



Rebuilding Wellbeing

SUPPORTING PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN
CHANGING AND CHALLENGING TIMES

by **Simon Bolger**

that 
wellbeing
guy

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INTRODUCTION

The world has changed. Now, so must education.

The virus pandemic has made the entire world re-evaluate what is important in their lives. The same has happened in schools. Suddenly, the significance of league tables and value-added scores has diminished. The things we now need to prioritise are children's levels of wellbeing, their knowledge of how to care for themselves in a changing world, and the habits they need to learn for how to be happier in a world suffering from a happiness shortage.

Even before the pandemic it was no secret that low-level disruption, burnout, anxiety, absence and mental health problems affecting staff and pupils alike are on the rise.

A 2016 Education Support Partnership (ESP) survey suggested 84% of teachers have suffered from mental health problems at some point over the last two years. A 2017 report by the Children's Commissioner for England also found that 580,000 young people are receiving some form of social care or assistance with mental health problems. We want better than this for our pupil community.

Statistics show that one in 10 children – an average of three in every classroom – has a diagnosable mental health problem, and that 75% of mental health problems in adults have their roots in childhood. On the frontline, teachers will be teaching children who have anxiety, depression and phobias, and a scary number of children now self-harm. Worse still, these disorders now manifest at earlier ages. We want better than this for our pupils.

For some, education is a joy. For an increasing number, school can be a source of competitive pressures and a hot house of stress.

Despite the hard work and unceasing effort, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) places UK teenagers in 15th place for achievement in science, 27th in maths and 21st in reading.

National statistics tell us that teachers are leaving the profession and pupils' happiness is on the decline. UK teenagers rank 19th out of 20 in a recent international study of wellbeing. Mental ill-health is a particular problem for girls with 1 in 4 being clinically depressed by age 14 and hospital admissions for teenage self-harm rising by 68% in the last decade.

In a valiant effort to keep up, many schools have fallen into the trap of doing the same, but harder. Cue more low-level disruption, burnout, anxiety, absence and mental ill-health, with over half of all school exclusions linked to mental health issues.

The national curriculum states that *'all schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education, drawing on good practice'*. Therefore, 'PSHE', as a 'subject' exists as a form of wellbeing education that contributes to schools' statutory duties. In the headlong rush for grades, very few schools take PSHE seriously and it is often taught by class teachers or form tutors (if at all) on an ad hoc basis. This project is a statement of intent that your school will place pupil wellbeing as a golden thread throughout wider life as well as the curriculum.

Many heads and teachers acknowledge a growing wellbeing problem and are doing the best they can. However, individual school attempts at boosting wellbeing can best be described as piecemeal. Many schools are facilitating sessions on growth mindsets, mindfulness, meditation, or they might have a 'chill-out' room where angry/anxious/stressed children can relax. Nowadays, the old-style school nurse is a counsellor and/or therapist.

All these interventions mean well. Some are tremendously useful but overall, the fact remains that English, Maths and Science are core pursuits, with wellbeing a peripheral or non-existent activity. The current hit and miss approach views pupil wellbeing as a safety net. Schools are very good at providing counselling, therapies, interventions and support for those who fall. Indeed, there's another £1.4 billion being pumped into the system to widen the net.

Compulsory curriculum changes were announced in February 2019 to come into action for September 2020 outline how children should be taught about mental and physical wellbeing. Although this is a step in the right direction, it is a narrow one. Emphasis is often placed at the negative end of the spectrum and focuses on how mentally unhealthy people became unwell in the first place. The curriculum changes do not focus on teaching children how to be their best self and how to equip them with the skills, attitudes and beliefs to squeeze the maximum out of their lives.

The system is at full stretch. Indeed, in terms of harming the mental wellbeing of young people, the system is often failing. The real solution is not to fix those who have been mentally and emotionally harmed by the education system and/or modern world. The challenge is to create an environment in which young people can consistently flourish. The questions therefore become; how can we move wellbeing back into focus? And how can we stop young people becoming mentally unwell in the first place?

The answer is surprisingly simple. **Teach them about wellbeing, early and with regularity.** And this project will be your school's first step on this journey.

