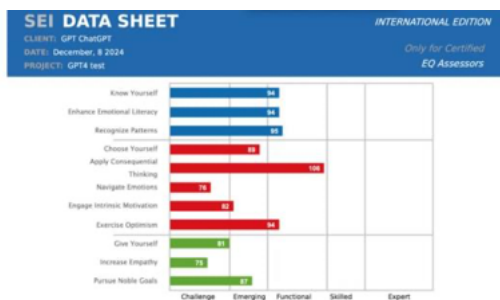


Welcome!

Welcome to another newsletter from the SEAL Community. This time we're talking about transition... plus featuring the usual fascinating research and great tips from schools.

News Update

AI takes the emotional intelligence test



How does AI do on an emotional intelligence test? Not that well is the answer.

The organisation Six Seconds measured ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini on an Emotional Intelligence assessment — the [SEI](#). SEI scores are scaled like a traditional IQ test: 100 is the human average, 130 is

genius-level. A recent Scientific American article reports that ChatGPT had an IQ of 155 on a cognitive intelligence test. But its average EQ (Emotional Quotient) score is only 93. To put that in context, ChatGPT's IQ score is higher than 99% of people; the EQ score is better than 32% of people.

Some AI did better than others. Of the GenAI tools, Claude scored the highest at 103.

Overall, AI did better in some tests than others. They did well on 'applying consequential thinking' and had some logical understanding of emotions, but struggled to use them. They'd have trouble 'getting it' when people express complex emotions. And they aren't sure that they can make a meaningful difference to the world! So sad.

AI has some insight into its limitations. When asked about its low scores on Empathy. ChatGPT said 'True empathy requires an experiential understanding of emotions, the ability to deeply resonate with others' feelings, and shared human experiences. As an AI, I lack the lived experience or emotional resonance that humans use to deeply connect.' When asked why this score might be so low, it said: 'I excel in cognitive empathy (understanding emotions intellectually) but lack emotional



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empathy (feeling with someone) and compassionate empathy (taking emotionally-driven action).
The score might reflect this imbalance.'

All that suggests that complex emotions, intuition, and meaningful relationships are outside the bot's expertise. So, people who are asking GenAI for personal advice or wisdom would be well advised to exercise extreme caution: that's not what a GenAI is good at.

Read more [here](#).

More mental health support teams

Mental health support teams will be expanded in England to cover almost a million more pupils by next year, the DfE have announced. £49 million will be invested to ensure that six in 10 pupils will have access to a mental health support team by March 2026.

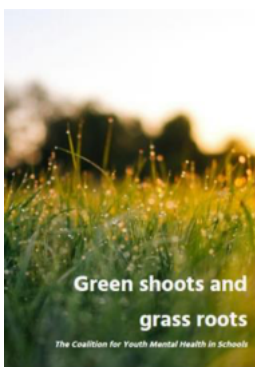
The rollout will be prioritised based on NHS identification of local need - which takes into account inequalities such as social deprivation and learning disabilities.

Mental health support teams currently reach 59 per cent of secondary schools and 35 per cent of primaries, 31 per cent of special schools and 34 per cent of alternative provision settings, according to the latest 2024 figures.

Save the date

Mark your calendars for 9th - 13th March 2026, next year's Empathy Week. The theme for 2026, 'My Culture | Your Culture | Our Culture', will give students a chance to explore the cultures that shape their identities, all the while learning about the cultures of other students and their community around them too. Register now at <https://www.empathyweek.org/> for a week packed with completely free resources, assemblies and events for every age group.

Green shoots of recovery



Teenage mental health could be on the mend, as new research reveals a sharp decline in distress and signs of recovery from the pandemic's impact. The report, *Green Shoots and Grass Roots*, draws on new polling by Public First of over 1,000 11- to 18-year-olds, using questions first asked in 2021 as a reference point.

Not all young people are seeing the same improvements, however. Girls and pupils from lower-income families remain far more likely to struggle with their mental health. Just 70% of girls rate their mental health as good, compared to 84% of boys, and only 69% of those from social grades DE rate their mental health as good, compared to 87% from grades AB. School stress hits poorer pupils harder: those from households earning under £30,000 rate their school-related worry at 4.9/10, compared to 4.1/10 for those from households earning over £60,000.

Teen girls struggling in Wales

A [Public Health Wales survey](#) of 130,000 secondary students has found that a fifth of teenage girls reported that their social media use was 'problematic' – twice the percentage found among boys. This meant they neglected other activities such as sport and hobbies to use social media, and using social media was always at the forefront of their minds. They reported struggling to limit time on social media and that it caused conflict with families and friends.

