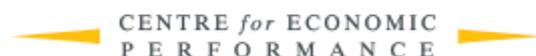


HEALTHY MINDS

A four-year course
in secondary schools



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More and more we worry about the mental health of our teenagers. As surveys show, their emotional health is worsening. And their behavioural problems are increasing.

These are problems that schools can influence. For schools make almost as much difference to the emotional health and behaviour of their pupils as to their academic achievement.¹ So how can schools do better for their wellbeing?

While young people's life skills are strongly influenced by the ethos of the school, there also needs to be at least one hour a week of dedicated and specific teaching of life skills. But at present schools lack the means to teach life skills in a fully professional way.



The Healthy Minds Curriculum

To remedy this, researchers from the London School of Economics scoured the world for the best well-tested materials for teaching secondary school pupils in

- ▶ resilience
- ▶ social and emotional learning
- ▶ relationships and sex education
- ▶ healthy habits
- ▶ social media awareness
- ▶ mental illness
- ▶ parenting
- ▶ mindfulness

From this research was constructed a four-year course from ages 11-15, consisting of weekly lessons of one hour each.² For each lesson there are dedicated teaching materials, written advice to teachers on how to use them, and dedicated teacher training. The whole course reflects the teachings of "positive psychology": it focuses on building strengths rather than attacking weaknesses, and on what is worth doing rather than on what to avoid.

The structure of the course is shown in the diagram below. No such programme on this scale has ever been tested in the world. These are difficult and delicate subjects to teach. Many earlier programmes have failed due to lack of teacher training.³ So one key feature of the course is that the teachers have to be trained for five days before teaching each year of the course.

In devising the curriculum, we had high ambitions - of supplying what teachers all over the world have been looking for. But this could only be verified by a 'randomised controlled trial'.

		Number of Lessons
Year 7 Managing the world around me	Penn Resilience Programme	18
	Media Navigator	6
	Breathe	6
Year 8 Moving toward my future	From School to Life	9
	Unplugged (Substance Use/Misuse) Part 1	4
	Media Influences	8
	Sex Ed. Sorted Part 1	4
	Relationship Smarts	4
	Review and Connect	2
Year 9 Taking control of the decisions I make	Relationship Smarts (continued)	8
	School Health Alcohol Harm Reduction Project	6
	Sex Ed. Sorted Part 2	6
	Resilient Decisions	4
Year 10 Preparing for the Future	Mental Illness Investigated	6
	Unplugged (Substance Use/Misuse) Part 2	8
	Parents Under Construction	10
	Resilient Learners	4
		113
		(Over four years)

The trial

The final curriculum and the trial were organised by Bounce Forward, a national charity that specialises in practical resilience training for schools. Their first task was to find 34 state schools, largely in deprived areas, that wanted to teach the programme – a number of schools large enough to give reliable estimates of the effects of the course. The schools were then randomly divided into two groups.

Each group taught the course over the full four years to one whole cohort of entrants to the school, and measured the wellbeing of the pupils before and after the course. But one group of schools started one year later than the other, and that group of schools also measured the wellbeing of the pupils in the previous year's entry – thus providing a control group that could be compared with all the pupils who were taught Healthy Minds.

The schools were drawn from a wide range of local authorities from Wolverhampton to Kent, and the trial ran from 2013 to 2017 or 2014 to 2018, depending on when the school joined the experiment. The schools reported enormous

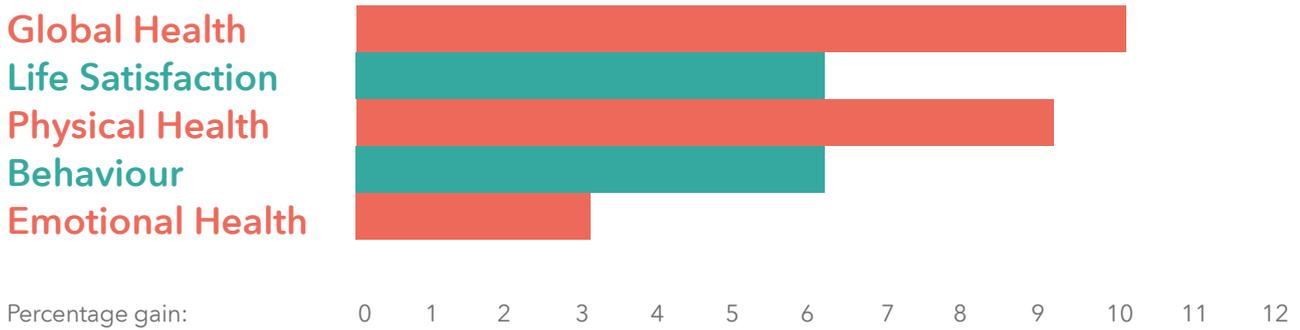
enthusiasm from staff and pupils alike, and all the schools have gone on teaching Healthy Minds to each subsequent year's entry to school – a real vote of confidence.

To help us assess the impact of the course, pupils completed a detailed questionnaire on their wellbeing before the course began and the same questionnaire again at the end of the course four years later. So we can track the effects of the course by comparing the results of the pupils who took the programme with those who did not – assuming that both groups would have followed the same wellbeing trajectory if neither group had taken the programme.

