

Mercers' Wellbeing Evaluation Programme: executive summary

October 2022



In recent years there has been an increase in rates of mental health difficulty among young people and a decline in their wellbeing.

Wider research suggests that some approaches show promise for supporting young people's wellbeing within education settings, including those based on building social and emotional skills or those based on cognitive behavioural principles.

However, research also emphasises that even interventions that have a strong evidence base can vary in their effectiveness, depending on how they are implemented and how well they fit the context in which they are delivered.

The Mercers' Wellbeing Evaluation Programme aimed to support Mercers' Associated Schools and Colleges to evaluate their mental health and wellbeing provision. The programme was delivered in two phases between 2016 and 2022. The final report from the Mercers' Wellbeing Evaluation Programme is available online. It summarises the learning and achievements of the programme's second phase, setting these within the context of the programme as a whole.



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Achievements

Wellbeing survey

More than 10,500 wellbeing surveys were completed by students in Mercers' Associated Schools and Colleges during the programme, in spite of significant challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. The data collected were used to understand the strengths and needs of the student population and to target support where it was most needed.

Sharing learning from these schools and colleges with wider populations of schools and colleges nationally has supported the increase in use of such wellbeing measurement tools more broadly.

In-depth evaluation

We carried out six in-depth evaluations of interventions delivered in Mercers' Associated Schools and Colleges during the programme. The schools and colleges that participated in these in-depth evaluations particularly appreciated access to independent evaluation that provided additional capacity and learning opportunities.

Capacity building

Working with the evaluation team and attending the workshops improved staff knowledge and skills around evaluation. Discussions at the workshops demonstrated that participating staff are now confident in considering and implementing evaluation when planning wellbeing provision for students.

Sharing between settings

The regular opportunity to share experiences and good practice between Mercers' Associated Schools and Colleges was particularly valued and added significantly to the learning accrued. Sessions were also an opportunity to receive guidance on selecting interventions when the array on offer is overwhelming.



Outputs

We produced the following outputs as part of this work:



37

bespoke reports created, reporting wellbeing data collected from more than 15,000 students

21

workshops and webinars delivered for Mercers' Associated Schools' and Colleges' staff

8

briefings published sharing learning from this programme

6

in-depth evaluations of wellbeing support provided for students by schools and colleges

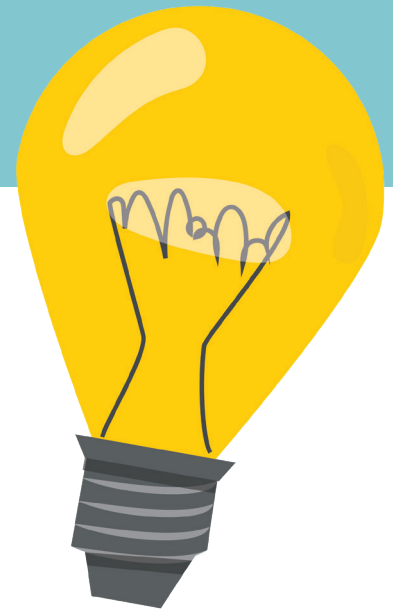
In addition, we provided regular support to school and college contacts to assist evaluation within their setting and the approach to evaluation was presented at a national conference.

Challenges

Some challenges were identified by schools and colleges. The majority of these related to staffing capacity and the ability to prioritise this work, without having specifically allocated protected time. A lack of capacity could sometimes make it difficult to maintain momentum and embed an evaluation approach.

Key findings and recommendations

1. The pragmatic IDEA (Intervention description, Design, Evaluation implementation, Analysis and dissemination) approach developed in this programme has been demonstrated to be a [feasible and valuable approach to evaluation](#) for schools and colleges.
2. Given that the research emphasises the importance of context, schools and colleges can only be confident that adopted programmes are supporting their students effectively if they are evaluated in situ. This programme has demonstrated practical and manageable ways that schools and colleges can carry out such evaluations.
3. The importance of centring the voice of children and young people in planning support has been highlighted and practical suggestions of how this might be achieved have been provided in [an additional briefing](#).
4. For support for young people to be most effective, programmes to improve the mental health and wellbeing of students should be embedded in a wider culture that supports and prioritises the wellbeing of students and teachers.



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