An [Estyn report published on 8 May](#) said in a few schools in Wales older girls were displaying more challenging behaviour than previously seen and often had outbursts in behaviour as a result of a breakdown in friendship groups, fallouts from social media activity and low self-esteem.

Sharing practice

A transition project at Whitefield Primary

Whitefield Primary in Liverpool works hard to develop children's ability to regulate strong emotions,



using Leah Kuyper's Zones of Regulation. Staff were aware, though, that when children went on to secondary school they often struggled to apply their primary school learning.

This was brought home to them when a boy who had joined them in Y4 came back to visit and described his experiences. This boy had really valued learning about self-regulation. He described Whitefield as 'The best school in England. They helped me stay calm.' But he had not found transition easy.

The first thing the school did was teach their Y6 pupils ways of describing their feelings that secondary staff would understand : not 'I'm in the red Zone' but 'I'm feeling'. Their children also had help in learning *how* to speak to adults, as well as what to say.

But staff realised that this was not enough; they would need to work with secondary staff to help them understand self-regulation and how to support it. So they sought funding from the SHINE charity to work with academics at Manchester University to develop and evaluate a transition project. This includes a six session curriculum to be delivered in the last half term of primary and the first half term of secondary, and a tool to measure wellbeing before and after transition.

The curriculum aims to address several critical areas of transition:

- Understanding emotions and managing change
- Developing effective communication skills within the school setting
- Building positive peer relationships and coping with related anxieties
- Developing resilience when facing problems

Sessions are designed to provide students with practical strategies to navigate new challenges confidently. These include the Zones of Regulation, Circle of Control (differentiating between what students can influence and what they cannot, encouraging them to focus on things they can do something about), body scanning to be more aware of emotions, and development of an individualised 'toolkit' of self-regulation strategies that resonate with each child.

Children learn about the significance of tone and word choice in communication, how the meaning of a sentence can dramatically change based on what you are feeling when you say the words and what word you emphasise.

The programme introduces the secondary school's behaviour policy and expectations about how students will speak to staff. Students are taught how to ask for help and how to react and gain a positive reaction when things go wrong. They learn how to read social situations, and to develop resilience they think about positive reframing to turn negative thoughts into positive ones and testing thoughts to see if they are really true or if they're just pretending to be true.

Other lessons cover the 'size of the problem', which teaches students to differentiate between small, medium, and big problems, avoiding over-reaction and allowing them to choose the right

response. Then there is work on how the way we think (positive 'dolphin' thoughts and negative 'shark' thoughts) can affect how we feel.

The transition curriculum includes

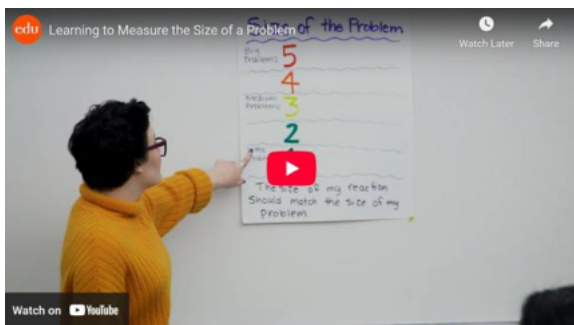
- A student booklet for the transition project
- A teacher guide with session plans for each lesson
- Short summary films to support content for each lesson
- Resources to support lessons - cards, brief slide deck

Whitefield staff are working in partnership with a number of local primaries and the secondary schools they feed to, providing training to the Y7 secondary tutors. The programme began in 2025, and aims to expand in its second year to further schools. The intention is for students in Y7 to present learning to future Y6 joiners as "transition ambassadors."

To find out more, contact Marie Beale, Deputy Headteacher and Inclusion Manager at Whitefield
mbeale@whitefieldprimaryschool.co.uk

Top tips

Are you using the size of the problem?



This strategy helps children decide whether a problem they face is large or small, so they can adjust their response accordingly. Watch a video about it [here](#). There's a printable size of the problem worksheet on that link, too.

Try saying this...

When students are stressed or upset or having behaviour problems, try these [really useful adult responses](#) from Young Minds.

How have you felt this week?

If your students have individual access to laptops, have them [Go to the Interactive version of Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions](#). Ask them to click on three emotions they've felt this week. Then read the short blurbs to discover what each one might be trying to tell them — and how that insight could help guide their next steps.

