

# #BeeWell: the state of young people's wellbeing in England

BRIEFING PAPER

April 2025

SMF

Social Market  
Foundation

## By #BeeWell, The state of young people's wellbeing in England

### ABOUT #BEEWELL

- [#BeeWell](#) is a youth-centred programme developed in response to a growing concern for the wellbeing of young people in the UK.
- Using a co-created survey delivered annually in schools, we find out what affects young people's wellbeing and what can be done to improve it.
- We help schools and partners to use the data to make improvements, and we produce valuable research insights to help drive change too.

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescent wellbeing is a predictor of school attainment, adult mental health, relationships, and socioeconomic outcomes. However, the OECD PISA study has ranked the UK's young people fourth from bottom across nearly 74 countries in terms of life satisfaction. As part of the [#BeeWell programme](#), researchers from The University of Manchester are working with Anna Freud and local governments to survey secondary school children about their wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a broad term that covers many areas of our lives, and it can mean different things for different people. To better understand it, researchers asked young people what wellbeing means to them. The Greater Manchester Youth Steering Group worked with the #BeeWell team to delve deeper into the meaning of wellbeing and build a well-rounded understanding of the term. They agreed that:

**Wellbeing is about understanding yourself and your emotions and feeling like you have meaning, purpose and control in different areas of your life.**

For them, wellbeing is a moving target and is about finding balance amid busy and complicated lives. It's not just about feeling good, but it's about understanding your emotions, looking after yourself and building resilience.

Kindly commissioned by



**Policy@Manchester**

## Young people's wellbeing: what we already know

- The peak age of onset of mental health difficulties is 14.5 years.<sup>1</sup>
- Mental health and wellbeing in adolescence predicts adult health, labour market and other important outcomes.<sup>2</sup>
- The wellbeing of adolescents has decreased in the last two decades, while the prevalence of mental health difficulties among them has increased.<sup>3</sup>
- A recent international study ranked the UK's young people fourth from bottom across 74 countries in terms of life satisfaction.<sup>4</sup>
- Young people's mental health and wellbeing can be influenced by multiple drivers, including their health and routines, hobbies and entertainment, relationships, school, environment and society, and how they feel about their future.<sup>5</sup>

The evidence is clear that young people, their parents and wider society in the UK value and recognise the importance of young people's wellbeing. It's essential, therefore, to prioritise young people's wellbeing, and in particular to:

- (i) listen to young people, so that the issues they recognise as important can start to be addressed; and
- (ii) measure wellbeing rigorously, regularly and consistently, so that we can implement targeted solutions to overcome barriers to young people's progress.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### **There are persistent wellbeing inequalities across gender and sexual orientation**

The 2024/2025 #BeeWell survey drew from over 56,000 young people across all 14 local authorities across Greater Manchester, and Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and Southampton. Overall, life satisfaction and mental wellbeing scores of young people surveyed are in line with expected scores based on comparable studies. However, the data shows [persistent wellbeing inequalities across gender and sexual orientation](#) with gay and lesbian young people reporting the lowest wellbeing. They reported that they are least satisfied with their lives, followed closely by bisexual and pansexual young people, and those who identify as transgender and gender diverse.

### **Neighbourhoods play a significant role in young people's wellbeing**

A number of other factors have been found to impact wellbeing, and the neighbourhood in which a young person lives is one of them. Despite the current limited knowledge surrounding the role of neighbourhoods in impacting young people's wellbeing, #BeeWell have taken strides in exploring this connection. From studying [neighbourhood influences](#) on young people's general wellbeing within Greater Manchester, the research showed that neighbourhood characteristics are significantly associated with different domains of wellbeing. What was evident

across the research was the influence of social cohesion and relational characteristics of neighbourhoods. Young people feeling safe in their local area and feeling that there was support for wellbeing among local people were among the strongest predictors of wellbeing.

## **Participation in arts, culture, entertainment, and sports can improve young people's wellbeing**

Another headline finding from #BeeWell shows the explicit [link between supporting participation in arts, culture, entertainment, and sports \(SPACES\) and young people's wellbeing](#). A recent study as part of the #BeeWell project explored patterns of arts, culture, entertainment and sports activities among young people. The findings demonstrated that those who engaged with wide-ranging or selective activities had improved wellbeing one year later compared to those with generally low engagement. Yet the research again underpinned the persistent inequalities between young people in relation to these activities. For example, LGBTQ+ young people and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to report generally low patterns of engagement than more frequent participation in selective activities (such as sports, exercise or other physical activities, and playing games on a games console or computer).