In reporting the effects of the course we focus on five outcomes. The first is 'global health', which was the primary outcome named before the trial began. This is captured by asking pupils 'In general, how would you say your health is?'⁴ Next we look at the most commonly used measure of wellbeing worldwide, which is life satisfaction: 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?'⁵ The other three outcomes are created from twelve questions



Effect of studying Healthy Minds on different outcomes



that capture various dimensions of physical health, emotional health and behaviour.

The trial showed that the course works. The results are shown in the figure above. This shows how far an average pupil⁶ has increased her percentage ranking as a result of the course when compared with other pupils nationwide. On our primary outcome (global health) pupils who took the course improved their ranking by 10 percentiles (out of 100) – a substantial increase. The results for the more detailed set of questions on physical health were similar. Life satisfaction increased by 6 percentiles, which is similar

to the effect on life satisfaction when an adult finds a partner.⁷ All effects were positive and significantly different from zero, except in the case of emotional health where the sample was too small for the effect to be significant.

These results include the effects on every group of pupils that a school signed up to teach, whether they were well or badly taught, or occasionally not taught consistently throughout. These are the effects after four years of teaching, and incorporate results measured on average two years after the material was taught.



Does the course give value for money?

The main cost of the course (compared with teaching PSHE⁸ as usual) is the training of the teachers. This involves 19 days of training and each day costs £190 for the teacher training and £160 for the teacher replacement cost. So the total cost per teacher trained is £6,650. If we assume each teacher teaches 90 pupils (in three classes) and we add in the cost of materials, the cost per pupil over the four years is £100.

This is a remarkably low cost, when compared with the difference in results obtained from teaching PSHE this way. For example, suppose we focus on the effect on life satisfaction. The increase of 6 percentile points corresponds to an increased score on life satisfaction (measured 0-10) of 0.37 points. This is at the end of the fourth year of the course. There was already some effect in earlier years and there will be some in subsequent years. So conservatively we could assume an overall gain of 1 point-year. But 1-point year of life satisfaction (measured 0-10) corresponds to roughly 0.1 QALY (measured on a scale of 0-1).

Thus the cost per QALY of the Healthy Minds course is only £1,000.⁹ By contrast the NHS is expected to provide all healthcare treatments for which the cost is less than around £25,000. So Healthy Minds costs only 1/25 of what NICE requires. It is real value for money. We should do more to promote mental health (as well as treat it) and Healthy Minds is one way to do that.



Policy conclusions

So now at last there is a way in which to teach life skills in secondary schools in a way that is scientifically based and low cost. It no longer relies on inspirational teachers, with time to devise their own curriculum. Naturally, we hope that such teachers will continue to exist, but we need to ensure that life skills are taught professionally to **every** pupil in secondary schools in Britain and elsewhere. So we hope the Healthy Minds course will spread like wildfire.

The teachers will need to be trained to use the materials, and brilliant training courses are available from Bounce Forward. To repeat, the total cost of *Healthy Minds* for one pupil over four years (inclusive of teacher training and teacher replacement) is less than £100.

In Britain we live in a historic period when the government is about to make most of Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) compulsory in schools. This requires good teaching materials and good teacher training.

All those who teach PSHE should be trained in how to do so. This should become the case within a very few years, and PSHE should become one of the specialisations for which secondary school teachers can become qualified. The Healthy Minds course and teaching methods should, we believe, be a key component of that training. And we hope the same will happen worldwide.



Acknowledgements

This report has been drafted by Richard Layard, Lucy Bailey, John Coleman and Emma Judge.

This whole project has been a wonderful partnership between:

- ▶ the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE, where the curriculum was initially designed by John Coleman, Dan Hale and Richard Layard (using funds from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation) and where the quarterly steering group met, chaired by Richard Layard,
- ▶ the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) which funded the implementation of the programme,
- ▶ those who funded the evaluation, including the EEF, the Rosetrees Trust, Hertfordshire Public Health, and the LSE,
- ▶ Bounce Forward, which found the schools, designed the final four-year curriculum and provided the training (with Lucy Bailey as director and Emma Judge as lead trainer),
- ▶ LSE Health, which conducted the evaluation (Alistair McGuire and Grace Lordan),
- ▶ And, above all, the schools and teachers who threw their energy into making the course a success.

Endnotes

- 1 Clark et al. (2018). Chapter 14.
- 2 This original paper was Hale et al. (2011) Their proposals were subsequently improved greatly by Bounce Forward and John Coleman.
- 3 E.g. Secondary SEAL, see Humphrey et al. (2010).
- 4 Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, or Poor. Treated as 1-5.
- 5 0-10 (0 = not at all. 11 = completely)
- 6 Beginning at the 50th percentile.
- 7 The effect on life satisfaction (measured 0-10) was 0.37 points, which yields an effect size of 0.16 standard deviations and a percentile change of 6 percentile points (out of 100). The 0.37 points compare with the effects on life-satisfaction (measured 0-10) when an adult finds a partner of 0.28 points (Clark et al. (2018), Table 5.2, panel section).
- 8 Personal, Social, Health and Economic education.
- 9 £100 divided by 0.1. If we allowed also for the whole cost of the lessons (rather than just the extra cost of using them to teach Healthy Minds) the cost would rise to about £600 divided by 0.1 = £6,000.

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