gap between boys and girls: 84% of boys rated their mental health as quite good or very good, compared to only 70% of girls.

Table Seven: Self-rating of mental health by sex

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate yourself for the following?: Mental health



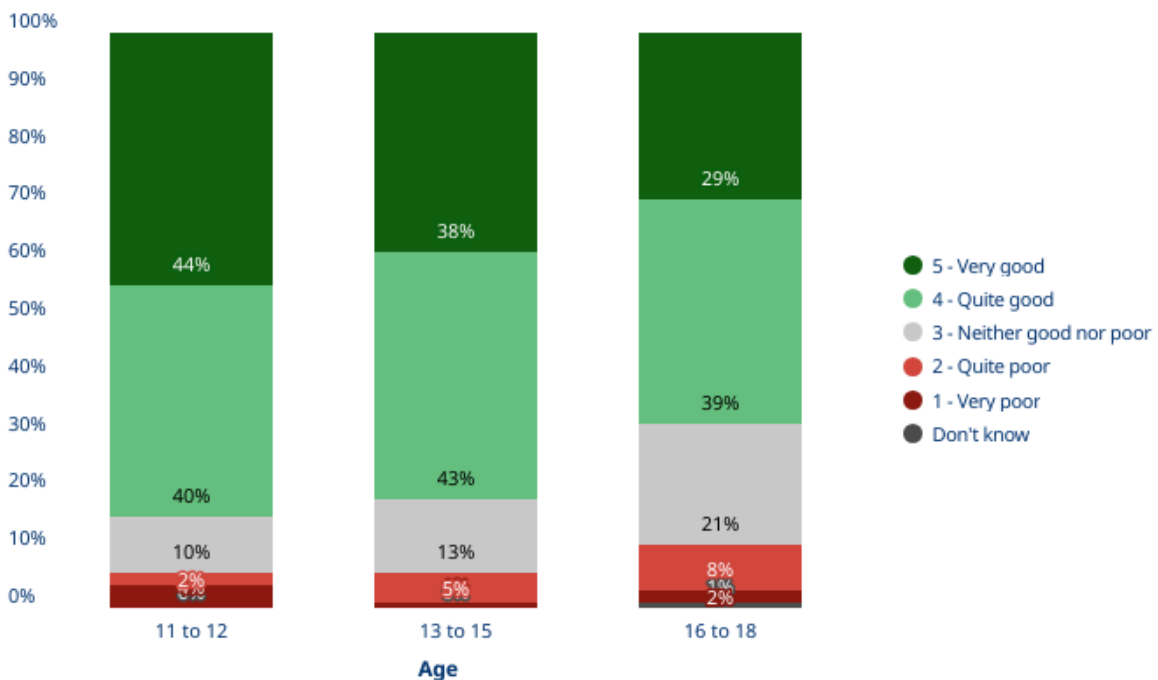
Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| Older teenagers also have worse mental health than their younger peers.

Despite the improvements since 2021 regarding the mental health of 16-18 year olds, our 2024 survey found that self-declared mental health ratings went down with age. 11-12 year olds were the happiest, with 84% saying that their mental health was quite good (40%) or very good (44%). Slightly fewer 13-15 year olds said that their mental health was quite good (43%) or very good (38%). 16-18 year olds had the lowest rates of quite good (39%) or very good (29%) mental health.

Table Eight: Self-rating of mental health by age

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate yourself for the following?: Mental health



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

When we put this to some of our Coalition schools, many said that this was a phenomenon they had perceived in their settings. Some pupils from Lady Eleanor Holles School (LEH) offered to tell us how the school supports their wellbeing in their final years in secondary education.

Case study: Wellbeing Day, LEH

Wellbeing Day has always been a highlight of the year and a day to look forward to. Filled with fun activities you can sign up to with friends, I've always found there to be a calming and relaxing atmosphere throughout the whole day. It's allowed me to take a step back from my work and to take a breath in the first few weeks of school.

In the first few years of my school career, I saw it as just a fun day to miss lessons and mess around with my friends, seeking out the high-energy and loud sessions, such as rounders and a disco. However, in my later years at LEH, I have started to most look forward to the meditative, soothing sessions such as yoga that allows me to have a reset of my mental perspective of school before starting again with lessons the next day. Wellbeing Day has taught me so many ways to reset and recover - not just in school, but with regards to any experience that has been intense or draining.

Holly, U6 student

Our annual Wellbeing Day has always been a much-loved break for everyone to recharge and relax after a busy start to the school year. Students can sign up for a range of activities, all of which provide different and creative ways to improve their wellbeing. Popular choices include a yoga session led by an external coach, and candle making, which is a great creative choice. However, the miniature farm and dog walk always seem to be the clear winners of the day! Wellbeing Day is a great opportunity to remind LEH students of the many different ways we can take care of our mental health whilst reinforcing all the support and advice the school has to offer. I know every student looks forward to this peaceful day, and I am sure the Upper Sixth will greatly miss it next year as they begin their post-18 journey.

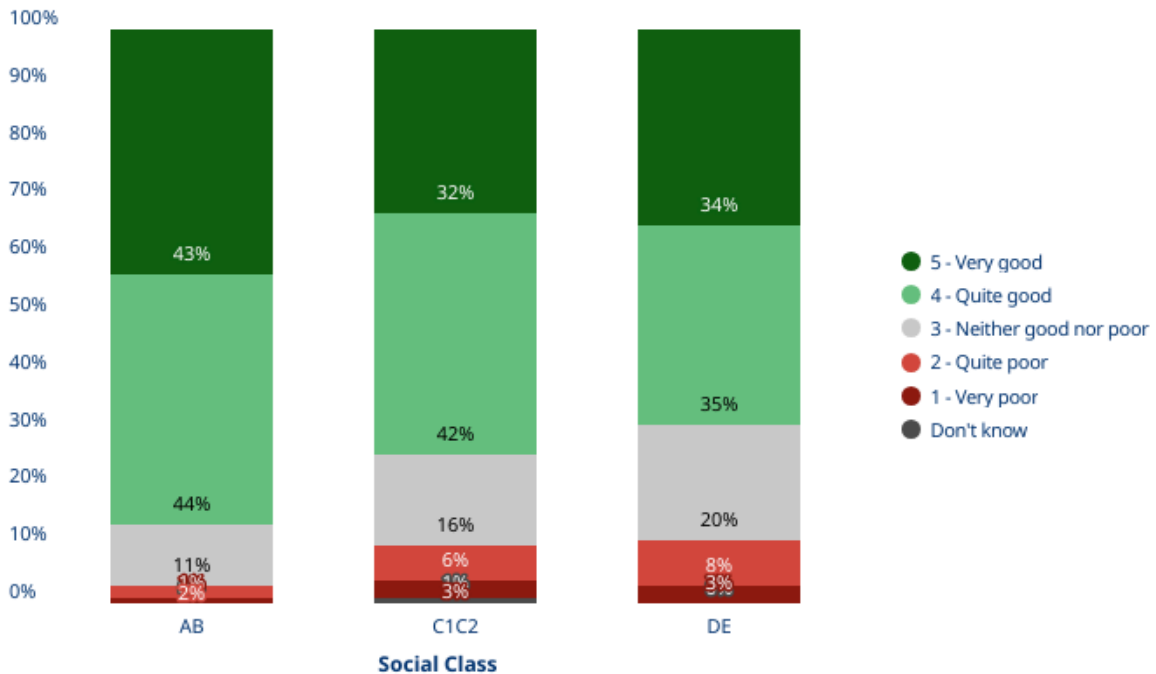
Amrit, Head Girl

| Young people from the highest socioeconomic grades were more likely to say that their mental health was quite good or very good than those from lower grades.

There was also a significant discrepancy for this question when broken down by social grade. 87% of young people from social grades AB said that their mental health was quite good or very good, but this was only true for 69% of young people from social grades DE.

Table Nine: Self-rating of mental health by social grade

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very poor and 5 being very good, how would you rate yourself for the following?: Mental health



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

In our conversations with Coalition members, we found that schools serving deprived communities go above and beyond to support their students’ mental health and wellbeing. One such school is Tauheedul Islam Boys’ High School in Blackburn, part of the Star Academy Trust. Their Vice Principal, Samina Yakub, told us more about the things they do.

