

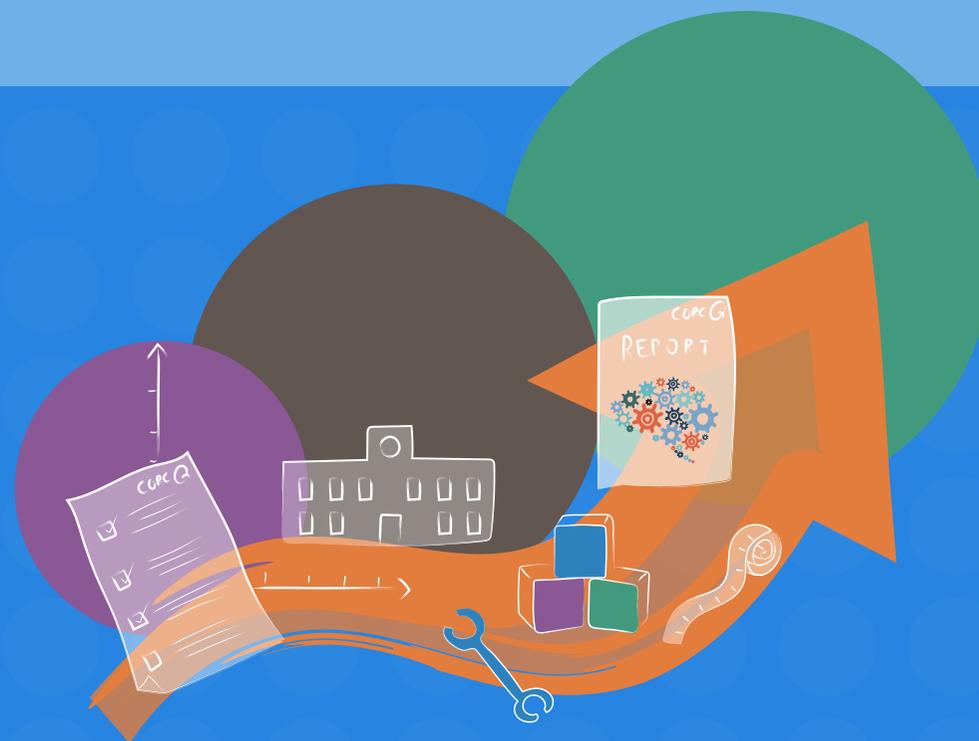


**CORC**

Child Outcomes  
Research Consortium

# Using measuring tools to understand pupils' mental health needs:

*a guide for schools and colleges*



**Understanding need** is one of our 5 Steps towards a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing. This document focuses on how to use measurement tools to understand pupils' wellbeing so that you can provide them with the support they need.

Why not **register** with our free 5 Steps framework now? It will provide you with evidence-based materials and a framework for promoting wellbeing in your setting.



Understanding the wellbeing and mental health needs of your pupils is at the heart of a whole-school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Using questionnaires with children and young people enables you to:

- v measure their needs
- v identify the most suitable interventions to address these
- v allocate resources
- v measure how things change over time.

In this resource we want to show you how to use **measurement tools** in schools and colleges. We focus on two main ways of using the surveys:

1. Using surveys with large groups of pupils (a cohort) to understand their needs.
2. Using questionnaires with individual pupils to understand their specific needs.

These summaries draw heavily on our **Measuring and monitoring children and young people's mental wellbeing: A toolkit for schools and colleges**. We recommend this document as a useful resource for schools and colleges who want to understand the mental wellbeing needs of their pupils.

## What are 'measurement tools' for understanding wellbeing and mental health needs?

These tools are researched or well-established questionnaires that can be used to measure and monitor different aspects of mental wellbeing.

## Who completes them?

Mostly young people, but there are also questionnaires for parents and carers, teachers and professionals as well.

## Why use these rather than design your own survey?

For the best results it's worth using a questionnaire that has an evidence base which is **valid** and **reliable**:

### Definitions:

Validity - measuring what you intend to measure; avoiding bias.

Reliability - getting the same result each time if each characteristic is the same; avoiding inconsistency.

Each questionnaire uses a different way of scoring responses. Many of them use existing research as a benchmark to contextualise the results.

## Where can I find out more?

The **Toolkit for schools and colleges** includes a compendium of measurement tools.

The **CORC website** provides guidance for using many commonly used tools.

## Useful resources

The **Wellbeing Measurement Framework** is a set of validated questionnaire booklets for primary and secondary schools and colleges.

You can use these questionnaires to carry out a survey and to help you assess wellbeing, behavioural or emotional difficulties, as well as the presence and strength of protective factors. These include support at school, home and in the community, and the child or young person's ability to deal with stress and manage emotions.

The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) run by the Anna Freud Centre and UCL and CORC (Child Outcomes Research Consortium) have developed a **Wellbeing Measurement for Schools**. This provides schools with an online validated pupil survey that assesses emotional wellbeing, mental health and resilience. Results are analysed and a report created that enables schools to compare their results with data from children in other schools. Please note that in order to cover our costs we have to charge if you require our support to do this.

## Understanding the needs of a cohort

There's lots to consider when planning to survey a cohort. Using 'tried and tested' resources can be really supportive. The Wellbeing Measurement Frameworks provide sets of questions, selected for different age groups. The Wellbeing Measurement for Schools provides electronic surveys and analyses your results.

Here are key questions to reflect on in planning your approach:

- **Why** would this approach be taken? **What** needs to be measured?
- **Who** completes the survey?
- **When** are the responses collected?
- **Where** and **how** are the surveys completed?
- **What** next?

