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for children

Media release

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Best practice framework to help schools to promote social and emotional well-being and recognise the early onset of mental health issues affecting young people

The National Children's Bureau (NCB), is today (12 March 2015) publishing advice for schools to better support pupils with mental health issues and to promote well-being as part of school life.

Challenges to schools include the misuse of social media and cyberbullying which are identified as major causes in the rise in emotional disorders. Self-harm and eating disorders are also increasing with one in twelve children and young people said to self-harm. Many of these problems can remain undetected and untreated if schools do not take an active role.

A systematic review of best practice and research worldwide was conducted by Professor Katherine Weare for the Partnership for Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools, which is a national network of 40 organisations hosted by the National Children's Bureau.

The framework outlines effective approaches that include professional learning and staff development; adopting whole-school thinking; and developing robust policies to underpin a supportive environment.

The emphasis is on developing a school and classroom climate which builds a sense of connectedness and purpose so that all children can thrive. It also highlights the need to promote staff wellbeing and particularly to address their stress levels.

The findings identify the triggers that can lead to mental health issues such as: lack of trust; communication and relationship breakdowns; and the possible lack of extended family ties.

The framework demonstrates how to engage the whole school community so that pupils feel their voice is heard and parents, carers and families feel they genuinely participate, particularly those of pupils in difficulties who otherwise may feel stigmatised.

Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of the National Children's Bureau, said:

'This framework highlights the benefit of adopting a whole-school approach to promoting social and emotional well-being, to help address mental health problems both in pupils and staff.'

'By framing principles which are directly informed by international research our aim is to give school leaders and their staff the best support to deliver effective interventions. This will impact on academic learning and motivation as well as staff and pupil well-being. It will reduce mental health problems and improve school behaviour.'

Lucie Russell, Director of Campaigns and Media at YoungMinds, said:

'YoungMinds is pleased to be a part of the Partnership for Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools, and welcomes this guidance which will be much valued by schools and policy makers.'

'Across the political spectrum the role of schools in promoting good mental health is gaining much support, and understanding of how resilience and results go hand-in-hand is growing. This advice on how to build positive mental health and resilience amongst all school pupils will add to the growing body of useful information on this vital subject.'

Sue Williamson, Chief Executive of SSAT - the Schools, Students and Teachers Network, said:

'Successful schools have always recognised the significance of emotional and mental well-being across their school community. They realise that a healthy, safe and thriving community is the tangible expression of their values as an effective place of learning and development for all pupils.'

'Headteachers appreciate that a school climate which fosters emotional well-being and positive mental health is reflected across the curriculum. They understand it is crucial for supportive whole-school systems to be clear and consistently implemented and they invest in their staff so they can confidently embed emotional well-being in every aspect of the school day.'

'Schools that are committed to preparing their pupils in the fullest sense for adult life enjoy the fact that resilience and well-being also contribute positively to pupil achievement. They are equally sensitive to the need of young people to manage the stress and pace of our world today.'

'This framework outlines effective approaches that support the emotional well-being and mental health of the whole school community and the welfare of staff, given their pivotal role in promoting well-being.'

'What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?' is available from:

<http://www.ncb.org.uk/areas-of-activity/education-and-learning/partnership-for-well-being-and-mental-health-in-schools/what-works-guidance-for-schools>

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For more information please contact the National Children's Bureau's media office on 0207 843 6045 / 47 or email media@ncb.org.uk. For urgent enquiries out of office hours call 07721 097 033.

Notes to editors

In 2013, Ofsted found that PSHE education was inadequate in 40% of schools. At the moment, not all pupils are getting an education that prepares them for life, something they tell us they want.

About the Partnership for Emotional Well-being and Mental Health in Schools

The Partnership for Emotional Well-being and Mental Health in Schools is a national network of 40 organisations hosted by the National Children's Bureau. It has established a vision for an education system where good emotional wellbeing and mental health are at the heart of the culture and ethos of all schools, so that children and young people, supported by their staff and parents, can flourish and build resilience.

About the National Children's Bureau

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) is a leading charity that for 50 years has been improving the lives of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable. We work with children and for children, to influence government policy, be a strong voice for young people and practitioners, and provide creative solutions on a range of social issues.

For more information visit www.ncb.org.uk