## **IMPACT**

[Findings from the #BeeWell surveys](#) have inspired decisive responses from schools, local government, and our coalition partners.

### **Schools**

Schools play a key role in using the #BeeWell data to deliver targeted actions. Interacting with young people on a daily basis means they are well placed to respond appropriately and achieve the best results for their community.

#BeeWell works side by side with schools to ensure they have information and support to make a difference to the wellbeing of their students. The programme provides participating schools with a confidential school-level dashboard that gives clear insights into the wellbeing of their students, enables anonymous comparisons with similar schools and informs school improvement plans. In addition, the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (part of Anna Freud) provide bespoke one-to-one sessions to support schools to interpret their results and identify pathways for action. [Schools are also supported with workshops, communities of practice, and more.](#)

Schools have embedded #BeeWell data into their wellbeing plans and implemented [a range of strategies to improve wellbeing](#), including:

- Offering a greater variety of extracurricular activities to boost physical activity.
- Enhancing the nutritional value of food provision.
- Strengthening the school-pupil connection.
- Improving school connectedness.

### Case Study: Greater Manchester School #1

In the 2022/23 Academic Year, a large, mainstream school in Greater Manchester took part in #BeeWell. From the survey results, the school found two areas of focus: relationships with parent/carers and relationships with school staff.

In response to these findings, the school took a variety of actions to address these areas, including:

- An assembly launch on the work they were beginning on relationships, providing advice and guidance on who they can speak to in school.
- Restructuring the schools' personal development curriculum, highlighting teaching on healthy relationships.
- Members of the school leadership team led training on building positive relationships.
- Whole school 'catch-ups' have been introduced to provide staff and students with opportunity to have positive restorative conversations and build professional relationships.
- The school has since seen clear changes in assessment sheets, noticing that students know who they can report issues to, who their trusted adults are in school and who they can speak to should they need to.

### Coalition of Partners

Young people's wellbeing depends on collaboration across communities, businesses, the voluntary sector, the health sector, government and schools to take collective action that will give young people new opportunities, empower them to act and support them to thrive. #BeeWell depends on the breadth of knowledge and expertise provided by its coalition of partners, with each of them committing to acting in response to survey data.

## Case Study: Curious Minds

By interrogating and drawing insight from the #BeeWell survey data, Curious Minds are active in supporting two significant project delivery strands of the #BeeWell initiative.

By supporting these two initiatives, Curious Minds combines their expertise in the field of creative and cultural education with their proven track record catalyst of change, helping to bring about tangible and sustainable benefits for young people in Greater Manchester.

### Strand 1 – #BeeWell with Artsmark

Funded by Arts Council England, Curious Minds partnered with 7 secondary schools – focusing particularly on schools in Wigan and Rochdale – to explore with them how the [Artsmark Award](#) framework could be harnessed to address wellbeing and cultural needs within student populations.

Schools were supported to connect and collaborate with experienced creative providers, using these partnerships to explore how creative arts can be used to address locally specific health and wellbeing issues identified through the #BeeWell data.

### Strand 2 – #BeeWell Youth Health Champions

In collaboration with TIPP, Curious Minds project managed the #BeeWell Youth Health Champions project, which pioneered a community-wide response to survey results. It focused on empowering young people and schools, enabling them to commission their own interventions across 5 neighbourhoods of Greater Manchester.

A cohort of #BeeWell Youth Health Champions were given access to a £100,000 funding pot to commission activity with local providers. Their work counted towards a RSPH Level 2 Young Health Champions qualification, which is equivalent to a GCSE.

## Local government

Local government has already incorporated #BeeWell data into their planning and delivery in a range of different ways. The GMCA has incorporated the headline metric of young people's wellbeing in its 2021-2031 strategy. Rochdale local authority has embedded #BeeWell data and indicators throughout their recently launched 2024-2027 'Raising Rochdale' [Children and Young People Plan](#). GM Moving launched a 'A feel good your way' campaign in response to #BeeWell data to encourage physical activity among girls. The ten local authorities in Greater Manchester have used

#BeeWell data profiles to support Youth Work Strategic Needs Assessments and SEND outcomes frameworks.

