



engage in their
future

MENTAL WELLBEING AUDIT

An Introduction

Introduction From Professor Barry Carpenter

I commend to you the *engage in their future* Mental Wellbeing Audit. It offers a lens through which to not only view the students social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH), but to bring that child / young person into focus as a learner. That is the designated purpose of any adult / teacher working with our student population; to ensure that their particular needs do not prevent them from achieving their rightful status of learner and achiever.

Fundamental to this process is the principle of Engagement; many of the children who are the focus of this audit are potentially disengaged. Hence this audit process whilst focussing on mental wellbeing, seeks also to liberate the child from the shackles of mental ill health, to enable them to navigate their way through the education system towards a world of work and post school opportunity.

To do this, through a dynamic and meaningful curriculum, combined with responsive and personalised pedagogy, is to constantly seek to engage that child as an efficient and effective learner. Engagement is the liberation of intrinsic motivation; it will self-propel the child through the maze of complex needs that can present themselves. Teachers should constantly ask the 'how' questions that can guide that child to successful outcomes. How is the child persistent? How do they initiate, explore, investigate? These are processes that transcend age or stage, difficulty or need.

The capacity of schools and settings to deliver truly relevant and responsive curriculum in a rapidly changing education system is a major challenge. To achieve this the curriculum should be the servant of the child, not its master. The *engage in their future* Mental Wellbeing Audit is both powerful and purposeful in this process.

Dr. Barry Carpenter CBE, OBE
Winter 2021

Preface

engage in their future is the national association for school leaders within the SEMH education sector. The principal aims of the organisation are to provide networked peer support, the sharing of good practice and to provide a collective voice in order to improve the standards of the schools and education, welfare and engagement of the children with whom we work.

The Mental Wellbeing Audit and the programme for identifying how schools can best meet their responsibilities to grow an emotionally secure and healthy community of purpose has been developed from the collective voice, advice and outstanding practice of schools within the *engage in their future* network.

The main author and creators of this work have drawn on their work in establishing emotionally secure and resilient practice in schools and from that practice the 'whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing' programme has evolved.

The programme is set out in two parts, with an introduction and protocols for collective use, and secondly the evidence framework and action plan for the sustainable replenishment of mental wellbeing and mutual support.

In 2014 the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice replaced the terms BESD (Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties) and EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties) with SEMH (Social, Emotional & Mental Health). For many in the mainstream sector this was the first real official recognition that behavioural difficulties were linked to mental health.

Within *engage in their future* we have long understood the connection between behaviour and mental health and advanced this knowledge and used it to underpin our work with the young people in our schools to great effect. Our understanding that behaviour is a communication of an underlying cause very often associated with bereavement, fear and anxiety, is at the very root of our practice. Over the years we have sought to support mainstream colleagues who often focus more on outcomes driven by the standards agenda.

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and the obvious knock-on effects to the nation's emotional health has led schools to focus harder on the wellbeing of staff, children and young people and their families and carers where resilience has become the focus, preceding academic results.

Through this audit we believe schools will be able to demonstrate their good practice through what they already do, but also identify opportunities to support the recovery of their communities. At *engage in their future* schools we experience the positive benefits that can be achieved through emotional connection, optimism and hope. Those of us in the service of young people facing SEMH challenges have worked in the hinterland of mental health and wellbeing all through our working lives and are informed through theoretical and practical responses to act in support of those young people with extreme anxiety due to the fallout of their emotional responses to evolving problems. In discussion with many colleagues in developing this audit we can remark quite honestly that most if not all of our colleagues are in awe of the resilience and strength of those young people we work with, as they negotiate fearful difficulties and the uncertainties of their lives.

Through this audit we hope to be able to support schools to get better results for all children and young people by supporting and developing everyone's mental health and wellbeing, and therefore their resilience. All of our young people are looking for safety and security that is consistently to be found in their partnerships with others, negotiated in a society. These key partnerships enable and help young people understand and manoeuvre their way in school usefully and positively and so this audit is also very much an advocacy for young people to be invested in their lives.

We believe the expertise evidenced in this resource from our practice in *engage in their future* can influence policy and practice across the whole sector and achieve the best outcomes for all school communities.

engage in their future National Committee
Winter 2021

Foreword

"Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without words
And never stops...at all"

Emily Dickinson

As the entire planet breathes in, is forced to stop - and even to hold its breath waiting to see what unfolds, there are people who have the capacity to lean into the future and by holding a common purpose can support the unfolding by gaining a sense of "what is new and what is needed". The *engage in their future* network are those people.