Practical tools

Emotion check-ins

Here are some useful ideas for emotion check-ins at the start of the day.

Zones of Regulation check-ins

Have children check-in on the blue, green, amber or red zone using clothes pegs with their photo on, or put a post-it in a pot under an 'Inside Out' Zones display.



Sticky Note Check-In

Students put a sticky note on the whiteboard or a poster that has different categories (such as "I'm doing great today" or "I'm struggling"), with the option to write more on the back of the note for the teacher's eyes only.



This tool gives students the chance to practice self-awareness and gives the teacher the ability to gauge the mood of the class and who might

need some support .

Animal mood boards

Make check-ins fun and vary them by searching Google Images for ‘animal check-in mood boards’.

We love this one, of Moo Deng the viral baby hippo.

Which Moo Deng mood are you today?



Use check-ins like these to help students support one another and be responsive to what is shared. For example, ask “What are some good strategies that a person could use if they’re feeling like the angry hippo today?” Extend this to ‘what would be a good way to support them?’”

Roses and thorns

Try the rose and thorn check-in, in which students share roses—something positive going on for them that day—and thorns, which are negative, or at least less than positive. Be sure to share yours too. Students can choose their level of vulnerability: a rose can simply be “the weather is nice today.” A low-stakes thorn might be “I feel tired.” Yet many students choose to share more personal items: “My rose is that even though I’m stressed out, I got all my homework done” or “My thorn is that my dog is sick and I’m really worried about her.”

Top Resource

The [Keep your cool toolbox](#) is a nice on-your-phone resource for foster carers and early years



practitioners to help children self-regulate. It has short films showing different strategies and explaining their use.

Resource Round Up

Calling all ELSAs and Trauma Informed Schools Practitioners

On the SEAL website [here](#) you'll find a new guide *How to get the best from the SEAL Community: for ELSAs and TIS practitioners*. It shows you how to find the resources you need on the SEAL website, and has links to resources that have proved particularly useful and popular – like assessment tools, and resources for work on anger. There's also a reminder about the videos on [our You Tube channel](#), that cover specific topics for working with individuals or small groups (e.g. getting on with others, anger, conflict management, bereavement, change, setting goals, building resilience, self-esteem, going to secondary school etc.). Inspiration for teachers, too, and loads of examples, video clips etc.

Change and transition



If you select 'Changes and Transitions lesson plans and assemblies' on the Members' tab on the SEAL website you'll find hundreds of resources from our back catalogue to use this term and next, to help children 'move up' to a new class or school.

Here are some new ideas. Why not, for example, have the rest of the school or another year group form a tunnel and clap the Y6 or 11 leavers out?

For children starting nursery or Reception, look at the National Literacy Trust's teaching resources to help children settle, based on the picture books Ravi's Roar and Ruby's worry. Find them [here](#).

Try this primary [Transition Profile](#) : the current teacher fills it in with a neurodivergent child in their class and passes it on to the next teacher.

Look [here](#) for five brilliant books that are great reads for children moving from primary into secondary school.

Or try this nice Anna Freud [animation and accompanying teacher toolkit](#) (lesson plan, assembly, PowerPoints) aimed at supporting pupils who have recently started Year 7, or are due to start soon. The resources were developed in collaboration with young people, teachers and mental health experts.



This [NHS lesson plan](#), along with associated videos, looks at the expected and unexpected changes people may face in their lives. It also explores ways for students to manage changes in their own lives. Suitable for ages 11-16.

And for September (and the SEAL Themes New Beginnings) we like [this activity](#) from 6 Seconds, in which children have a chance to see different kinds of communities and talk about the components that make them. They think about how these components make them feel and create their own ideal community on paper.

First Five

We like some of the ideas from EdTomorrow's 'First Five'. These are quick five minute classroom



activities to start the day that foster connections and belonging.

There are ideas on their [website](#) (primary and secondary) for students to talk in pairs about, so as to get to know classmates, and ideas for emotion check-ins. Go to 'Today's First Five' in the top bar. Also available is a free daily email with 18+ new activities.

Understanding our brains



Do you want to get beyond the simple [flight or flight neuroscience](#) with your older students? Help them understand what is happening in the cells of their body when emotions are activated? Learn about the cascade model? Find out how to interrupt an emotion cascade by engaging the

thinking part of the brain? We really like [this video](#) from the emotional intelligence organisation 6 seconds. It's suitable for secondary students and in our view should be part of the biology curriculum.