As the #BeeWell programme embeds in our second location – Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton – the first year of data has influenced local authority activity across a range of departments. The findings have supported the ICB Children & Young People strategy to widen mental health support for young people and the project team will work with them closely to support their aim to co-create solutions with young people. The Homes for Ukraine team have been able to use the findings to understand the wellbeing of Ukrainian refugees who may otherwise not get a voice, to provide intelligence for support workers and where to target intervention. The #BeeWell findings have been a valuable additional tool to overlay current data sets used by Public Health, Trading Standards, Hampshire Fire and Rescue and Community Safety Services to inform service provision.

## Impact evaluation

#BeeWell has worked with its evaluation partner, Renaisi, to help understand its impact and make improvements to strengthen its work. Renaisi supported the #BeeWell project by gathering feedback from schools and coalition partners through surveys from which they have produced yearly evaluation reports:

- In 2022, the year one evaluation report gathered feedback from participating schools, indicating that overall, schools found the survey a positive and useful experience. It revealed that an encouraging 39% of schools were planning to make changes following the survey to address the wellbeing of their students. A stakeholder survey gathered feedback and insights among coalition partners. It detailed how organisations are using the neighbourhood dashboard, exploring in-depth engagement with the dashboard, the data, and the #BeeWell programme as a whole.
- In 2023, the year 2 evaluation report utilised feedback gathered from participating schools, indicating that overall, schools found the survey a positive and useful experience. Engagement with the #BeeWell data has driven some schools to revise mental health and pastoral strategies, leveraging survey insights for targeted initiatives that bolster student wellbeing and academic-emotional balance.
- In 2024, #BeeWell received their final evaluation. It revealed that #BeeWell data offers organisations insights into young people's wellbeing across various aspects, enabling targeted support and tailored interventions for their unique needs and experiences.

### Case Study: Football Beyond Borders

Football Beyond Borders (FBB) is a targeted, school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) intervention. The programme consists of a range of young people who either considered as at-risk, passive learners or role models by their school.

The programme is run throughout the school year and aims to improve young people's social and emotional skills, mental wellbeing, behaviour and attendance via mechanisms of change that include the development of consistent and long-term relationships, a sense of belonging to the FBB group, an engaging and relatable curriculum, and an asset-based approach.

To assess the efficacy of FBB, #BeeWell provided a preliminary robust independent evaluation of the impact of the intervention on the mental wellbeing of at-risk young people, drawing on the #BeeWell dataset.

This evaluation found that for at-risk young people, there was a positive, statistically significant impact of FBB on mental wellbeing. Analysing this data, coalition partners Pro Bono Economics determined that for every £1 spent, the programme provides £2.20 of wellbeing benefits.

This analysis showcases the utility of the #BeeWell dataset in helping to understand how best to support young people's wellbeing.

## RECOMMENDATION

Alongside [The Children's Society](#), [Fair Education Alliance](#) and [Pro Bono Economics](#), and together with [a coalition of more than 50 other organisations](#), #BeeWell is calling for a national wellbeing measurement programme, to listen to young people across England, to be included as an amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

Whilst #BeeWell welcomes the Bill as it contains many important provisions relating to children, it is still not a cohesive offering to improve the wellbeing of all children in this country. The inclusion of national wellbeing measurement would provide both strategic focus and a meaningful framework to understand its impact. Below are just some of the ways a national wellbeing measurement programme would benefit young people:

## Child Poverty and Economic Disadvantage

- The Bill contains provisions to introduce Breakfast Clubs in Primary Schools and a branded school uniform item cap as interventions to help reduce the cost of living and levels of poverty.
- In January 2024, the number of pupils eligible for free school meals rose to 2.1 million. Young people growing up receiving free school meals earn just over half as much as their better-off peers.
- Research shows strong links between poor wellbeing and child poverty. Wellbeing measurement would provide crucial data on the impact of interventions like breakfast clubs on children's wellbeing. Alongside improvements in attainment, this would support the Government to understand the impact and cost effectiveness of these initiatives and guide future initiatives.

## Devolution

- By enabling local decision making, national wellbeing measurement shifts power out of Westminster and into the hands of local communities – those with skin in the game.
- Armed with concrete data on how local young people feel about various areas of their lives, multi-sector decision-makers across local government, schools, health and charities can act according to what is directly needed within their community.