Case Study: Tauheedul Islam Boys High School, Blackburn

TIBHS is dedicated to maintaining an environment that nurtures mental health and well-being. Our school achieves this by fostering open dialogue, providing access to counselling services, and encouraging a balanced approach to both academic and personal development. With the engagement of committed staff, and a plethora of wellbeing programs, we equip pupils with the necessary resources to manage stress and build resilience.

Additionally, our strong sense of community and inclusivity ensures that every individual feels recognised, valued, and supported in their journey towards mental

wellness. To support pupils with their mental health and wellbeing we have a mental health team in school every Tuesday and Thursday. Having a multi-agency approach in school allows pupils to easily access the relevant support needed. Weekly pastoral briefing notes have slides dedicated to mental health, and pupils receive weekly assemblies signposting the different forms of support that they can draw on. Our nurturing environment promotes mental wellbeing with a focus on having a safe space to talk, encouraging pupils to engage with a trusted adult to whom they can 'offload'. We find that this has a huge impact on the overall wellbeing of pupils.

Samina Yakub, Vice Principal

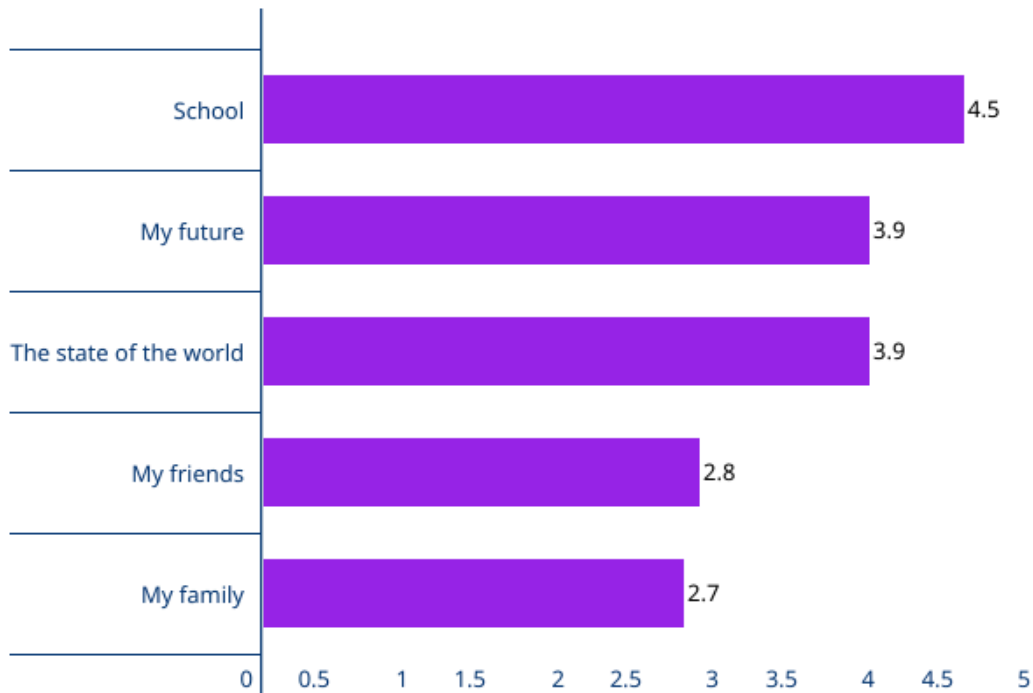
| *Schools and their own futures are more of a source of stress to young people than home.*

In order to establish how policymakers and schools could intervene positively to alleviate stress in young people, we asked a series of questions in which young people outlined how stressful they find different aspects of their lives. There are some areas of young people's lives, such as the school system, that will inevitably be seen as greater sources of stress than others, and where intervention will need to be particularly thoughtfully designed. Nevertheless, we felt that it was important to understand the relative levels of stress that different factors impart on young people's lives in order to understand how such interventions should be targeted.

Across a range of measures, school life is a source of stress to a greater extent than home and social life. When asked to rate the sources of stress in their lives on a scale from 1 to 10, respondents gave schools the highest average score of 4.5. The stress from friends averaged 2.8 and from family averaged 2.7, while concerns about their future and the state of the world both averaged a score of 3.9.

Table Ten: Average stress scores from various sources

To what extent would you say that you feel stressed, if at all, about the following things in your life? Average score out of 10, where 0 is 'Not stressed at all' and 10 is 'Very stressed'



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

This finding was also corroborated when we mapped feelings of wellbeing, happiness and satisfaction using our 'star diagram' method.

This consisted of a separate set of questions within the overall poll that cumulatively contributed to three areas (home, social and school), each with two poles: questions about the environment explored how the overall experience in each place made young people feel, and those about relationships referred specifically with the people and interactions within them.

Higher scores indicate more positive sentiment towards a particular area and its impact on overall mental health and wellbeing. Because each axis is an average of responses to a number of polling questions, any variation along this axis represents a notable difference in response to questions on this topic.

The light blue line, representing the mental health and wellbeing of pupils with higher stress levels, is inside the dark blue line (the corresponding scores for low-stress-level pupils) across the board, suggesting that they have worse mental health and wellbeing. Importantly, though, the biggest gaps between points occur on the school relationships

and school environment scores. This implies that schools are an environment that young people with high levels of stress find particularly challenging.

Diagram One: Self-ranking of mental health across various environments and relationships, by stress level



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

When we asked Coalition members how they brokered their discussions about adolescent mental health and wellbeing with parents, Oasis Community Learning told us about their work with parents through their Encounter programme.

Case study: The Adolescent Brain & Oasis Encounter

In September, January and March, Oasis Community Learning held online webinars available to all our parents and carers. The theme of the webinars was “The Adolescent Brain” and how parents can best support it. This year we had on average 240 participants in sessions that covered the neuroscience linked to many teenage behaviours. These sessions had a particular focus on symptoms of poor mental health, many of which emerge first in adolescence.

At these webinars, we also offer the opportunity for parents and carers to join Oasis Encounter, our therapeutic parenting programme based on the principles of Non-Violent Resistance (NVR). Encounter runs online for 8 weeks and covers a variety of difficulties that children and young people can experience with their mental health and behaviour. Encounter equips parents with new tools in de-escalation, raising parental presence, the importance of self care, and actively resisting violence. We have had over 500 parents complete Oasis Encounter, and feedback from parents has been unanimously positive.

Parent Feedback

“The webinar taught me huge amounts about the fight-or-flight system and how I can support my child to regulate themselves when they feel overwhelmed, scared or angry. It gave simple language to each part of the brain that I was able to then use when talking to my child. The webinar also talked about parental presence. I hadn’t heard of this before, and I was able to reflect on how much I am emotionally present with my child. Prior to this webinar, my child was really struggling with anger and anxiety about attending school. Our home life had become very difficult, with lots of escalations, shouting and tears. Using tools from the webinar and the Oasis Encounter programme, I was able to help regulate, relate and reason with my child.

Things are now so much better. My child’s attendance has improved significantly, and home is a much happier place. I am profoundly grateful for Oasis Encounter and the webinar, as they have given me both new friends and new skills. More than this, though, I feel understood.”