The purpose of this overview is to share our framework as to what underpins our collective thinking for our response to post Covid-19 risk assessment, reduction, and management and ongoing mental health and wellbeing.

In legal cases, the test of what constitutes good practice is whether a particular course of action would be supported by a 'reasonable body of professional opinion'. In drawing together such an experienced group to face these challenges the *engage in their future* national network, we believe, is that reasonable body. There are no experts in a position to pass down infallible guidance to leaders on the practicalities of managing schools and children's homes in this new era, but as established and experienced practitioners whose mission it is to prioritise support to those with emotional and mental health issues, we have a wealth of experience in developing resources to identify concerns and deliberate solutions towards successful curricula and policies to support mutuality, sustainability and resilience. It is up to us all to invent best practice by engaging creatively and sharing ideas that work successfully. We recommend this programme as an investment in the balanced mental health of your community.

***engage in their future* stands out, reaching in, to reach out, posing the question; How can our community lean into the future and articulate a pathway through this experience?**

This programme has evolved through our concerns for our communities' wellbeing and primarily how young people can be supported in times of crisis, however, developing resilience is a key aspect for all stakeholders. This programme is part of the offer to all *engage in their future* schools and will be informed by their practice going forward and we expect regular iterations and adaptations.

Our first exploration is to find out what the issues / problems are, not just our perception of what they might be for ourselves and all stakeholders, but the actual lived experience. There starts our challenge to reconnect to recovery and resilience.

We are not in the same boat

I heard that we are all in the same boat.

But it's not like that.

We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat.

Your ship could be shipwrecked and mine might not be.

Or vice versa.

For some quarantine is optimal.

A moment of reflection, of re-connection, easy in flip flops, with a cocktail or a coffee.

For others, this is a desperate financial and family crisis.

For some that live alone they're facing endless loneliness.

While for others it is peace, rest and time with their mother, father, sons, and daughters.

Some were concerned about getting a certain egg for Easter while others were concerned if there would be enough bread, milk and eggs for the weekend.

Some want to go back to work because they don't qualify for unemployment benefits and are running out of money.

Others want to scream at those who break the quarantine.

Some are home spending hours a day helping their child with online schooling while

others are spending hours a day to educate their children on top of a 12-hour work-day.

Some have experienced the near death of the virus; some have already lost someone from it and some are not sure if their loved ones are going to make it.

Others don't believe this is a big deal.

Some have faith in God and expect miracles during this pandemic through a time when our perceptions and needs are completely different.

Each of us will emerge, in our own way from this storm.

It is very important to see beyond what is seen at first glance.

Not just looking, actually seeing, not just listening, actually hearing.

We are all on different ships during this storm, experiencing a very different journey.

Let everyone navigate their route with respect, empathy, responsibility and compassion.

Anonymous

Drawing on the expertise of the *engage in their future* national association, this audit draws a path to support our way through this complex challenge. The focus is on staying as connected as possible during times of lockdown or remote learning, pursuing reconnection and recovery, and repairing the rupture and enabling resilience for all - imagining a WHOLE school; "School communities that are whole again".

The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, the capacity to affect every person in the world and each individual response can potentially affect everyone else. In addition to the efforts of courageous health care providers, first responders, and a wide range of workers providing other vital services, countless numbers of selfless individuals are leaping into action to meet the rapidly changing needs of people most affected by the economic, social, and health impacts of this crisis. We at *engage in their future* especially wish to honour and support the extraordinary efforts of our colleagues across our schools and educational settings who continue to work tirelessly to assure connectivity and the availability of essential services while focusing attention on the many challenges facing families and their children.

Throughout the national *engage in their future* network, our children, staff, families, and wider community have always been encouraged to systemically engage head, heart, and hand in learning to make full use of the intellectual, emotional and physical processes which connect

across communities and so increase capacity. It is this approach that will help during reconnection to recovery and resilience as it largely informs our thinking as to how we bridge the 'here and now' into future successful learning and living.

As the advances in cognitive science and neuroscience continue to develop, we are more able to explore learning, we know that learning is both a multi-sensory and an emotional process, and that there are some important and powerful tools that we will engage as we transition our schools back to becoming 'whole' again.

We know from the work of neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio¹ and Andrew Curran² that learning is deeply emotional and that our reasoning is streamed through and infused with emotions. Indeed, Marc Smith outlines three domains of learning - the emotional, the social and the cognitive. He warns against the over-simplification of regarding learning as merely a shift in long-term memory.