## Children and Young People with SEN and Experience of Care

- Data shows that young people with special educational needs (SEN) and care-experienced young people leave school with poorer educational outcomes, limiting their life chances. And research demonstrates strong links between low wellbeing and both SEN and childhood experiences of abuse and neglect.
- The Bill introduces important provisions to ensure that children with SEN, or who are being supported by children's social care services, stay in school.
- The changes in the Bill are reactive in that they will be used to ensure school withdrawal is properly safeguarded when parents and carers have already made the decision to withdraw their child from school.
- By providing local services with the data they need to understand which children have poor wellbeing and target interventions to improve wellbeing, national measurement could help local areas to intervene early to prevent school withdrawal.

## School Belonging and Attendance

- The Bill introduces new provisions to help schools and local authorities improve school attendance. Overall non-attendance during the 2023/24 school year was 6.9%. The year prior, the IPPR calculated that 32 million days of learning were lost.
- The connection a young person feels to their school is a significant driver for attendance. Asking young people about school belonging as part of national wellbeing measurement would give schools the data and insight they need to improve pupil-school connection and thus attendance. This would provide a proactive method to improve attendance alongside the important reactive measures included in the Bill to help address situations where attendance has already become a significant problem.

## Economic Opportunities and Future Prospects

- In the final quarter of 2024, 946,000 young people were not in employment, education or training (NEET). The number of young people out of work due to ill health has also doubled in 10 years.
- Asking young people about their experience of careers support or work experience, can help design improved post-16 opportunities. Schools, local authorities and national government can then work together to target interventions where they are most needed, as outlined in the “Get Britain Working” white paper. Similarly, given the Government’s plans to expand the reach of youth hubs, concrete data can identify where these services, and which types, are most needed.

Only by consistently and regularly listening to what young people tell us, can we begin to understand their experiences, act on the issues they recognise as important for their wellbeing, and implement targeted solutions to overcome barriers and ensure all young people get the opportunities they deserve.

## ABOUT #BEEWELL

### #BeeWell

[#BeeWell](#) is a youth-centred programme developed in response to a growing concern for the wellbeing of young people in the UK. It is a collaboration between The University of Manchester, The Gregson Family Foundation and Anna Freud, who, together with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), founded the programme in 2019.

Using a co-designed survey, #BeeWell listens to the voices of as many young people as possible; publishes the results privately to schools and publicly by neighbourhood; and drives action across society to improve young people’s wellbeing.

In collaboration with a team of experts, more than 150 young people from 15 pathfinder schools across Greater Manchester designed the original #BeeWell wellbeing survey to ensure it captured what matters to them. The annual [#BeeWell survey](#) is the first of its kind.

### The survey

Co-created with young people, schools and education and mental health experts, the #BeeWell survey has been designed as a gold standard survey for the measurement of adolescent wellbeing across England.

This comprehensive survey gathers the thoughts and feelings of young people each year, to determine trends in their wellbeing (and the factors that influence these). It enables consistency of measurement, and facilitates meaningful and standardised comparisons based on the powerful messages young people themselves are giving us.

The #BeeWell survey is divided into two sections that together encompass what matters most to young people. The first section is for the “domains” of wellbeing, in other words, different aspects of wellbeing. The second section is for the “drivers” of wellbeing, in other words, the different influences on wellbeing.



## Progress so far

The programme is currently being delivered across Greater Manchester, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton. #BeeWell’s Mission is to see this approach implemented nationally. So far, almost 300 schools across those two regions have participated to date and the programme has heard from over 130,000 young people. The #BeeWell survey is also being locally adapted, and delivered by partners, in three additional locations: the London Borough of Havering; Milton Keynes; and North Devon and Torrington.

## 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Over **56,000** young people participated in the #BeeWell survey in 2024.

Almost **300** schools have now participated in #BeeWell.

Over **1,000** young people in the Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton region took part in a co-commissioning process to kickstart new projects that address issues highlighted by local survey data.

In 2024, #BeeWell won the **BERA (British Educational Research Association) Public Engagement and Impact Award.**

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Solmi, M. et al (2021). Age at onset of mental disorders worldwide: large-scale meta-analysis of 192 epidemiological studies. *Molecular Psychiatry*, Online First.

<sup>2</sup> Goodman A, Joshi H, Nasim B, Tyler C (2015). *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life*. London: EIF.

<sup>3</sup> Children's Society (2021). *The Good Childhood Report 2021*. London: Children's Society.

<sup>4</sup> NHS Digital (2021). *Mental health of children and young people in England, 2021 – wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey*. London: NHS Digital.

<sup>5</sup> Office for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019). *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results*. Paris: OECD.