Pupil Feedback

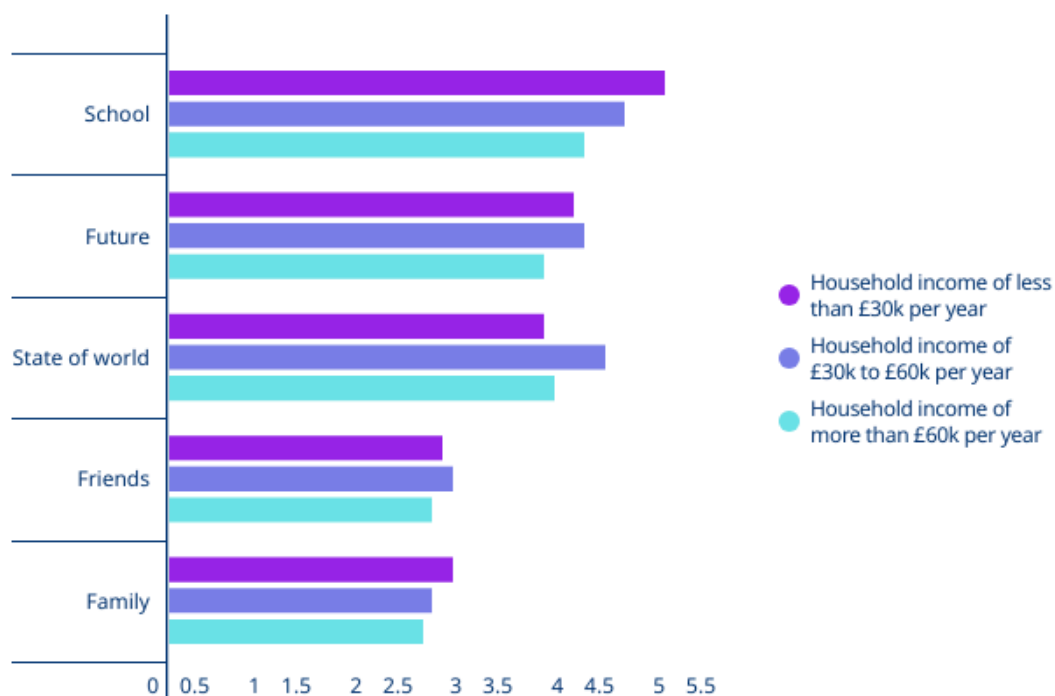
“Before, Mum and I were always arguing. She was always telling me off for silly things and I’d often get really angry. I feel now that mum understands me more. We don’t shout at each other any more. What’s helped is that Mum doesn’t get so angry and I’m able to take more steps than I did before. When I do get really angry, if either of us says “time out” then we take a minute to walk away and calm down. This has made a big difference as it doesn’t get as bad as it used to. We also spend more time together doing fun stuff - although she is still rubbish at gaming.”

| Concerns about school are slightly more pronounced among young people living in lower-income households.

In common with many findings around mental and physical health and wellbeing in young people, those from more disadvantaged backgrounds tend to report greater challenges. When the named sources of stress are analysed by household income level, there is a slight trend for those in less affluent households to be more worried. This is particularly pronounced in the case of school, where those who live in households with an income of less than £30,000 per annum rated their worries an average of 4.9/10, compared to 4.1/10 for those living in households on more than £60,000 per annum. There was no source of stress where those living in households with an annual income of more than £60,000 had the highest average stress level.

Table Eleven: Average stress scores from various sources, by household income per year

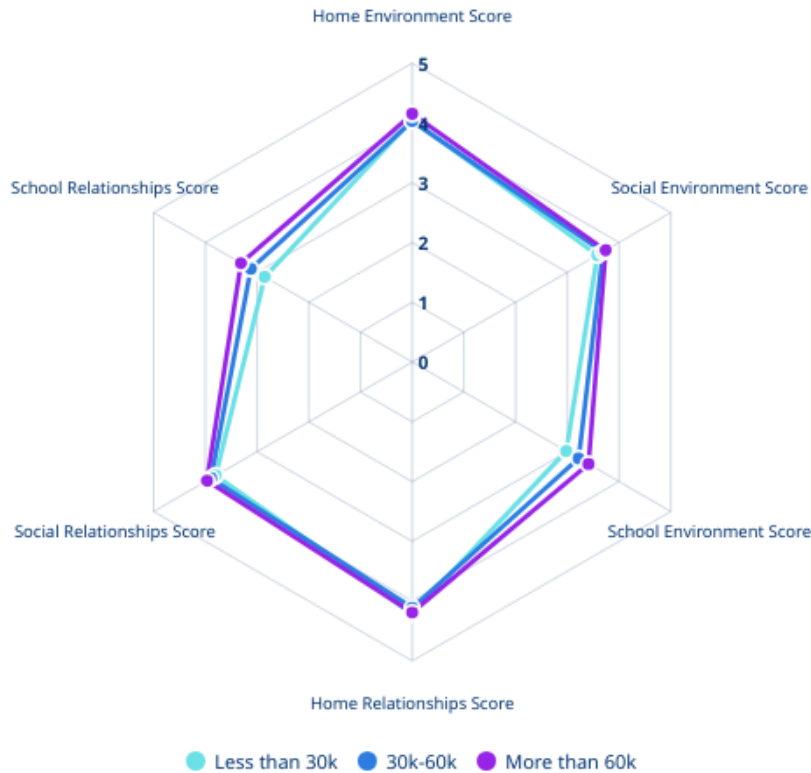
To what extent would you say that you feel stressed, if at all, about the following things in your life? Average score out of 10, where 0 is 'Not stressed at all' and 10 is 'Very stressed'



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

When we broke down the star diagram by income, we found that school was the particular area which had a more negative impact on those on lower incomes compared to those on higher incomes, suggesting that schools should be particularly aware of the mental health challenges that pupils from low-income households associate with it.

Diagram Two: Self-ranking of mental health across various environments and relationships, by household income per year



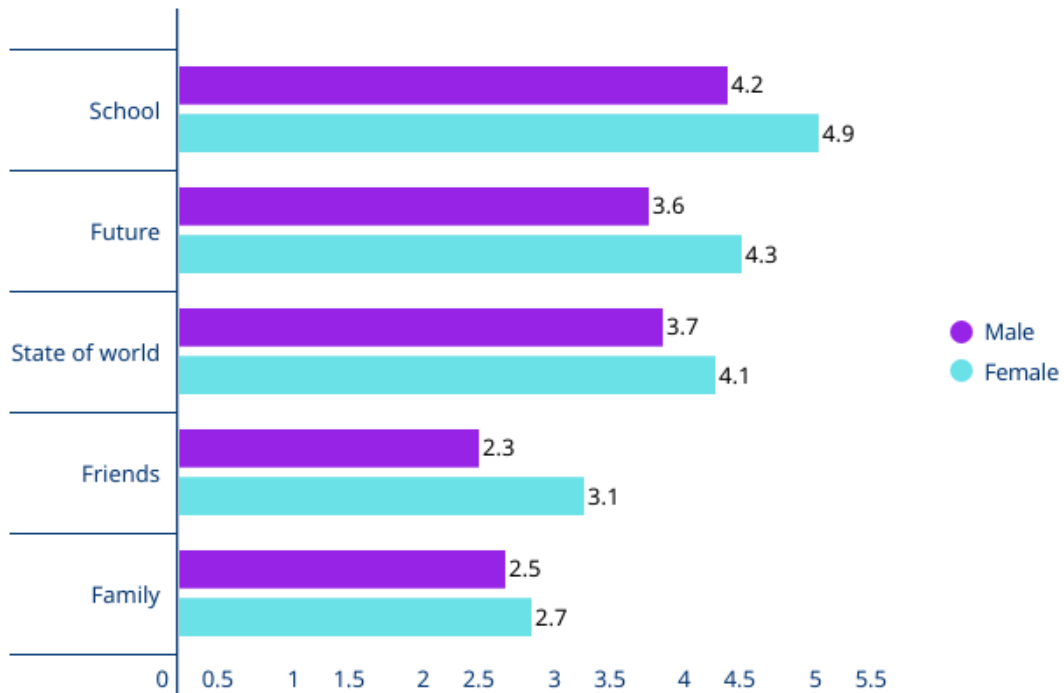
Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| *There is a consistent pattern of girls perceiving themselves to be more stressed than boys, particularly in school.*

When responses to this question were split by gender, we found that girls report being slightly more stressed than boys about every aspect of their lives that we tested. Across all of the different aspects, the average stress score reported by girls was 3.8/10, compared to boys whose average score was 3.2/10. In terms of school specifically, girls rated their stress 4.9/10, 0.7 higher than the average worry score for boys when it came to school. This was one of the largest gender gaps of each of the aspects that we tested, alongside stress caused by friends, where girls' average score was 0.8 higher than boys', and the future, where the girls' average was 0.7 higher than boys'. Although these differences between girls and boys are not vast, this consistent pattern across a number of different life aspects means we can typically expect girls to be experiencing elevated stress levels compared to boys.