"The process of learning certainly requires the engagement of cognitive processes, but without the other so-called cognitive processes, learning simply will not take place."

The process of learning, therefore, involves emotional, social as well as cognitive processes. The idea is to re-amplify these developmental theories and revisit how we can support young people in resolving their difficulties through the application of psycho-social and attachment theories as well. To remember really not that we have been here before, but to reflect that at the core of our work is the relationships we as adults need to develop as young people reframe their worlds. Our concerns must be discussed in an environment of understanding the whole child or young person, neurobiology, psychologically and as protagonist in their journey through their own experiences. As for the child so for the community we reframe and re-make in difficult times.

We have used these principles as the molten gold that will fuse reconnection through to recovery and future resilience, illustrated through the metaphor Japanese art form Kintsukuroi.

Poetically translated to "golden joinery," Kintsugi, or Kintsukuroi, is the centuries-old Japanese art of fixing broken pottery. Rather than rejoin ceramic pieces with a camouflaged adhesive, the Kintsugi technique employs a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver or platinum. Once completed, beautiful seams of gold glint in the conspicuous cracks of ceramic wares, giving a one-of-a-kind appearance to each "repaired" piece. This unique method celebrates each artefact's unique history by emphasising its fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them. In fact, Kintsugi often makes the repaired piece even stronger than the original. It reflects that by creating the right emotional environment, with relational support, we can draw out the hope, the positives of this experience and together co-create our pathway.

With this knowing, as children reconnect, we have thought through the learning journey, the curriculum to be available, to respond to need and facilitate the secure base from which we can flourish and thrive.

"We have therefore placed the social, emotional mental health and wellbeing at the heart of all we do and continue to do." ³

¹ Damasio, A. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*, Pantheon, 2010

² Curran, A. *The Little Book of Big Stuff About the Brain: The true story of your amazing brain*, 2008

³ Gray, S. *A Wholehearted Approach*,

The common thread that runs through the current lived experiences of our children, is **loss, fear and anxiety**. Publicly it has been the loss of national examinations which has been most obvious. As one student said, "I was preparing to run a marathon, but now they tell me there is no race!". Many would think that the removal of examinations would be a matter of joy for most young people facing a gruelling timetable of tests. But these are rites of passage; they are integral to how that young person shapes their ambitions for their life. What impact will it have on students to give their all to examinations next time around?

From loss emanates three significant dynamics that will impact on the mental health of our children. Anxiety, trauma and bereavement are powerful forces. For them all to appear at once in an untimely and unplanned fashion is significant for the developing child. Our children are vulnerable at this time, and their mental health fragile. And on top of that, they are witnessing a sea of adult anxiety, which they unwittingly are absorbing. There will be many students who are young carers, and this loss of freedom will be combined with a weight of responsibility that will have made academic learning feel inconsequential.

The loss of friendship and social interaction could trigger a bereavement response in some of our children. They will grieve for that group of peers, who not only give them angst, but also affirm them as the person they want to be. The rules of the peer group have vanished without warning, and our young people in particular, were ill prepared for this. They will mourn for how their life was compared to how it is now. They have undergone a period where friends and family members have been avoided because they are a threat; how long will it take for children to not feel threatened by the nearness of others?

The loss of routine and structure will be traumatic for some. Already we are receiving reports of the increased incidents of self-harm (Young Minds, 2020). Children can find it alarming that the infrastructure of their week has been abandoned however logical the reason. The suddenness of it all may induce panic attacks, a loss of self-control, as the child feels their own intellect no longer informs their personal judgements accurately.

Anxiety is a cruel companion. It eats away at the positive mental health of the child, and can cause a deterioration in their overall wellbeing. The anxious child is not a learning child. Mood swings may prevail; they can become irrational and illogical. There can be a loss of sleep; the cumulative tiredness can diminish the child's coping mechanisms.

Daily, children were listening to reports of the spread of the pandemic and to the reported death toll in their country and internationally. It is probable that most children returned to school knowing of someone who has died. Indeed, they may have first-hand experience of the death of a loved one. In this respect, we have much to learn from the experiences of those children affected by the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand. Schools there kept a register of the deaths within a family, or other significant traumatic events, to guide and inform staff as children returned. Subsequent evidence from research studies from New Zealand (Liberty, 2018) have shown that there has been considerable impact on the learning and development of those children who were under five years old at the time of the earthquakes (e.g. speech delays, emotional immaturity, etc). We ignore such related evidence at our peril.