Into Film Relationships Resources



We were all shocked by the Adolescence Netflix drama. You will know that Into Film have made the series available to schools along with teaching resources. But did you know about another Into Film resource for teaching about relationships?

Relationships on Film is a series of short courses

designed to support educators of 11-16-year-olds in exploring key topics within sex and relationships education. The courses are packed with engaging films, curriculum-linked resources, expert advice and exclusive video extras to help you deliver lessons with confidence and sensitivity.

[Watch a quick, sneak preview](#) of one of the videos available in this course series, for a bite-sized piece of learning you can apply in your classroom straight away.

[Enrol now](#) to see the entire Relationships on Film course series. You can work your way through all the courses or select the ones which appeal most to you.

Toxic masculinity

Addressing the impact of Masculinity Influencers on Teenage Boys: A guide for schools, teachers and parents/guardians is a useful resource based on research



conducted in Dublin. You can download it [here](#).

Gender Line

In [this interesting activity](#) students tape or clip cards with different qualities on a string on the wall with Male at one end and Female at the other end. They discuss questions about gender

stereotyping, what was difficult or easy about the activity and how it feels to have an opinion challenged by a different opinion.

Empathy Day resources

We've put a couple of really useful Empathy Day resources on the SEAL website. Empathy Characters is a worksheet helping primary pupils explore the feelings of any book character. Empathy Chat is a list of great questions for pairs of children to discuss, so as to get to know one another better. Find them [here](#)

The power of the splat



The Power of the SPLAT

[The Power of the Splat](#) is a fun mindfulness video from GoNoodle, for KS1 and lower KS2. Turn mindfulness into slimefulness ... Have a look, too at Rainbow Breathing, another breathing exercise to add to your collection. [Here](#) is a GoNoodle video to use on your whiteboard. Needs a bit of space, though!

New wellbeing resource for 14+

[This video resource](#) from the Anna Freud Centre demonstrates three different types of coping strategy:

- A grounding exercise
- A breathing exercise
- A CBT-style reframing thoughts activity

The video also features Sophie, a young person who explains how her chosen coping strategy, visualisation or guided imagery, helps her.

Staff could share this video with students to watch in their own time, or could play it to a small group of students during tutor or form time.

Research

Co-operative behaviour is infectious...

Lab research with adults has shown that cooperative behaviour can spread through social networks up to three degrees of separation. This means that when one person acts with empathy or intentionality, it can influence not only their immediate contacts but also their contacts' contacts, creating a ripple effect that fosters widespread behavioural change. Read the research [here](#)

How important are emotions for learning and how do they develop?

We learned some interesting things from a [Tes interview](#) with Reinhard Pekrun, professor of psychology at the University of Essex, who has spent much of his career researching the interactions between emotions and achievement.



He's looked at a broad range of positive emotions and negative emotions, like anger, boredom and shame.

Here are some highlights of the interview:

Cognitive science in education has neglected the area of emotions

The scale of the impact that emotions can have on how we learn is often not fully recognised. The effect size for emotions is similar to the effects of intelligence, but the 'cognitive science revolution' that has shaped how we now teach means we have neglected emotions.

Emotions direct our motivation. We are motivated to pursue goals that we value and to avoid events that we are afraid of.

Emotions also direct our thinking. If you are in a positive mood, you are able to think in a flexible way, to become creative and strategic. If you are in a negative mood, that can also be beneficial: it can help us to think critically, for example, when we evaluate decisions.

“This is illustrated by a study we just completed with university maths students”, says Reinhard. “We induced a positive emotion (enjoyment) for one group and an anxious state of mind for another group. We then asked the groups to generate mathematical ideas about a geometrical figure, and to evaluate others’ ideas about the same figure. It turned out that, under enjoyment, idea generation was substantially better, while in an anxious mood, critical evaluation was better”.

But overall, emotions like anxiety, shame, hopelessness and boredom are negatively associated with academic achievement. The reverse is generally true for positive emotions – but there is a caveat. Negative emotions can be beneficial if they are not too intense, and if you uphold the expectation that you will succeed in the end.

So confusion, for example, can be helpful, as long as you’re motivated to resolve the confusion and solve the problem. So can anxiety. “Being a little bit nervous before an exam can motivate you to invest effort to avoid failure,” Pekrun explains. “As long as you are able to keep a sense of optimism, and the anxiety is not so intense that it stops you from focusing on the task, it can be beneficial.”