Table Thirteen: Average stress scores from various sources, by sex

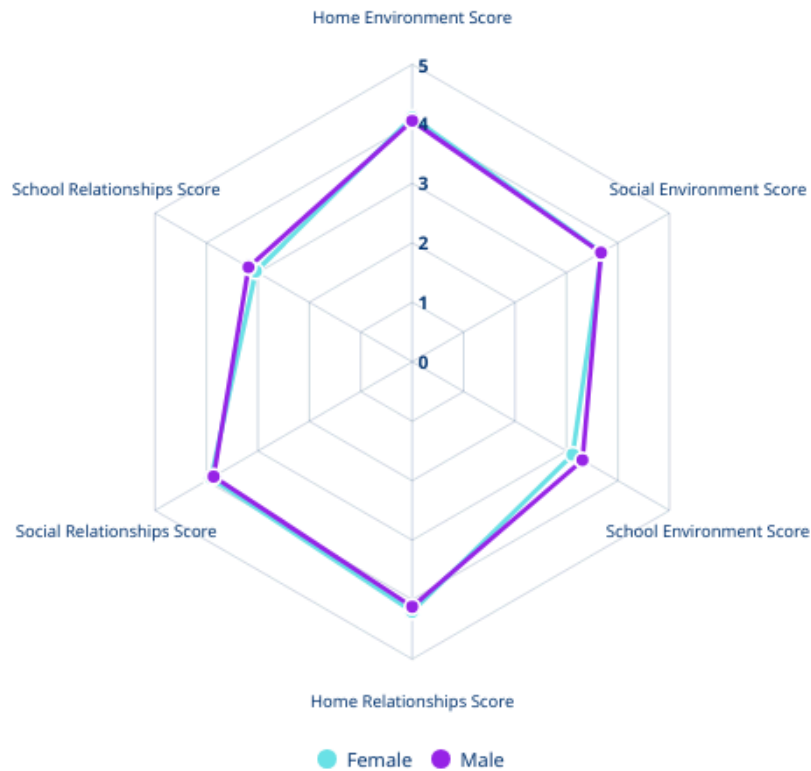
To what extent would you say that you feel stressed, if at all, about the following things in your life? Average score out of 10, where 0 is 'Not stressed at all' and 10 is 'Very stressed'



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

When we compared different environments using the star diagram, boys also consistently outsourced girls when it came to considerations about school, suggesting that school is an area that girls find particularly more challenging than boys.

Diagram Three: Self-ranking of mental health across various environments and relationships, by sex



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

The Wellbeing Hub from Teen Tips allows schools to understand their pupils' needs and priorities for their own mental health and wellbeing, including gender-based needs. Students from the all-girls Sacred Heart Catholic High School in Newcastle told us more about how The Wellbeing Hub supports their own efforts to address mental health and wellbeing needs within the school community.

Case Study: The Wellbeing Hub at Sacred Heart School, Newcastle

As Sixth Form Wellbeing Ambassadors at Sacred Heart School, we've seen firsthand how The Wellbeing Hub has made a real difference to students across our school. Mental health can sometimes feel like a difficult thing to talk about, but having a dedicated space full of advice, support, real-life stories and situations has helped so many of us feel more understood and less alone. We have also been able to develop a better understanding of what it means to be mentally and physically healthy.

What we love most about The Wellbeing Hub is that it's not just about fixing problems—it's about giving us the tools to look after ourselves and each other. Whether it's tips on managing stress, advice on friendships, or even career guidance, there's something for everyone.

One of our favourite parts of The Wellbeing Hub is the 'Help Zone', a great resource for anyone who needs extra support, such as the Year 13s and Year 11s who may be going through a lot before and during exam season. Moreover, as Sixth Formers we feel that it makes it easier to access support when things feel tough, and we can use the platform to be proactive instead of letting our worries build.

Through the Wellbeing Ambassadors programme, we've been able to encourage younger students to prioritise their mental health and support their friends, especially when starting secondary school. It's been amazing to see how much more open and supportive our school community has become over the years. The Wellbeing Hub has become a catalyst for so many events in school that focus on wellbeing. For example, in the Sixth Form we have a wellbeing room where students can take part in activities to help relieve stress, or simply take a breather. In Lower School, Year 7s receive peer support, where they gain a friend who can support them as they settle in. Year 7s and Sixth Formers both agree it has had a positive impact on their wellbeing, as being able to start the day with a friendly face is always welcome. Using topics featured on The Wellbeing Hub has been a great conversation starter resource for this initiative.

Overall, we feel that The Wellbeing Hub has given us the confidence to talk about mental health and wellbeing in a positive way. We feel so grateful to have such a great support system in place, one that we know will continue to help students for years to come.

Sixth Form Wellbeing Ambassadors, Sacred Heart School

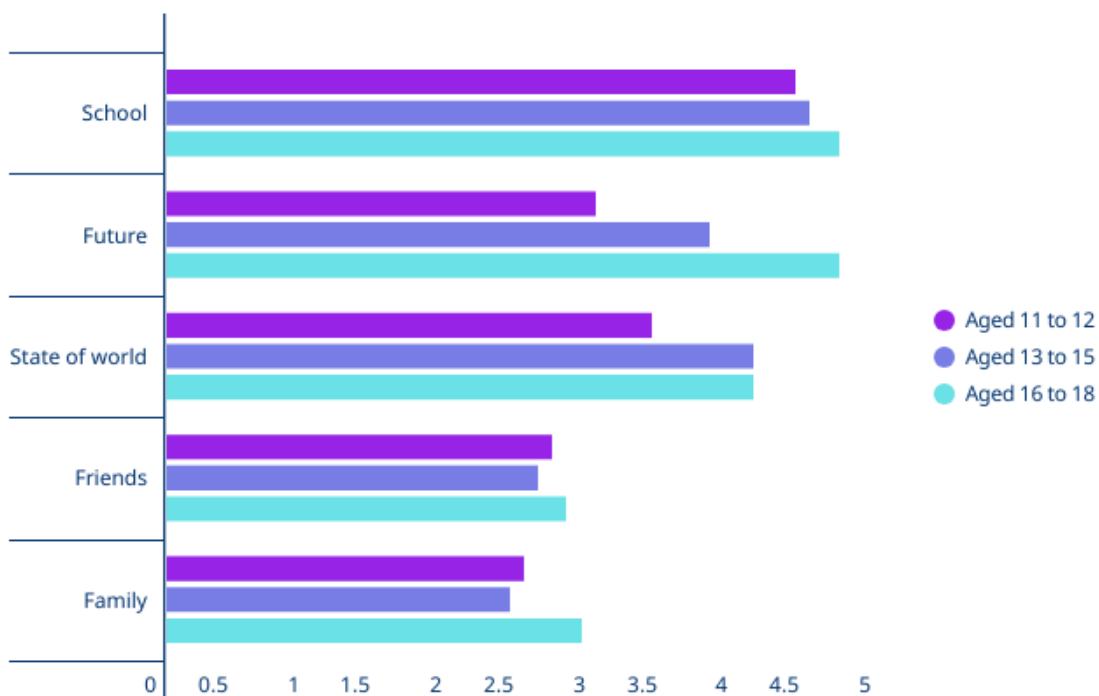
| *The biggest age-related changes in stress levels occur when young people consider their futures.*

As young people draw nearer to the end of their time at school, our data suggests that they seem to become more uneasy about what lies ahead. When it comes to school, there is a notable lack of difference in worry levels across age brackets. While stress about school is scored, on average, higher than any other life aspect by every age group, these scores do not increase very substantively with age. This is despite the increased exam pressure as young people move up through their school, and despite, as outlined above, the fact that older students tend to perceive their mental health to be slightly less good than their younger peers perceive theirs to be.

This therefore suggests that the pattern of declining mental health in older students is not fuelled entirely by school stress. When looking at students' stress scores regarding their future, a more significant gap begins to emerge. While the average stress score in this regard for 11-12 year olds was 3/10, this rises to 3.8/10 among 13-15 year olds, and rises again to 4.7/10 among 16-18 year olds. Older students also reported being slightly more stressed about the state of the world. 11-12 year olds presented an average score of 3.4/10, rising to 4.1/10 in students in both of the older age brackets.