The loss of routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom, can trigger the emergence emotionally of anxiety, trauma and bereavement in any child. The overall impact cannot be underestimated. It will cause a rapid erosion of the mental health state in our children if we are not mindful and do not face this challenge with courageous kindness, candour and creativity.

How are schools to prepare? What curriculum adjustments are crucial? What pedagogical frameworks will facilitate teaching with compassion? How will staff manage their own recovery? We inevitably have a finite resource and we must consider the gradual implementation of any form of plan to recover from loss. All of our learners will need a holistic recovery, some may need a focused recovery intervention programme personalised to their needs; others may need a deeper and longer lasting recovery period, enabling a fuller exploration of the severity of their trauma and emergent attachment issues.

Our response is through a humane approach, concerned with the fundamental emotional mental wellbeing of all involved; staff, children, families, communities, and to secure the systemic positive development of the child. Without this there will be no results that have true meaning and deep personal value to the child in terms of their preparation for adulthood. Utilising the expertise of colleagues who have worked for a combination of many years in specialist settings in mental health and wellbeing, this programme has been developed to provide support during our current context and into a future of mental wealth.

Sharon Gray
December 2021

The Importance of Mental Health

So, what is mental health? Health Education England defines it as:

"The emotional, spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive of wellbeing and an underlying belief in our own and others, dignity and worth."

Resilience can be defined in many different ways and is used in many different contexts. Developing resilience in children and young people (CYP) should be the core aim of adults working with them. Resilience grows through connection and helps children and adults deal with life's ups and downs through growing social and emotional skills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP5sG4qb3Rk>

The emotional and mental health and wellbeing of CYP is as important as their physical health and wellbeing. Over recent years it has been recognised that changes need to be implemented to mental health services for CYP to identify CYP's needs early and enable them to access timely, appropriate mental health services that support them to build resilience.

Mental health problems range from short spells of depression or anxiety through to severe and persistent conditions that can isolate, disrupt and frighten those who experience them. Mental health problems in CYP can result in lower educational attainment, poor physical health, poor social relationships, school exclusion and limited future employment prospects as well as behaviours such as smoking, using drugs and drinking alcohol. The impact of improving emotional wellbeing and mental health is seen at an individual and family level.

A recent [Young Minds report \(February 2021\)](#) identified the concerns of young people and in particular those at school -

- Among young people who believe they have needed mental health support during the pandemic, 54% said that they have received some form of support (e.g. through NHS mental health services, school or university counsellors, helplines, charities).
- 24% said that they have looked for support but not accessed any; 22% said that they had not looked for support.
- Among respondents who are at school or college, 55% said that there was a counsellor or mental health support team available in their school, 23% disagreed.
- Among respondents who are at school or college, almost half (48%) did not think that their school was focusing more on wellbeing and mental health than usual.
- 69% of respondents described their mental health as poor now that they are back at school; this has risen from 58% who described their mental health as poor before returning to school.
- 40% of respondents said that there was no school counsellor available to support students in their school.
- Only 27% had had a one-to-one conversation with a teacher or another member of staff in which they were asked about their wellbeing by the time they completed the survey.
- Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) said that there was less mental health support in their school than before the pandemic, while only 9% agreed that there was more mental health support.

Data from NHS Digital assessed that pre-pandemic one in eight CYP lived with a diagnosable mental issue. They are now reporting that they believe this figure to be as low as one in five.

engage in their future recognises that poor mental health can be a barrier to children and young people achieving their potential. This programme of work is to help our schools and communities develop or recognise strategies and deliver actions to improve mental health and wellbeing.

The whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing (MHEW) looks at the key areas which schools can use to help CYP to be resilient and mentally healthy. The purpose of this framework is to help schools and educational provisions to self-assess their current provision, identify strengths and good practice which they might share with other settings and schools, as well as to identify areas where schools might appreciate more training and assistance via *engage in their future*.

We all have mental health. For some of us that is positive. Others suffer with mental ill health. It can be thought of in terms of a continuum.

It is the role of all adults to reduce stigma and to help all of our young people to either remain above the line or to be supported back over it. We believe this audit tool will help with that process.

For further information on the *engage in their future* Mental Wellbeing Audit, please visit:
engageintheirfuture.org

To contact *engage in their future*, please email us:
georgina_engageintheirfuture@aol.co.uk

