

There are a lot of contributing factors to achieving health and well being, so an holistic strategy and a collaborative approach to delivery will enhance the likelihood of success.

The 'Healthy Britain Report'(2023) by Kim Leadbeater, advocates the following government policy changes;

Making Physical Education a core subject at secondary schools

Having trained PE specialists in all primary schools.

DIRECT RELEVANCE TO SCHOOLS

Putting physical literacy and wellbeing at the heart of a 'curriculum for life'.

Supporting positive mental health from an early age and throughout life.

Establishing ring-fenced budgets for active travel schemes.

Increasing social prescribing and curbing the over-prescribing of drugs and medication

Enforcing legally binding standards for healthy homes and town and country planning.

WIDER COMMUNITY IMPACT

Giving communities power to promote social wellbeing locally.

Offering incentives for businesses to support a healthy workforce.

This document provides excerpts from the report which have direct relevance to schools. To read or download the whole report please visit <https://fabians.org.uk/publication/healthy-britain/>

Building the foundations for wellbeing

Physical literacy and PE

As Simon Stevens told me, health experts often observe that:
“If physical exercise was a medicine, it would be a miracle drug.”

During the pandemic, Sir Chris Whitty, too, stressed the importance of physical exercise to public health, arguing:
“There is no situation, there is no age, and no condition where exercise is not a good thing.” These habits must be established at an early age. We need a national drive to get every child to be more active in order to meet the current guidelines of at least 180 minutes a day from birth to five years old and 60 minutes a day for five to 18-year-olds. In their first years at school, children can spend around 20 per cent of the school day in ‘play’ without any proper guidance or a training plan for teachers to maximise its long-term benefits and with no real method of evaluation. We should make PE a core curriculum subject in secondary schools and, through the ongoing teacher recruitment process, ensure over time that every primary school has an enthusiastic, fully qualified PE specialist to support staff in engaging young people in sport, PE, and physical activity across the school day. Physical literacy – understanding the holistic foundation for physical competence and activity – should be incorporated in all teacher training.

Healthy children and young people

Our children deserve the best start in life. Parents want their kids to be happy and healthy and they deserve support in providing for them. Through Sure Start and other policies, Labour in office has a proud record of tackling childhood poverty, a record of progress that the Tories put into reverse. It will fall to Labour again to redouble our efforts to eradicate child poverty through the benefits of an economic strategy that restores the growth and prosperity we have lost over the past 13 years. Nor should we shy away from the active health interventions that can help protect children and adults alike. Nobody now calls Labour's ban on smoking in public places 'nanny statism'. We must have the courage to go further.

Nutrition education

Ten per cent of children are obese (not just overweight) before they start primary school. That rises to 20 per cent by the time they leave. There would be greater public acceptance of restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food and drink, minimum unit pricing for alcohol and taxes on major sources of sodium and saturated fats if they were seen, not as 'penalising' unhealthy eating habits or punishing hard pressed families, but as directly promoting healthier living. Building on the success of the soft drinks industry levy, we should hypothecate taxes on excess sugar, salt and fats in processed foods and drinks, and ring-fence the proceeds for schools to provide nutritious meals and cookery and home economics classes. These classes should be both fun and educational, helping to establish good cooking and eating habits that could last a lifetime. Jamie Oliver was ahead of the game on this years ago, and recently launched the Good School Food Awards to celebrate those working in education to bring good food to our children. Healthy practices should be celebrated and rewarded.

Curriculum for life

Whilst there are some specific changes to be made to the curriculum in relation to nutritional education and physical literacy, there are also broader changes that could be made. Headteachers often remark that the school curriculum is becoming more and more narrow, and less and less suitable for what children need. We need a curriculum that reflects the needs of society. We need a curriculum that facilitates the development of children in terms of their physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing, as well as their academic attainment. In other words, we need a 'Curriculum for Life'. After the constant meddling of the Tory years, schools should be empowered to design a curriculum that pupils, parents, teachers and governors can agree best prepares children for the world of today – and tomorrow – with the skills and resilience to better protect their physical and mental health as adults. Currently, key components of a rounded, healthy curriculum are either missing or given too little emphasis, including physical and digital literacy, financial literacy, and an understanding of social and emotional wellbeing. As Professor Richard Layard has argued: "Education should develop more than the skills of earning a living. It should also develop the skills of living a rounded and satisfying life and of contributing to the wellbeing of others. So, life skills should become an explicit goal of every school." Furthermore, teachers tell me they can find themselves as tied to their computers and the internet as their pupils and are too constrained by assessments and inspections to provide a rounded education including outdoor learning. We need to give teachers and everyone working in education the support, time and capacity to take a more holistic approach to the education of our children – something they are keen to do.

Positive mental health from an early age

There is now a widespread acceptance that the first thousand days of a child's life are crucial. In the UK today, an estimated five children in every classroom have a mental health problem.

Looking after our youngest children and giving them the best possible start means also looking after the mental health of parents and siblings. As the Mental Health Foundation argues, we should ensure that all parents, regardless of their circumstances and background, are equipped with the skills and knowledge to raise a mentally healthy infant and protect their own mental health as a parent. As children get older, we know that adverse childhood experiences can lead to a substantially higher risk of poor wellbeing, mental ill health, and other negative outcomes during the rest of their lives. A holistic approach incorporating the education, health, welfare and other systems is needed to ensure both that negative experiences are minimised and that they are never made worse by the well-meaning but harmful impact of outside interventions.

Active Travel

Speeding and dangerous parking is a wholly unacceptable wherever it occurs, but especially close to schools and colleges. Parents need to feel it is safe for their children to use public transport or, better still, walk or cycle to school. Twenty mph limits and more enforcement officers around schools would help, as would more creative ideas like partnerships with local supermarkets, businesses and others to provide temporary parking or 'kiss and go' drop-off zones. In some cases, charges could be made for suitable off-road parking, including by schools on their outdoor pitches with the proceeds going to create more safe travel routes.