Table Fourteen: Average stress scores from various sources, by age

To what extent would you say that you feel stressed, if at all, about the following things in your life? Average score out of 10, where 0 is 'Not stressed at all' and 10 is 'Very stressed'



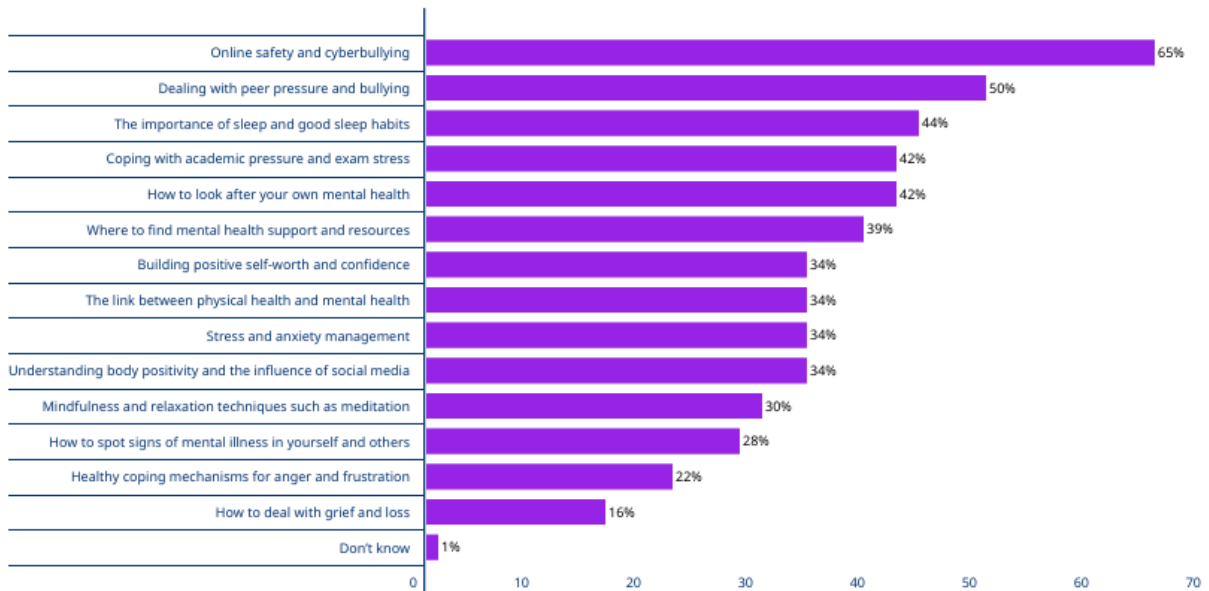
Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| Although most young people have been taught about mental health in the classroom, addressing poor mental health is not one of the most commonly-named topics that they have been taught.

Schools have internalised the message that mental health is a topic their students need to address head on, and the young people we polled reflected that in their responses. 72% of young people we surveyed said that they had been taught about mental health at school. Within this group, the most common topic that had been taught was online safety and cyber-bullying (65%), followed by dealing with peer pressure (50%) and the importance of sleep (44%).

Table Fifteen: Experience of teaching of various mental health topics in school

You said that you have been taught about mental health issues at school. Which of the following have been included in your mental health education at school? Select all that apply.



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health, all those who said they had been taught about mental health issues at school | Sample Size 748 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

Although, for the vast majority of topics that we tested, fewer than half of students said they had learnt about it at school, more than two thirds (68%) said the lessons they had received about mental health were informative and 67% said that the lessons were helpful, with only 12% and 11% respectively disagreeing with these statements. However, under half (42%) said that they had been taught about how to look after their own mental health, and fewer than four in ten (39%) said that they had been taught where to find mental health resources and support.

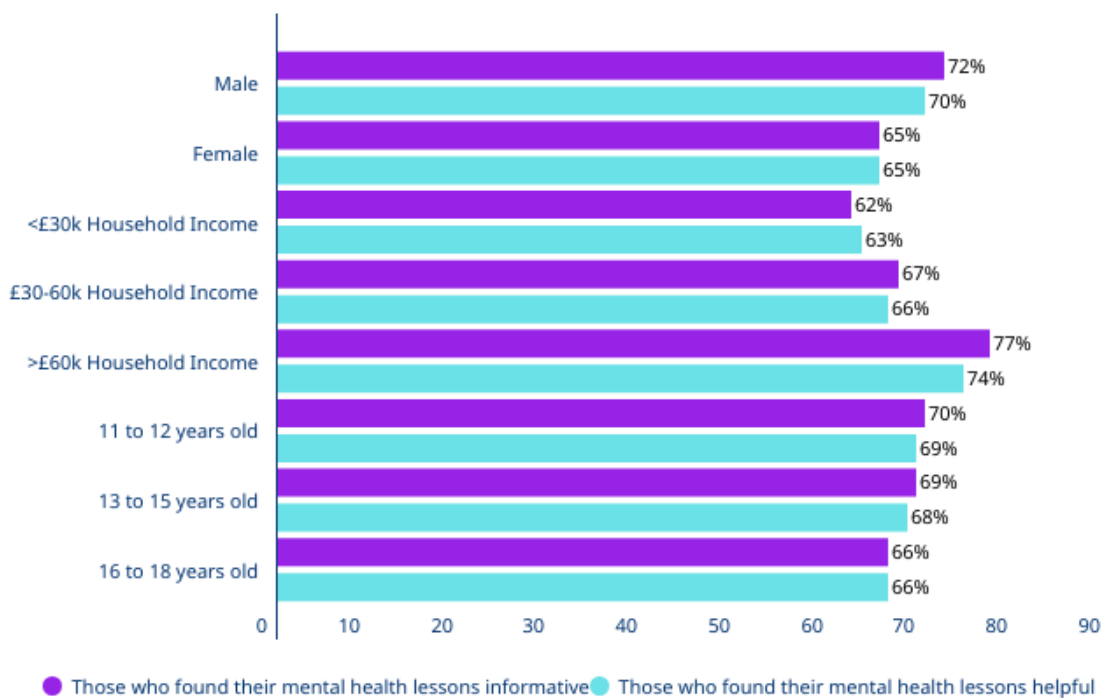
The gendered experiences of stress and poor mental health outcomes were also reflected in what young people told us they wanted to be taught about in mental health lessons. Of the five topics selected by over half the sample overall as priorities for mental health teaching, there were double-digit percentage point gaps in the proportion of boys and girls selecting them for two topics. First, stress and anxiety management was chosen as a priority by 47% of boys, but 59% of girls; second, coping with academic pressure and exam stress was a priority for 47% of boys as opposed to 58% of girls. Finally, the biggest gender gap emerged on the topic of building positive self-worth and confidence. This topic was selected by only 42% of boys, but 54% of girls, making it clear that differences in self-image and the effect that that has on confidence remain a significantly gendered issue for teenagers.

This finding was also informed by the extent to which young people of different genders valued their mental health lessons. Slightly more boys who had been taught about mental health found their lessons informative and helpful (72% and 70%),

compared to girls (65% and 65%, respectively). Household income also impacted pupil perception of their teaching about mental health, albeit to a moderate degree. More young people from higher income homes found mental health teaching informative and helpful (77% and 74%) than students from lower income households (62% and 63%).

Table Sixteen: Experience of teaching of various mental health topics in school, by various demographic factors

You said that you have been taught about mental health issues at school. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?