### **Why would this approach be taken?**

This approach will help you understand the mental wellbeing of a cohort of young people – the strengths and range of needs within the cohort – to better inform the allocation of resources. Used regularly, this approach can show progress of pupil wellbeing over time.

### **Who completes the survey?**

Include all the young people in the year group or school to provide a snapshot of strengths and needs at that time.

### **What needs to be measured?**

Decide what's important for your school and choose questionnaires that focus on these issues. These could include: positive wellbeing, access to support, protective factors that improve the likelihood of positive mental health and wellbeing, such as social support and good problem solving.





### When are the responses collected?

We advise avoiding stressful times such as exam periods.

Many schools carry out surveys annually to get a regular snapshot of a year group or to follow a cohort through school.

### Where and how are the surveys complete?

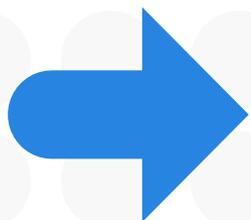
Decide whether pupils' responses will be anonymous or identifiable. Pupils may respond more honestly if the survey is anonymous, whereas identifying individuals may enable more targeted support.

Surveys can be completed electronically or on paper. Online surveys are much more efficient, particularly when surveying lots of pupils but do take time to set up and require access to appropriate technology. Paper-based surveys can be quicker to set up but time-consuming to analyse in large numbers.

Pupils need privacy to respond to the questionnaires. Giving plenty of space and making sure screens can't be read by others helps ensure this.

Completing measurement tools can be an emotional experience and some pupils may require support before, during or after completing the tool. Schools need to plan how to provide this support.

*See practical considerations.*



### **What next?** *Sharing and using the information collected.*

Comparing your results with those from other schools can contextualise the findings and help you to identify your areas of strength and need.

You will often get the best results by involving a range of stakeholders. Including young people and other stakeholders in discussions about the results can deepen understanding. Consider who to include in discussions and action-planning to get a range of perspectives.

Key questions to ask when looking at the results:

- What's going well and how can we ensure this continues?
- What are the needs of the cohort and what steps should we take to address them?
- What else do we know about the cohort that will help contextualise the results?
- Are there groups of pupils who might benefit from a more targeted approach?
- How will we monitor the impact of the school response?

**Case example: Saddleworth Secondary School – [read about one school's experiences of surveying Year 7 and how they used the results.](#)**

## Understanding the needs of an individual

If you're concerned about an individual pupil, using a questionnaire can help to identify the nature and level of their need and to plan for effective additional support. These questionnaires are widely used by mental health services to understand need and measure change.

### What needs to be measured?

This will depend on the concerns you or others have about the child. Once you have discussed these, you will need to choose a **measurement tool** that is relevant to the difficulties the young person may be experiencing. Local services may be able to suggest tools that are used with the young people they work with.

### Why would this approach be taken?

This will help understand the mental wellbeing of a young person to develop a supportive response to their particular needs and monitor the impact of this response.

### Who completes the questionnaire?

As well as the young person themselves, the perspectives of others who know them well such as parents or carers and school staff can add to the understanding of need. Some questionnaires have versions to use with teachers and parents.



## When is the questionnaire used?

If you or anyone else has a concern about a child, using a measurement tool can help inform decisions about support. Using a tool regularly to monitor progress can provide valuable information to ensure support is effective.



## Where and how is the questionnaire completed?

Make sure you provide a safe and supportive environment. Completing measurement tools can be an emotional experience and pupils may require support before, during or after completing the tool.

## What next? *Sharing and using the information collected*

Discussing the findings with the young person is important. It gives you an opportunity to understand more about their experiences by opening up conversations about their needs. It's worth spending time identifying the best person to discuss the findings with the young person.

Key questions to ask when looking at the results:

- What do the findings suggest about level of need?
- How does this add to what is already known about the young person?
- How can the school support?
- Do other agencies need to be involved to provide support?
- Is signposting or a referral to another service required?
- How will progress be monitored?

**Case example: Cheltenham College** – on page 22 of the toolkit, **read about how one school is using questionnaires regularly as part of their pastoral support system**

## **Practical considerations**

Schools need to seek consent from pupils and parents to carry out a survey. Clarity about what is being collected and how it will be stored, used and shared are all necessary for informed consent.

All personally identifiable information collected in this way must be stored in accordance with legal requirements, ethical standards and data security requirements. It is important to plan where and how the data will be stored and who will have access to it.

## **Engaging with parents and carers**

Measuring the mental wellbeing of pupils can send an important message to parents and carers that their wellbeing is a priority. Plan how to engage parents with the process through clear communication about your approach and the potential benefits to pupils. Parents and carers need to fully understand what is being asked of their children and how the information collected will be used and shared. Sharing the findings, and planned actions, with parents and carers, reinforces the importance the schools places on mental wellbeing.

## Introducing questionnaires to pupils – *what do pupils want to know?*

Plan carefully how to introduce the process to pupils so that they feel comfortable to answer the questions openly and honestly. Ensure there's an opportunity for them to ask questions and find out more. Pupils tell us that they want to understand:

- why they are being asked to complete the wellbeing measure
- what the wellbeing measure is like and how to complete it
- who is being asked to complete the measure
- who will see the information
- how the results will be used
- what difference it will make
- how they will get feedback.

Carrying out surveys, involving stakeholders and developing responses to needs can result in great improvements for the individual child, groups of children and the whole school community, including parents and carers. It sends out a clear message that you take pupils' mental health and wellbeing seriously and that you are prepared to work hard to ensure the best results for your pupils. Conversations with stakeholders enrich the process and have an important impact on how schools engage with their communities and lie at the heart of a taking a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

