

THE MULTI-SCHOOLS COUNCIL

# Pupil Voice on: Mental Health

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In Collaboration with schools across Essex

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This document gives a brief overview of ideas collected from across three strands in Essex combining views from primary, secondary and SEN pupils since September 2017. The document has also been influenced by local ambassadors and colleagues involved within education.

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## Our Starting point

During the academic year 2016/2017 the multi-schools council had been running for 3-4 years and had made good progress, mainly in school sport around breaking down perceptions around children with special educational needs. The council's main aim;

'To break down perceptions around children with SEND and mental health difficulties in all areas of education, to help promote a better society.'

During this academic year the children of the council voted on 3 areas they wished to focus on **Mental health in schools, Preventing bullying in schools and supporting refugees in schools**. As a full time teacher I approached our local authority to support these aims and have been commissioned for one day a week through Essex County Council and the Local Offer Team.

During the academic year (2017/2018) has begun with hosting meetings across our 3 Essex strands North, Mid and South with a key focus on Mental health. We are now involved with over 60 schools and networks across Essex (not all attended this year's first meetings) and we were able to collect their views on this subject.

## The problem

Of the 20 schools who attend the meetings and hubs I have visited since September, 18 of them raised concerns over mental health difficulties in their schools.

Wendy Smith who is an ambassador for the multi-schools council and puts in interventions across the Essex area has said that 65% of year 7 – 11 students who she has worked with have had suicidal/self-harming thoughts and that the word depression is not properly understood in a school context.

Health watch Essex commissioned a report in March 2016 which states that 1 in 10 young people currently have a diagnosable mental health condition. Combine this with SEN difficulties and social deprivation which many of our MSC

members suffer from, this statistic actually becomes 1 in 5. There are many figures and facts that can be quoted but the simple fact is that **A change is needed.**

From our meetings over the first term the children have discussed how to improve mental health in schools and why they believe there is such a problem.

A common factor was that the children felt overworked and pressured into achieving results. Too much of the focus can sometimes be on developing the academic progress rather than focusing on the progress of the individual as a human being.

Being bullied and being accepted by others were other strong feelings, especially amongst those with SEND who felt that at times they were discriminated against for being 'different'.

The level of support between 'peer – peer networks' they felt was a major problem and that schools were not 'exactly set up in all areas' to support mental health.

The children felt there needed to be more communication between schools so that positive ideas can be shared and more support given. Outside of the school gates children also felt isolated and stated that better online support and forums should be developed with the support of schools. The reason the children felt schools had a role to play in developing outside interventions was because many of the children trusted school staff and that 'outsiders' may not truly understand the support they need.

The school curriculum was also seen as a massive problem, comments were based around it being too cluttered and that there was not enough social time between lessons.

Most of the children believed that by building better friendships mental health difficulties would be reduced.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the pupils ideas and visits to local schools over the past 2 months;

- **Produce a document outlining our views, with a list of recommendations – *here it is!***
- **For every school in Essex to have pupil mental health ambassadors that have been trained to provide peer – peer support**

- For a programme to be developed and commissioned with our local authority based on '***Building resilience***' that can be delivered as part of the curriculum across schools in Essex
- For the government to put out recommendations to schools around increased breaks, creation of 'break out' rooms and more hands on activities linked to sport and wellbeing
- Staff in all schools and those on teacher training courses to be heavily trained around understanding and supporting mental health difficulties
- 'Health hubs' replicating those in place for children with autism but will include a more intense intervention based around the '***building resilience***' model we hope to develop in our curriculum
- Increased collaboration between schools with increased mental health forums to share good practice/build better support networks for young people

## **Next steps**

Our recommendations will be sent to the Director of Education for Essex and taken with us to local mental health conferences.

Progress will be reviewed at our next Essex strand meetings in March 2018.



**We may all be different but  
we have the same smile**

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