



Whole school approach to identifying pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties: Project by members of the Research and Development Board of the West London Teaching School Alliance (WLTSA)

1 BACKGROUND TO PROJECT

1.1 Pupil well-being: practice and research national context

A recent survey of 338 schools conducted by the Association of School and College Leaders and the National Children's Bureau reported that more than half (55 per cent) of schools had experienced a large increase in cases of anxiety and stress - while more than 40 per cent reported a big increase in cyber-bullying. In addition, nearly eight out of 10 schools (79 per cent) reported an increase in the number of pupils self-harming or having suicidal thoughts. Research evidence shows that education and health are closely linked. Therefore, promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils has the potential to improve their educational outcomes and their health and wellbeing outcomes (Public Health England, 2014).

1.2 Pupil wellbeing: WLTSA context

This national picture is also the experience of the WLTSA context and over the next year, a number of schools in the WLTSA are seeking to review their whole school approach to supporting pupil wellbeing. To support this process members of the WLTSA Research and Development (R&D) Board are seeking to review current practice in their schools against practice being conducted in other schools and the wider evidence base, including research evidence. One of the purposes of the R&D Board is to support members in developing more evidence informed approaches to their practice. The R&D Board sees evidence informed practice as a combination of practitioner professional judgement gained from experience, relevant evidence from policy and research and eliciting the views of pupils and parents.

A whole school approach to wellbeing incorporates a number of strands such as the whole ethos and environment of a school, the curriculum, pupil voice, identifying pupils with additional needs and working with parents. This term the Board has chosen to focus on identifying pupils with additional needs in relation to social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties (SEMH). Currently, there is debate as to whether schools should use some form of universal screening tool for all pupils (Humphrey and Wigglesworth, 2016). However, there are some studies which show that teachers' judgments are a viable alternative to a universal screening tool (Dowdy, Ritchey, and Kamphaus 2010). Teachers benefit from seeing a pupil's behaviour in school and can also use their collective experience with other children as a frame of reference in providing accurate ratings. Any universal screening tool, if desired, is some time off so, in the meantime members of the Board are proposing a small project to identify a WLTSA evidence informed approach to identification of pupils whose wellbeing may be a cause for concern.

2 WLTA: PUPIL WELLBEING PROJECT – EARLY AND ACCURATE IDENTIFICATION OF PUPILS WITH SEMH DIFFICULTIES

2.1 What did we investigate?

We investigated

1. If a pilot pupil referral form (attached as **Annex 1**) helped staff to ‘articulate’ more clearly why they might be concerned about a pupil.
2. The efficacy of using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (see **Annex 2**) with these pupils in terms of more accurate identification of need, indicating ways forward for the pupil, as a method to measure the impact of additional support and how practical it is to use within a school setting.

2.2 How did we do it?

Two primary schools agreed to work with two staff in their schools and to ask them to complete and give their feedback on the referral form on four pupils they suspected of some form of SEMH difficulty.

The SDQ was completed with the four pupils.

A member of staff from each school completed a SWOT analysis of the whole process with particular attention paid to efficacy of the referral form and the SDQ.

2.3 Findings

The summary of the SWOT analysis of the referral form showed a very positive response from all staff who completed the form and all staff agreed that they would like to continue using the form.

The SDQ scores for all pupils came out as cause for concern. It did support the findings of the review paper (Humphrey and Wigglesworth, 2016) that teachers can and do make sound judgements about pupils they suspect of some form of SEMH and that only at this stage would the SDQ assessment be needed. The results of the SDQ would inform the nature of support and, if relevant, act as an impact measure of the efficacy of any additional support provided.

Annex 1: Pupil Referral Form (SEMH)

Pupil:

Staff member/s:

Date:

<p>In a couple of sentences please summarise the main cause/s of concern.</p>	
<p>Please tick the relevant areas for the pupil to provide more detail</p>	
<p>Externalising behaviours (e.g.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fighting • Swearing • Stealing • Destruction of property • Running away from home • Alcohol/drug use • Refusal to follow rules • Impulsive behaviours • Other 	<p>Internalising behaviours (e.g.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social withdrawal • Feelings of loneliness or guilt • Unexplained physical symptoms • Self-harm • Nervousness or irritability • Fearfulness • Difficulty concentrating • Feelings of sadness • Changes in sleeping or eating patterns • Other
<p>Curriculum progress and achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not making expected progress 	<p>Relevant associated risk factors (e.g.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looked after pupil • Social and economic status • Child in Need • School exclusion/s • Other
<p>Attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance below 95% 	<p>Other</p>

Annex 2: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for 3-16 year olds. It can be completed by a teacher, parent/carer and pupils (age 11+) to give practitioners a better understanding of the specific needs of a pupil, i.e. emotional problems, conduct problems, inattention, peer relations difficulties and prosocial behaviours and therefore put in place support more targeted to the needs of the pupil.

The link below provides a wide range of SDQ forms such as:

- One-sided SDQ for parents or teachers of 4-17 year olds
- One-sided SDQ for parents or educators of 2-4 year olds
- One-sided SDQ self-rated SDQ for 11-17 year olds
- Double sided versions with impact supplement
- Follow up versions
- Scoring instruction for SDQs for 4-17 year olds completed by parents, teachers or self-report

<http://www.sdqinfo.org/a0.html>

Using this link, an example the 'One-sided SDQ for parents or teachers of 4-17 year olds' and the corresponding 'scoring instructions' are attached overleaf