The development of emotions

Very early, in preschool and the first years of primary school, the range of emotions children can process is still pretty limited. Emotions like joy, anger and anxiety are already experienced during the first few months of life, but the ability to process more complex social emotions, like admiration, contempt or envy - which depend on being able to compare yourself to others - develops later.

In secondary school, the full range of human emotions is available, and the ability to regulate those emotions has evolved, too.

Children’s ability to suppress or choose to express emotions also changes as they get older. That is also not yet really possible at the beginning of primary school, and this is why, with pupils of that age, you see all the emotions they can experience. The primary classroom is an extremely emotional place.

In contrast, in many secondary school classrooms, everybody has a straight face. You don’t see their emotions anymore because they’re able to control their expressions.

If you’re a primary school teacher, you are in a relatively good position compared with your secondary colleagues, because you see what is going on with your pupils. But with 13- or 14-year-

olds, you don't know. Are they bored? Are they confused? Looking at their faces, you might not be able to tell.

So it's important for secondary teachers to check in with students, to find out where they are emotionally. But trust is needed as a basis for that. If your students trust you, they will be more willing to tell you how they are doing.

Empathy is teachable

A study in Ireland evaluated the effectiveness of an empathy-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programme, Activating Social Empathy (ASE), in promoting empathy, social concern and helping among secondary-school students. Findings from this study show that adolescents who participate in the ASE programme show higher levels of empathy over time (compared to youth who do not participate in ASE). Higher empathy was in turn linked to greater altruism, emotional understanding, and social concern. [This](#) is the article.

Yes, restorative approaches to behaviour really work



[This 2025 study](#) looked at Chicago Public Schools' adoption of restorative practices and found that compared to control schools there was a significant reduction in suspensions and arrests and a 15% decrease in out-of-school arrests, with no negative impact on attainment.

Unlocking high quality teaching

An interesting report from OECD draws on extensive research to unpack what actually constitutes high quality teaching. Two of the five key areas they identify relate to SEL: fostering classroom interaction, and providing social-emotional support. The others are ensuring cognitive engagement, crafting quality subject content and using formative assessment and feedback. For each of the five areas, the report suggests 20 practices that teachers draw upon to achieve them. These practices are relevant across different age groups, subjects, educational contexts, and pedagogical beliefs.

Social-emotional support, the report says, 'focuses on nurturing a supportive classroom climate and building positive relationships that are conducive to learning. It is also about furthering

students' social-emotional development, with teachers explicitly teaching social-emotional skills and providing opportunities for students to actively practise these skills. An area of rich if relatively recent attention, part of the complexity here lies in the new demands it places on teachers' knowledge of social-emotional skills and how to support their development.'

Fostering classroom interactions means that 'Teachers facilitate high-quality interactions in the classroom through questions and responses, organising opportunities for students to collaborate, and whole-class discussions. The complexity for teachers lies in establishing clear routines, balancing teacher and student agency, ensuring an equitable environment of interaction.'

Read more [here](#) .

Socioemotional skills of teenagers in England below international averages



The socioemotional skills of 15- and 16-year-olds in England are significantly weaker than many of their peers' in 30 comparator countries, according to new [research](#) .

These weaknesses - in areas such as cooperation, curiosity, empathy, persistence and stress resistance - could damage young people's job prospects if ignored, the report's authors warn.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) study suggests that socioemotional and cognitive skills are precursors to the skills that are essential if young people are to thrive in the future labour market.

It recommends exploring whether, and how, the development of essential employment skills such as collaboration, communication and problem solving can be further strengthened as part of teaching and delivering the curriculum.

Previous NFER research predicted that by 2035 workers will need to use these skills more intensively in their jobs, but that up to 7 million workers could lack the required skill level to carry out these roles effectively.

The report calls on the government to incentivise and support schools to promote the development of socioemotional skills.

The research examined the socioemotional skills of young people in England compared with those in other countries that were part of the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) study in 2022.

They also compared literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills at age 15 and 16 in England with those in other Pisa-participating countries, to identify areas where England might be able to learn lessons.

The average standardised score for socioemotional skills of young people aged 15 and 16 in England was -0.12 in 2022, compared with the OECD average of zero.

The NFER researchers found that the countries with the highest scores for socioemotional skills had less social inequality than England. The two countries with the highest average scores were Switzerland and Portugal.

The report states that “self-control, locus of control and self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, social problem-solving, empathy, assertiveness and cooperation are identified as skills with a high level of evidence of both teachability and predictive value for other outcomes”.