EARLY YEARS – SUMMARY

1. Flourishing – Being kind to others
2. Happiness – Spreading happiness
3. Relationships – Apologising
4. Resilience – Asking for help
5. Connections – Sharing
6. Health – Exercise makes me happy
7. Change – Practice
8. Community – Donating
9. Feelings – Winning and losing
10. Breathing – Simple breathing
11. Nature – Sunlight

KEY STAGE 1 – SUMMARY

1. Flourishing – Compliments
2. Happiness – Cake of life
3. Relationships – Choosing to be positive
4. Resilience – Persevering
5. Connections – Gratitude
6. Health – Eating healthily
7. Change – Growth mindset
8. Community – Philanthropy
9. Feelings – Talking about feelings
10. Breathing – Counting breaths
11. Nature – 2D fractals

KEY STAGE 2 – SUMMARY

1. Flourishing – Comfort, stretch and panic zones
2. Happiness – Habituation
3. Relationships – Understanding different perspectives
4. Resilience – Understanding pressure
5. Connections – In and out of your control
6. Health – Sitting is the new smoking
7. Change – Learning from failure
8. Community – Volunteering
9. Feelings – The HEART Model
10. Breathing – Alternate nostril breathing
11. Nature – 3D fractals

Key Stage	Lesson
KS2	Flourishing Comfort, stretch and panic zones



KNOWLEDGE

Your comfort zone is what you are currently capable of without too much concerted effort. It is comfortable and what you are used to – hence the name. Your stretch zone is what you are capable of if you exert yourself beyond your perceived limits. Your panic zone is when you try to do too much too soon. A good example is comfortably being able to run for 5 minutes, stretching yourself to run for 10, and panicking yourself by trying to run a marathon. If you stay inside your comfort zone for your whole life then you will never grow. When you push yourself into your stretch zone, something amazing happens. Your comfort zone expands to encompass the new stretch activity, action, skill or belief. If you keep stretching a little bit for your whole life then you will be constantly growing what you are comfortable doing and what you can stretch yourself to be capable of doing. What are you capable of?

GRASPING ★	EMBEDDING ★★	DEEPENING ★★★
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name the three zones. Describe comfort, stretch and panic zones. Why is it good to push into your stretch zone? What could happen if you only stay in your comfort zone? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare and contrast the different emotions you experience from being within each zone. Create a diagram explaining the comfort, stretch and panic zones. Annotate it. Give examples of things you have experienced within each zone. How did it make you feel? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose a famous sportsperson and find evidence showing how they have pushed themselves into their stretch zone. Present this information. Suggest three ways a friend could push into their stretch zone. Present this information in a simple way. Do you agree with the importance of the stretch zone? Why? Why not? Explain your choice.

WHOLE SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES – SUMMARY

1. Flourishing – Your 100th birthday party
2. Happiness – Dealing with your worries
3. Relationships – Random acts of kindness
4. Resilience – Whether we like it or not
5. Connections – Being grateful for things that aren't things
6. Health – Sleep
7. Change – The iceberg illusion
8. Community – Loneliness
9. Feelings – It's OK to not be OK
10. Breathing – Counting breaths
11. Nature – The great outdoors

Assembly theme

Flourishing
Your 100th birthday party



KNOWLEDGE

The message to get across in this assembly is: nobody will live a brilliant life for you. If you want a brilliant life – then you need to make it happen yourself. So many adults grow up to say that there is so much in their life that they want or wanted to do. The truth is a lot of them are still waiting to do those things and even more of them will never do those things. Right now, a lot of children will think they will have a brilliant life if they have the latest gadget or lots of money (some children will say this to either try and be funny or to seek attention), but will those things bring you happiness as an adult? Science tells us no. Scientists have found that experiences and relationships with others are far more important than money when it comes to being happy.



TEACHER'S TIP

- Ask, imagine it is the day of your 100th birthday party, all of your family are there with you to celebrate, what would they say about your life? What would you want them to say?
- How will you know your life is brilliant?
- Imagine at your 100th birthday party, you are talking to your great, great, great, great grandchildren – what three things do you want to be able to tell them about your life?
- What things do people think are important, but in reality, are not? Games console, smartphones, fast internet, big house, new car etc...
- If someone was going to make a movie about the best day of your life, what would happen in it? Would playing PlayStation or scrolling on your phone make a very good movie? Probably not...
- What could you do that is better?

STAFF MEETINGS – SUMMARY

1. Worrying
2. The HEART Model
3. Taking massive action

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Simon Bolger is **That Wellbeing Guy**. A former primary school teacher and headteacher who now operates as a teacher, speaker, consultant, coach and writer. He is on a mission to start a wellbeing revolution in our school communities by educating, empowering and energising school staff to live their best life every day, teach great lessons, and create an environment fit for flourishing. He is determined to help schools learn how to transform their school culture from the inside-out.

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*“Our dreams don’t mean anything
unless we do something about them whilst we’re awake.”*

- **Simon Bolger**