

## Children's Wellbeing - LSE and EPI Roundtable

25 March 2025, London

### Summary Note

As part of a series of roundtables centred around the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, the Education Policy Institute and London School of Economics and Political Science held a roundtable discussing the Bill's efforts to improve children's wellbeing and happiness.

EPI and LSE were joined by MPs, Peers, and expert representatives from local government, children's charities, education unions, and professional associations.

The roundtable was based around a discussion of how the Bill can support children's wellbeing and happiness, and broad discussion of the role that factors such as digital technology, the curriculum, assessments, social and family life can play in improving child mental health. Participants also considered what more is needed to support children's wellbeing, particularly the proposals for wellbeing to be measured, which is being trialled in South Australia, the Netherlands and in some parts of the UK.

### **Guiding Questions**

Participants were invited to consider the following questions:

- What do the provisions in the Bill offer to support children's wellbeing and happiness?
- Which provisions of the Bill do you think are likely to be the most beneficial for supporting wellbeing? Are there any you would change to improve its impact?
- What role can measurement of wellbeing play to improve children's lives? How could we use this data to improve policymaking?
- To what extent has the curriculum and assessment review considered how the system can be designed to support children's wellbeing?
- How can we take advantage of the opportunities that the education system could afford through digital and online technologies, while mitigating the potential risks to children's wellbeing and their safety?
- What do the provisions in the Bill mean for how schools and local authorities will approach mental health support for children and their parents or carers?
- What else is needed in the long-term from education policy and beyond to improve children's wellbeing and happiness in England?

Attendees agreed that improving the wellbeing of children and young people requires a multi-faceted approach, with policy around poverty, housing, education and family life, as well as the emerging impacts of digital technology, being interconnected.

Whilst attendees welcomed the Government's focus on children, it was felt that the Bill could have gone further in emphasising wellbeing - the term itself being rarely used in the Bill. It was noted that the Bill seemed more about welfare than wellbeing, and perhaps a wider wellbeing strategy is needed.

Questions were also raised around the Government's priority in relation to the opportunity mission, and whether its intention was to improve the livelihood of children generally or to focus on children at the bottom of the income scale. A Labour MP clarified that, given current standards of living, with many children living in temporary accommodation, the Government's priority are those children experiencing the highest rates of poverty. The Bill, however, is not the limit on the Government's ambitions for education and children's policy and there are further opportunities for reform with the upcoming SEND legislation due in the Autumn.

## **Digital Technology**

Attendees discussed the opportunities and risks of digital technology for young people's mental and physical health. The link between mental health and technology is contested, though attendees generally agreed that there is no silver bullet solution to the mental health problems among children. Attendees made the following remarks during discussion:

- Public discourse on technology's harm to children, especially from parent campaign groups, is often too simplistic in siloing technology as the cause of mental health problems however the picture is more nuanced.
- The burden is often placed on individuals to self-regulate technology use, despite Big Tech and the state having a role to play as well in supporting parenting and regulating the industry.
- Technology is becoming part of the infrastructure of school, social and family life. Schools use technology in the classroom; children are using it to socially connect with their peers. Parents are navigating both their own reliance on tech as well as their child's use of it, amidst great uncertainty about the digital future and its risks, and inequalities in digital literacy. Policy makers must consider this diversity in digital experience when seeking to regulate technology.
- Control of technology might inadvertently impact the benefits young people have found from online communities and mental health services.
- Edtech has the potential to improve adult education and offer more tailored teaching approaches.

## **Wellbeing and Education**

### **Assessments and Curriculum**

Attendees discussed elements of assessment and curriculum in UK schools, and how improvements could be made to ensure children face fewer pressures during their time at school:

- Attendees generally agreed that children in the UK sit a large volume of exams, particularly at GCSE stage.
- It was noted that education's emphasis on exam results discourages critical thinking among young people.
- It was highlighted that exams are an important component in education systems, and countries without exams do not perform well.
- There have been cuts to music, drama and arts education – elements of the curriculum that can help poor mental health and social isolation. There is an opportunity with the curriculum review to address this, and include digital literacy, with an emphasis on critical learning.

## Education System

Attendees discussed the problems of school disengagement and educational disadvantage across the wider education system. Attendees noted the following:

- There is a worrying trend of poorer children dropping out of education and training entirely.
- The Further Education (FE) sector is important for young people, yet given little attention and there are large disparities in funding for FE compared to sixth forms. The Government's Youth Guarantee is welcome in this regard.
- Take-up of the free childcare entitlement for two-year olds is currently low, as [EPI research](#) has shown, particularly in urban areas and among certain ethnic groups, despite its potential to address educational disadvantages.
- There are policy levers the Government could pull which do not require money. The direction of funding to certain schools and accountability reform, for instance, are relatively quick changes that could give teachers more time to spend with individual students and improve wellbeing across the sector to encourage the retention of teachers.
- Upcoming SEND legislation can deliver benefits to the wider system if done currently, by strengthening the system's ability and capacity to meet the individual needs of children.

## Measuring Wellbeing

Many participants felt that the Bill would benefit from including a measurement tool for children's wellbeing. Some welcomed the idea, but felt clarity is needed on how the measurement can be instructive in providing policy solutions. Participants noted the following in relation to the potential of a wellbeing measurement:

- There needs to be a child-equivalent of the WELLBY which acts as a universal measure of children's wellbeing. LSE's programme on community wellbeing has introduced the [C-WELLBY Approach](#) to enable the measuring of child wellbeing over time and identify

- A measurement tool would help to bring wellbeing into political and national conversation, as well as assist teachers in identifying children who are quietly facing difficulties that might otherwise be missed.
- The C-WELLBY would be important for assigning monetary value to wellbeing, which is helpful in making a case to policy makers.
- Local Authorities utilise BeeWell measures, however these are not used consistently.
- One of BeeWell's strengths was in asking children how they defined wellbeing and providing a platform to listen to children's voices.