



January 2025

Second Reading Briefing on The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

The Our Wellbeing, Our Voice Coalition Welcomes the Bill

The Our Wellbeing, Our Voice Coalition welcomes the publication of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which seeks to address urgent challenges in the children's social care and schools systems that are preventing young people from thriving and damaging their wellbeing. The Coalition is a group of organisations with expertise in children and young people's wellbeing, wellbeing measurement, education and wellbeing economics.

The challenges facing today's children are deeply troubling – young people in this country have the lowest wellbeing in Europe. Measures to introduce breakfast clubs, reduce the costs of school through the branded uniform item cap, and to improve support for pupils with special educational needs could potentially have a significant impact on children's wellbeing and make a meaningful contribution to the Government's Mission to 'Break Down Barriers to Opportunity'.

But it doesn't go far enough...

Whilst the Bill contains many important provisions relating to children, it is 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.

As Lord Gus O'Donnell, Former Cabinet Secretary has said, "How do you have a children's wellbeing bill without any attempt to measure their wellbeing across the country? There is a lot to welcome in the Bill but this gap is a fundamental flaw."

How a National Children & Young People's Wellbeing Measurement Programme Would Strengthen the Bill

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.

Willows High School in Cardiff, which has a high free school meal uptake and many learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, responded to their **SHRN** data showing they were below the national average in time spent engaging in physical activity, by expanding the number of sports on offer and including a wide range of physical activities in new fortnightly enrichment sessions.

Question for the Minister:

"Would the Government consider introducing national measurement of wellbeing to provide the longitudinal data required to target, demonstrate the impact and make the societal case for crucial school-based interventions to tackle poverty like the breakfast clubs and school uniform initiatives included in the Bill?"

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.

Coram Voice measure the subjective wellbeing of children in care and care leavers, based on what they felt made their lives good. Findings are used by local authorities to influence practice, service development and strategic thinking. For example, Stockport used the data to make the business case for further supported accommodation and it contributed to a successful £2.3 million bid to develop a 'staying close' initiative to support care leavers in their area.

Question for the Minister:

"The provisions in the Bill for care leavers are welcomed. Would the Minister consider going one step further by implementing a regular national wellbeing measurement survey that would include care-experienced young people, as organisations such as Coram Voice do currently, to allow these young people's voices to inform service design and delivery?"

How a National Children & Young People's Wellbeing Measurement Programme Would Strengthen the Bill

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.

Football Beyond Borders delivers a social and emotional learning (SEL) programme working with pupils at risk of school exclusion. By using data from youth wellbeing surveys, **#BeeWell** and **Pro Bono Economics** found a 17% increase in the wellbeing of the participants and a 2.2:1 return on investment.

Question for the Minister:

“The provisions in this Bill aim to boost attendance and attainment. Can the Government provide further details on whether it is willing to include national wellbeing measurement, to provide school leaders the vital data they need to improve school belonging and tackle the current school attendance crisis?”

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.

In **Greater Manchester** wellbeing measurement data from the **#BeeWell** survey is used to identify uptake of careers advice and work experience at different stages and by different groups of young people, enabling better targeting of support and facilitating place-based leadership.

Question for the Minister:

“Does the Minister agree that comprehensive data about children’s wellbeing would allow the early identification and provision of support to young people who are at risk of becoming not in employment, education or training (NEET)?”

How a National Children & Young People's Wellbeing Measurement Programme Would Strengthen the Bill

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.

- Local authorities working with **OxWell** use data on vaping to co-design a youth vaping prevention campaign.
- Charities in **Greater Manchester** have delivered initiatives to directly support young people accessing CAMHS, on waiting lists or at risk of being referred.

Question for the Minister:

“Programmes such as Oxwell and #BeeWell are demonstrating how local communities in England can come together to respond to the needs of their young people. Given the emphasis in this Bill on joined-up working between schools, local authorities, police and social care, does the Government have plans to continue putting power in the hands of communities by equipping them with vital data - through implementing national wellbeing measurement?”

Evidence-based Policy and Evaluation

- By equipping policymakers with necessary data for improving both the delivery and the evaluation of programmes designed to benefit young people, national wellbeing measurement stands as a key tool for creating better outcomes in the long-term. It will:
 - Provide vital data for better-targeted support
 - Enable evidence-based evaluations of what works to improve young lives
 - Highlight disparities and unmet needs, especially among vulnerable groups such as children with SEN and care-experienced young people
 - Offer a consistent framework for comparing interventions at both local and national levels

Question for the Minister:

“Can the Minister provide details on how the Government plans to evaluate its progress on key elements of the Bill, and whether it has considered tools such as national wellbeing measurement to provide a clearer picture of the factors affecting young people's mental health and wellbeing?”



How National Wellbeing Measurement Can Help Tackle Other Issues Affecting Wellbeing

<p>Mental Health and Wellbeing</p>	<p>1 in 5 children and young people in England aged 8-25 had a probable mental disorder in 2023. Asking young people about their psychological wellbeing and their emotions can shine a light on developing issues, enabling interventions to prevent the development of diagnosable mental health conditions. By enabling detailed evaluation of interventions, such as Mental Health Support Teams, it can also equip decision-makers with information on what is and what is not driving improvements for young people.</p> <p>Question for the Minister: “Countries such as the Netherlands regularly measure the wellbeing of their young people, who have some of the highest levels of life satisfaction in Europe. Will the Minister consider meeting with the partners of the Our Wellbeing, Our Voice Coalition before Committee Stage to explore the potential of national wellbeing measurement and the contribution it could make to this Bill?”</p>
<p>Exercise and Physical Health</p>	<p>Less than half (47.8%) of children are meeting the recommended amount of physical activity. Furthermore, 1 in 7 children aged 2-15 were obese in 2022, costing the NHS £800 million. Questions on how much they exercise, how they rate their physical health, and their eating habits, provide direct data on young people’s health behaviours. Schools and community groups can then adapt their provision to encourage more physical activity and healthier eating.</p>
<p>Social Media</p>	<p>Children and young people aged 5-15 spend an average of 5 hours and 24 minutes a day on social media. Whilst research is mixed on the impact of social media on wellbeing, anonymously surveying young people on the amount of hours they spend on social media offers parents, teachers and local stakeholders a clearer picture on young people’s digital lives and enables better research to understand the implications for wellbeing.</p> <p>Question for the Minister: “The average young person in this country spends 5 and a half hours on social media. However, there is currently no way of measuring this nationally, or understanding which groups of young people are most susceptible to spending long hours online. Is the Minister willing to support young people, teachers and parents by offering them this information, through including national wellbeing measurement in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill?”</p>
<p>Arts and Culture</p>	<p>Research shows that participating in arts, entertainment and cultural activities has a positive effect on young people’s wellbeing. Regularly asking young people how often they participate in these activities offers crucial insight into those who have less access to opportunities and which communities are in need.</p>
<p>Youth Activities and Youth Clubs</p>	<p>Youth activities have beneficial impacts for young people across a range of outcomes, equipping them with important skills for life, yet we know that availability and take up is variable.</p>