Can we have it all? UK dips on the sense of belonging in school

In 2003, the UK performed above average for school belonging and mathematics scores compared to other OECD countries. But by 2022, [a report](#) has found that the UK had seen the largest fall in pupils’



sense of belonging in school of any country in the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), though its relative academic performance improved. The report blames curriculum reforms which have increased the number and importance of examinations in the school system, encouraged rote learning, discouraged school investment in extra- and co-curricular learning, and contributed to high-stress academic environments.

In comparison, countries such as Japan, which prioritise a 'well-rounded' curriculum with lots of extra-curricular learning, achieved the largest increase in belonging between 2003 and 2022, whilst also achieving the highest mathematics score.

The paper argues that there is no inherent trade-off between wellbeing and attainment; we can 'have it all'. It sets out what steps government should take to ensure that schools represent both academically challenging and enjoyable environments.

Did COVID catch-up get it wrong?

A report called 'A generation at risk: rebalancing education in the post-pandemic era' finds that compared with most other nations, England's pandemic response was heavily focused on academic catch-up and failed to emphasise socio-emotional skills, extracurricular support, and wellbeing. The authors of the study argue that to improve child outcomes, much greater emphasis is needed in schools on activities that improve **both** socio-emotional and cognitive skills. They analyse data from the Millenium Cohort and find that socio-emotional skills (the ability to engage in positive social interactions, cooperate with others, show empathy, and maintain attention) are as important as cognitive skills in achieving good GCSEs and decent wages after school.

Socio-emotional skills at age 14 predict GCSE results at 16, they find.

The analyses showed some interesting gender effects. For boys, cognitive skill levels at age 14 were twice as important as socio-emotional skills in determining future GCSE prospects; for girls, the opposite is true, with socio-emotional skills 50% more impactful than cognitive skills.

Read more [here](#).

Evaluation of mental health interventions in schools shows mixed results

Funded by the Department for Education, Education for Wellbeing was one of England's largest research programmes testing the effectiveness of school-based mental health interventions. The aim of the programme was to evaluate pioneering ways of supporting the mental wellbeing of pupils. It was conducted in three waves between 2018 and 2024. The programme was split into two trials: AWARE (Approaches for Wellbeing and Mental Health Literacy: Research in Education), tested in secondary school settings, and INSPIRE (INterventions in Schools for Promoting Wellbeing: Research in Education),

tested in both primary and secondary school settings.

The AWARE study

The AWARE study examined two interventions - Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) and The Mental Health and High School Curriculum Guide (The Guide) - tracking their impact on more than 12,000 students across 153 schools.

While both programmes aimed to improve mental health awareness and help-seeking behaviours, they also had unintended consequences.

YAM, for example, was linked to an increase in emotional difficulties in the long term, particularly in schools with little existing mental health provision.

The Guide initially improved students' willingness to seek help. However, a year later, those who had taken part reported greater emotional struggles and lower life satisfaction than their peers. Given this, the DfE research said neither programme could be recommended.

INSPIRE

This research involved 32,655 pupils in Years 4,5,7 and 8 across 513 schools. The results show that one intervention - Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing (SSW) - had the best overall effect.

SSW is designed to help children and young people before potential problems escalate into mental ill-health by normalising everyday emotions (such as stress and sadness) and showing where to find support if needed. It involves a series of eight lessons delivered by school staff.

SSW was found to significantly improve mental health literacy - specifically, the intention to seek help if mental health problems arise in the future - in primary schools. When it was implemented in full, a significant rise in mental health literacy was also seen in secondary schools.

Two other strategies - mindfulness-based exercises and relaxation techniques - were trialled. The course on relaxation techniques, made up of daily five-minute sessions, significantly reduced emotional difficulties when delivered frequently and consistently in primary schools, and most helped children from ethnic minority groups.



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However, in secondary schools there was evidence that emotional difficulties actually increased significantly with the frequency of the sessions.

Meanwhile, the mindfulness exercises, which involved training teachers to deliver daily five-minute sessions in class, reduced emotional difficulties when delivered frequently in secondary schools.

But in primary schools there was evidence that the sessions could increase emotional difficulties, including in children with special educational needs and prior emotional problems.

Overall, the researchers say the positive effects that they witnessed were small but, when amplified across the population, could translate into “meaningful change”.

There's a readable summary [here](#) and you'll find the full evaluation reports [here](#).