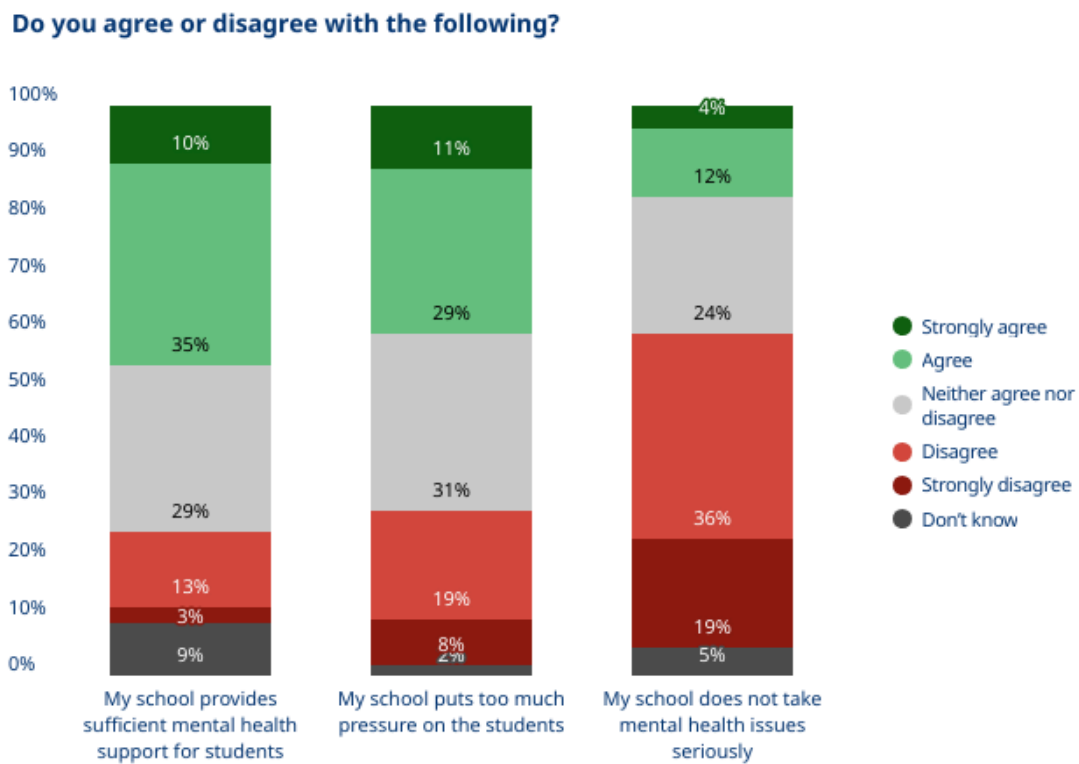
Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health, all those who said they had been taught about mental health issues at school | Sample Size 748 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| Young people believe that their schools are taking mental health seriously, but many also think that schools apply too much pressure.

Based on our polling, it seems that young people implicitly recognise the tightrope that schools have to walk in order to maintain high standards while remaining nurturing environments. Almost three times as many (45%) of survey respondents agreed that their school provides sufficient mental health support for students as disagreed (17%). Even more strikingly, 55% of respondents overall disagreed with the idea that their school does not take mental health issues seriously, with only 16% agreeing that mental health issues are not taken seriously in their school. This suggests that there is

strong support for the work that schools are doing to help their students maintain positive mental health and wellbeing. Despite this, 40% of students agreed with the idea that schools put too much pressure on their students, with over 1 in 10 (11%) agreeing strongly and only 27% disagreeing with this idea. All this suggests that young people are supportive of the work that schools are already doing to support them, but keen for schools to remain mindful of the pressure that they place on their students alongside their supportive efforts.

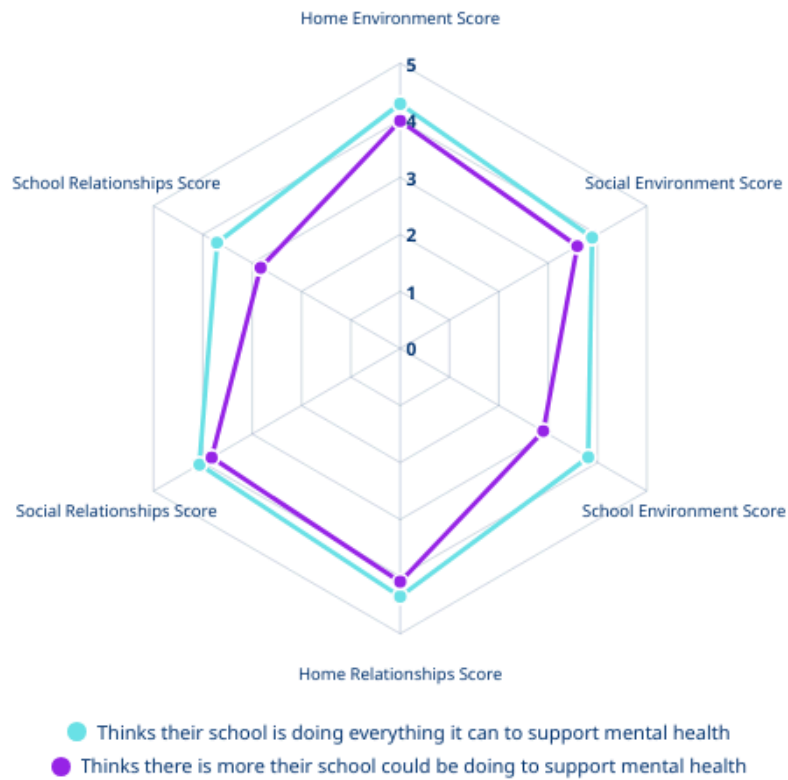
Table Seventeen: Schools' impact on mental health



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

When we used the star diagram to compare the mental health and wellbeing of those with different perspectives on how much their schools are doing to support mental health, we found that those who think that their school could do more to support mental health have particularly poor school relationship and environment scores, but also lower scores across the board. This suggests that when young people feel that schools could be doing more to support their mental health, this loss of confidence could spill over into their feelings of wellbeing in other aspects of their lives.

Diagram Four: Self-ranking of mental health across various environments and relationships, by level of confidence in how much schools are doing to support mental health



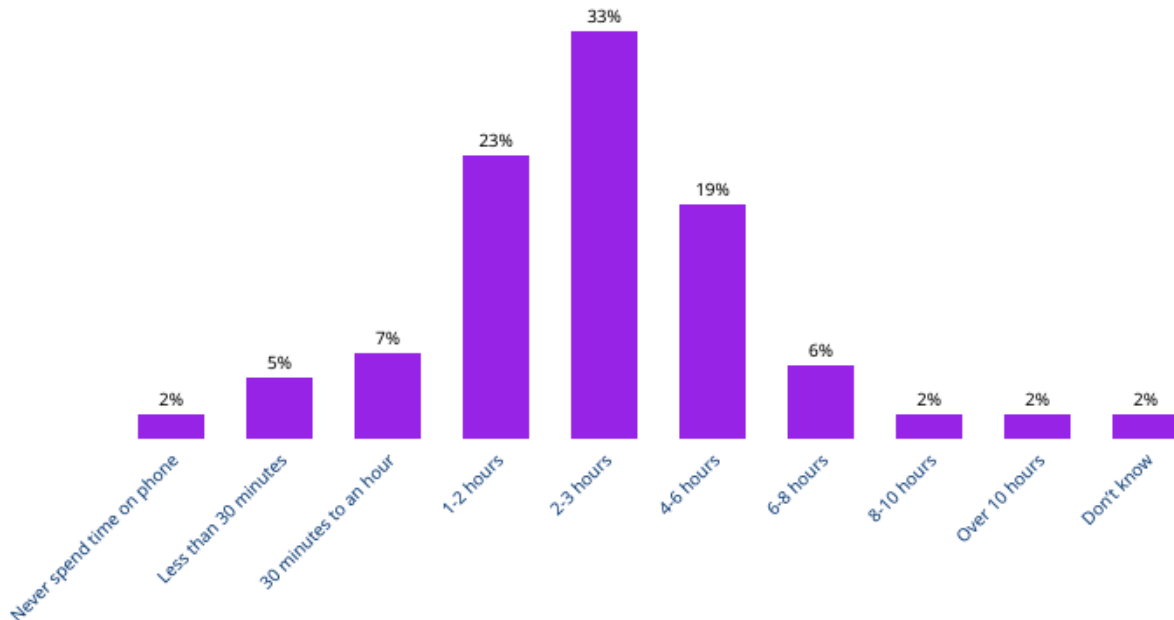
Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| Young people are extremely reliant on their mobile phones.

In discussions of the priorities for our polling work, Coalition members alluded to the ubiquity of phones in adolescent life, and asked us to explore teenagers’ habits and uses of their phones. Their perceived omnipresence was borne out in the data: 97% of respondents in our poll said that they own a smartphone. We also found that students spend a considerable amount of time on their phones, with a plurality (33%) estimating they spend between 2 and 3 hours looking at their phone screen on an average school day.

Table Eighteen: Hours on smartphones on the average school day

How many hours per day would you say that you spend looking at your phone screen on the average school day?

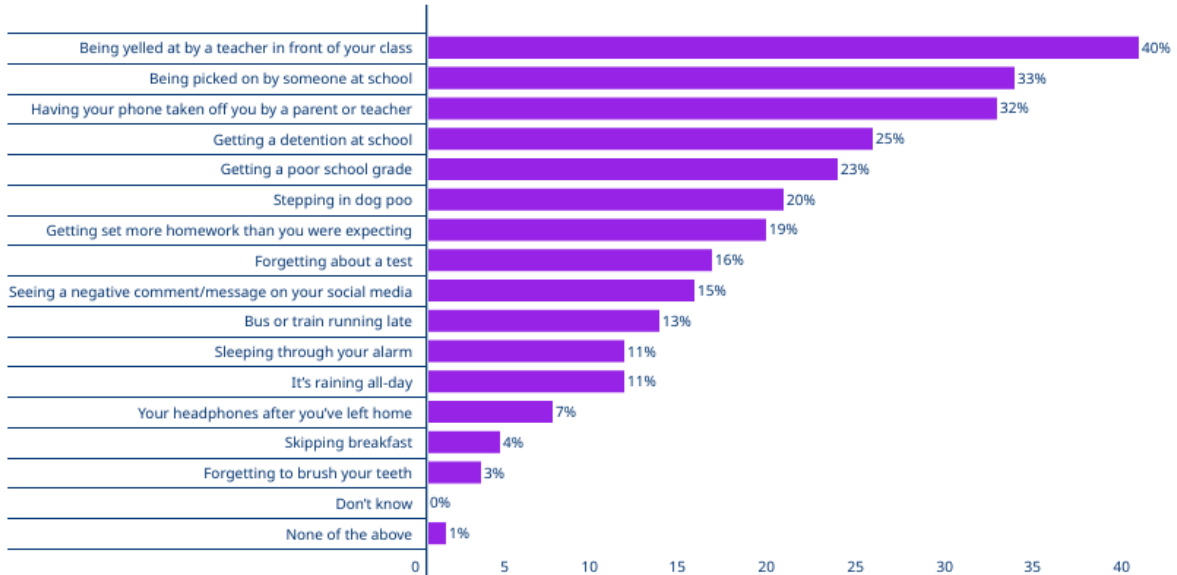


Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old, all those who own a smartphone |
Sample Size 930 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

When we asked students what would be most likely to ruin their day, 11-18 year olds were more likely to select having their phone taken away by a parent or teacher (32%) than getting detention (25%) and getting a poor school grade (23%). It came third in the ranking of potential day-ruining events we presented to students, behind getting yelled at by a teacher in front of the class (40%) and being picked on by someone at school (33%).

Table Nineteen: Ranking day-ruining experiences

Which of these would be most likely to ruin your day? Select up to three.

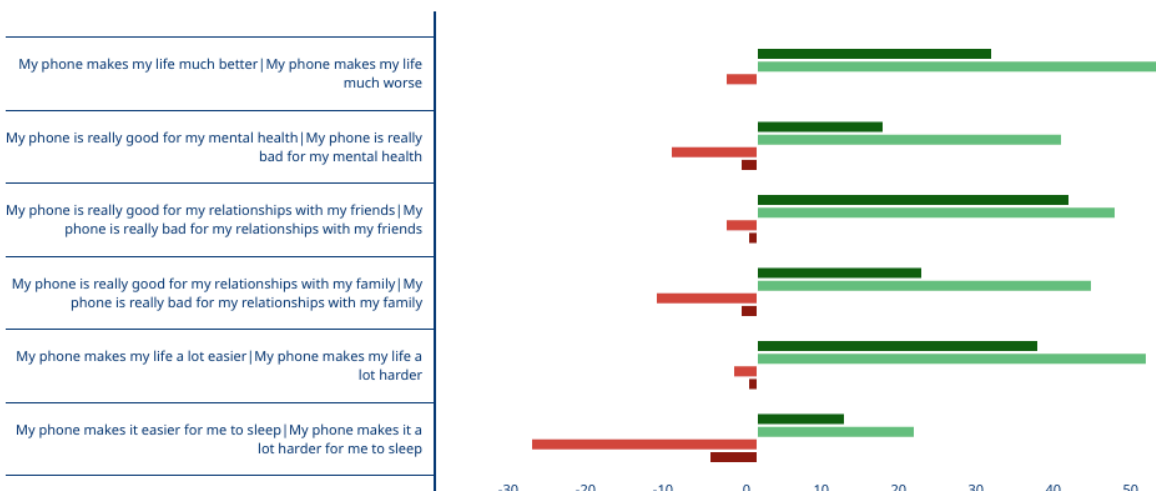


Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old | Sample Size 1,000 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

However, young people are overwhelmingly positive about the roles that phones play in their lives. 82% said that their phone makes their life better, 86% said it makes their life easier, 85% said that it is good for their relationships with friends and over half (55%) said it is good for their mental health.

Table Twenty: The impact of smartphones on lives

Thinking about the impact that your phone has on your life, please place yourself on the following scales.



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old who consented to answering questions about mental health | Sample Size 868 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

| *They are also very reliant on social media, saying that they couldn't go without it.*

Social media usage was also a major feature of young people's lives in our polling. 86% of 11-18 year olds told us that they use at least one social media account. Despite the fact that, on most platforms, the legal age to join is 13, 63% of 11-12-year-olds we surveyed reported using an account. This rose to 91% of respondents aged 13-15 and 94% aged 16-18.

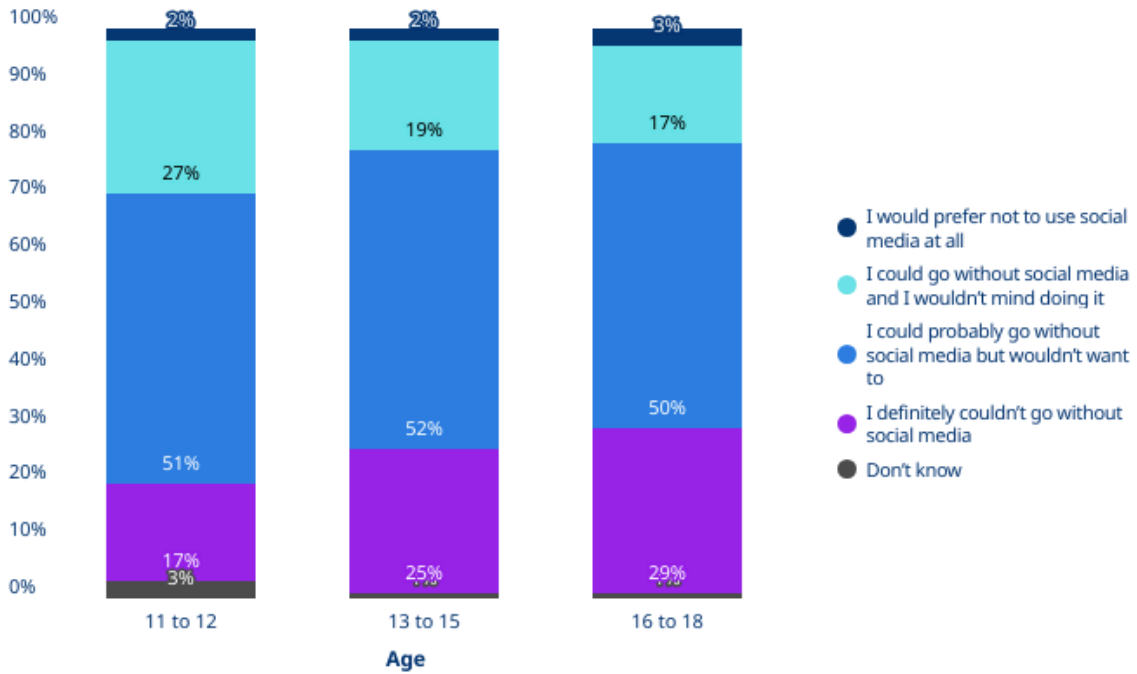
Of those who have a social media account, 65% said they spend at least an hour using their accounts on a typical school day, with 9% estimating they spend 4-6 hours on these platforms daily.

25% of those who use social media went on to say that they definitely couldn't go without it. This ranged from 17% of social media users aged 11-12 saying they couldn't go without, up to 29% of social media users aged 16-18. Young people from London were also more likely to say they definitely couldn't go without social media. 32% of London social media users said that they couldn't go without, which was six percentage points higher than any other region (and thirteen percentage points higher than regions reporting the lowest levels of social media dependency, Scotland and Northern Ireland at 19%).

A further half (51%) of all social media users said they probably could go without social media but wouldn't want to; 3% of social media users said that they would prefer not to be on these platforms at all.

Table Twenty-One: Relationships with social media

How would you describe your relationship with social media?



Public First | Nationally representative sample young people aged 11 to 18 years old, all those who told us they use social media | Sample Size 856 | Fieldwork 14th to 21st November 2024

Recommendations: In order to continue improving young people's mental health, there are many targeted solutions in schools - both extant and hypothetical - that could make an impact.

| Labour's manifesto commitment to providing a counsellor in every school can act as a complement to existing teaching strategies and ensure that awareness is matched with action.

Our polling found that in the main, young people are benefiting from lessons on mental health in the classroom. 72% said that they had been taught about mental health in school, with online safety and cyberbullying the most commonly-mentioned topic being taught (65%), which aligns with their priorities for these lessons, and two-thirds of young people said that these lessons were helpful. 75% of young people also report that teachers are comfortable teaching these topics. All of this suggests that the 'taught' part of the 'caught and taught' approach to mental health and wellbeing that both the Coalition and others have advocated is taking hold.

Alongside this, though, there is room for growth in the 'caught' approach to mental health provision in schools. The fact that fewer than half (42%) of respondents report receiving lessons on how to look after their own mental health and only 39% report being taught where to go for help and resources to support their own mental health possibly points to a gap in the immediacy of support when young people are struggling with their own mental health. It is here that counsellors could work to support young people. Recent research has pointed to how implementing

mental health awareness interventions in schools can leave young people struggling without follow-up provision and actionable steps. As well as this, there is a clear sense that awareness is not an issue for young people, with three quarters of those we polled saying that they have actively had lessons on the topic, as referenced above. There is no shortage of online content, especially via shortform video, on the topic of various mental health issues.

With this in mind, concrete support is the next necessary step. Labour's commitment to ensuring a counsellor is available in every school can help teachers and pupils alike by ensuring that mental health teaching is complemented by onsite mental health support and resources for pupils, helping them to 'catch' better habits surrounding their own mental health.

| *Gender-specific interventions should form a key part of mental health provision in the coming years.*

Our polling found that experiences of mental health between 11 and 18 are strongly gendered. We found that girls tend to worry more about their lives than boys, and were less likely to rate their mental health as 'quite good' or 'very good' than their male counterparts, and they are more likely to say that they regularly or occasionally had experienced bullying at school. They also have distinctive priorities for mental health lessons in schools, many of which relate to self-confidence and managing stress levels. Other research has pointed to the challenges that boys and young men face regarding their mental health, particularly regarding the visibility of role models for positive masculinity, and it is very possible that the boys we surveyed have systematically underreported their own mental health struggles.

It is clear that boys and girls have different experiences of mental health while at school. Our Coalition members spoke to us about the importance of focusing on the ways in which young people experience adolescence differently based on their gender, and we saw many examples of schools working to address these differences in their settings. Likewise, The Wellbeing Hub does extensive work on behalf of parents, teachers and pupils on the different experiences that young people have based on their gender. Alongside the extensive work that third-sector organisations, trusts and schools do to address gendered mental health problems, policymakers should make policy in light of these gendered experiences.

| *Interventions on mobile phones should bear in mind the way in which they are perceived by young people.*

In recent years, there has been a well-documented and well-justified shift towards reducing the presence of phones in schools. Most schools already have rules in place that dramatically limit pupils' ability to interact with their phones during the school day, and technologies such as Yondr pouches are used extensively to support these limits. Although recent reports suggest that banning phones in schools does not have an

effect on grades or mental wellbeing, phone bans are already being rolled out in some parts of the country, and polling indicates that screen time among young people falls dramatically with school phone bans.

A widespread reduction in phone use at school is likely to be a positive step for teachers and pupils alike. Teachers in Coalition schools spoke extensively about the disruption that phones cause and the ways in which they distract from learning. Nevertheless, our polling demonstrates that smartphones in particular are now an indelible part of teenage life, and that young people feel that they have many positive impacts on their lives. While we welcome the reduction in phone use in schools in response to statutory guidance and/or future bans, policymakers should be mindful of the ubiquity of smartphones in young people's lives (with 97% of respondents saying that they own one), and the benefits that young people argue these devices offer them. Schools should seek to adopt a pastoral approach to this issue that is in line with their school's ethos - explaining why phone policies are the way they are, for example, or linking it to the school's work on pupil character.

| Supporting young people to find ways of managing their relationships with their phones and social media should be a key priority for mental health policymakers.

One of the more concerning trends we identified from our polling was the level of dependency that 11-18 year olds feel regarding their phones and social media usage. 63% of 11-12 year olds said that they use social media, despite the legal minimum age being 13, and a quarter of young people said that they definitely couldn't go without social media. There is also a body of existing evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study that suggests links between time spent on social media and issues with self esteem, body image and symptoms of poor mental health. To have young people flouting legal restrictions on social media usage and risking worse mental health outcomes in the process while often feeling incapable of reducing their usage is an invidious combination of circumstances.

As alluded to above, the benefits that young people perceive from their mobile phones and their omnipresence in modern life means that solutions to the problems they cause must extend beyond setting-specific prohibition. Nevertheless, the fact that significant proportions of the teenage population report dependency on their phones alongside an insistence that these phones are beneficial will be of some concern to adults with caring and safeguarding responsibilities.

Policymakers should investigate ways to rebalance young people's relationships with their smartphones, and social media in particular. Reducing phone use in schools is one piece of the puzzle, but more work needs to be done in order to reduce the extent to which they feel they cannot do without social media. This could entail building on existing work to curtail the features of some social media platforms that are available to younger users.

| Young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds need more inclusive wraparound support and teaching to address the mental health challenges they face.

In several instances, our polling found that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and lower socioeconomic grades had poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes than their better-off peers. Our polling found that young people in households with an income of less than £30,000 rated their worries about school at 4.9 on a 1-10 scale, compared to 4.1 for young people in households with incomes of over £60,000. Furthermore, 87% of young people from social grades AB said that their mental health was quite good or very good, but this was only true for 69% of young people from social grades DE.

Our work as a Coalition has shown us that school staff, particularly in deprived settings, work tirelessly to support young people facing mental health challenges. But with attendance challenges affecting children from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly severely, schools' capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people from these backgrounds may be strained. In order to address this, wraparound support, such as the Youth Hubs promised in Labour's 2024 Manifesto, should be a key priority to avoid broadening the socioeconomic gap in the mental health and wellbeing outcomes of teenagers. Furthermore, young people need more support and teaching in school to help them manage worries that may be exacerbated by deprivation.

| More should be done to prepare 16-18-year-olds for the transition to their next stages of education and employment.

Our polling found that young people's happiness declines across their adolescence, with older teenagers less happy and more stressed than their younger counterparts. Only 68% of 16-18 year olds rated their mental health as quite good or very good, 29% said that they definitely couldn't go without social media (compared to 17% of 11-12 year olds and 25% of 13-15 year olds) and they rated their worries about the future as 4.7 on a 1-10 scale (compared to 3 for 11-12 year olds and 3.9 for 13-15 year olds). Despite the improvements in the self-declared mental health outcomes for 16-18 year olds since 2021 reported above, there remain some concerns around how this age bracket are feeling about their own mental health and what comes next for them.

This is a crucial point for well-delivered education regarding future options. Recent research from Public First has uncovered widespread pessimism from Gen Zs aged 18-27 regarding the state of the world. With 50% of this age group saying Britain is stuck in the past, 30% saying they hold debts of £10,000 or more and a third saying they've sought help for mental health support in the last year, it is perhaps unsurprising to see the 16-18 year olds who are following them into university and work apprehensive about the adult world that awaits them. Teens' reliance on phones (as

discussed above) could leave young people open to misinformation and disinformation from malign online influences, which could amplify adverse mental health consequences in at-risk sections of the 11-18 population.

Smoothing this transition is achievable through greater dialogue between schools, colleges, universities and employers, a process that starts upstream of the 16-18 phase by providing ongoing awareness, advice and guidance to young people about what life beyond school looks like throughout all key stages. With this generation among the first year groups to expect a university and graduate training experience untouched by the legacy of the pandemic, more could be done to engender confidence and excitement for the experiences that await them.

