

Students' Voice - West London High School



Northolt Youth Hub

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Introduction to ESDEG

ESDEG's mission is to help children and their families from global majority migrant communities and low-income backgrounds strive for a better future through education and skill building.

We are committed to improving the lives of disadvantaged children through education, skills development and social integration. We are based in Ealing, but work in the other boroughs of West London as well. Since ESDEG's establishment in 2005 we have supported children and families from refugee, asylum seeker, ethnic minority, low-income households and other deprived backgrounds to overcome barriers to educational achievement. In response to the needs of our service users ESDEG's work has expanded to focus on the specific needs of children with special educational needs, disabilities, and those at risk of exclusion and in danger of being left behind.

As part of our work with the children, we offer the following services

- After-school homework classes
- Mentoring (both one-to-one and in groups)
- After-school sports club (handball and football)
- Mental health support including counselling, art therapy workshops
- SEND support
- Skills building initiatives like robotics, coding, healthy eating & cooking and arts & crafts workshops both during term times and over the term breaks and summer holidays.

ESDEG's SEND Project

ESDEG's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) project supports children in West London boroughs with special educational needs and disabilities. Our aim is to bridge the gap between families, schools and the Local Authority by working with the parents and their children to ensure that the child is receiving the right support s/he needs for developmental and educational success. Our specialised staff focus on identifying the reasonable adjustments a child with SEND may need to reduce the disadvantages s/he faces as well as providing extra encouragement in his/her learning and support with physical and personal

care difficulties. We nurture the confidence and self-esteem of the children with whom we work.

The SEND project offers:

- Extra Educational support (Viking Community Centre) for SEND children
- Coffee mornings to support parents
- Workshops, events, focus groups to disseminate information about SEND and the process
- Support for families via our telephone, email, one-to-one appointments, school and college meetings and annual reviews
- Information and guidance on how to apply for statutory assessment, including relevant documents and evidence to be submitted.
- Review EHC plans with parents to ensure that objectives and outcomes of the special education provision meet the child/young person's needs.
- Mental health counselling for both children and their parents
- Weekly SEND club
- Sport and activity sessions for the children during term breaks and summer
- Recreational activities like trips to seaside, cinema, London Zoo, amusement parks etc.

We are working towards building a SEND hub in a community setting in the Viking Community Centre offering holistic support and activities to SEND CYP and their families. We recognise that the wellbeing of families is crucial to a child's development and education and providing specific targeted support does not always work with the grassroot community, so we have adopted a whole family approach in supporting children with special needs. We offer help according to the unique needs of the child and the family. Like in some cases our SEND team had to speak to the bailiffs, sort out internet connection, co-ordinate with housing, refer the family to foodbanks or Household Support Grant. They may not be directly related to special needs, but essential for the safety and security of the child. We believe that unless a child has a secure place to stay and sufficient food to eat, helping the parents with EHCP application is not enough.

SEND Numbers

From January 2023 till June 2024 ESDEG's SEND Support services have helped a total of 209 families in navigating the SEND journey.

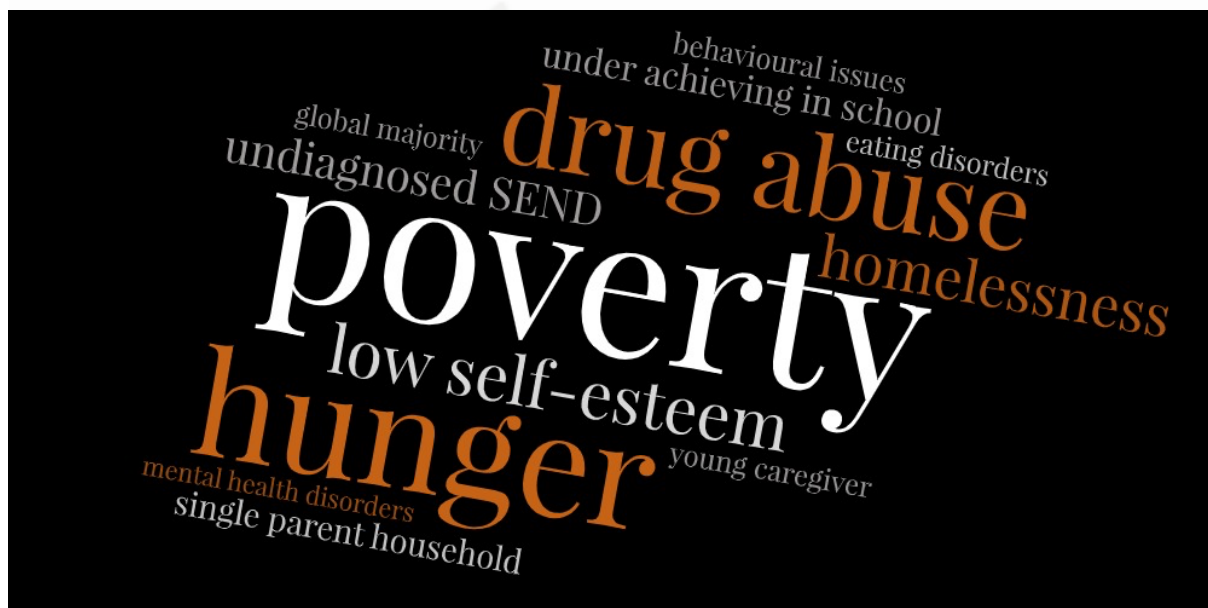
Barriers Facing Disadvantaged CYP

From our experience of working at the grassroots level for almost three decades, we know that the children from vulnerable backgrounds suffer from a range of significant issues, multi-layered vulnerabilities and complex challenges. Global majority children often struggle in the English education system fighting stereotyping, unconscious racial bias, institutional racism, bullying, violence etc. These children are the classic example of intersectionality where race, class, gender, special needs and disability intersect with one another and overlap. Multiple odds are stacked against these children. Facing discrimination is nothing new for global majority families in England. There are glaring examples of racial bias faced across several generations in these families in the migrant dense London boroughs of Brent, Ealing and Hounslow.

We are listing some of the issues faced by the CYP in the deprived areas in London -

- Poverty
- Hunger
- Substance abuse
- Behavioural issues like violence and anger outbursts
- School Exclusions, sometimes permanent
- Conflict with teachers and/or parents/siblings/peers
- Eating disorders like anorexia, bulimia etc.
- Mental health disorders like depression, anxiety etc.
- Tendency to self-harm
- Homelessness
- Under achievement in academics
- Low motivation and self-esteem
- Lack of self-control
- Bullying others or being bullied
- Gangs, drugs and crime
- Bereavement and grief
- Sleep deprivation
- Single parent households
- Lack of role models
- Witnessing/experiencing domestic violence and abuse at home
- Relatives involved in crime and gangs
- Addiction to video games and social media

- Living in unhealthy conditions, often cramped in small spaces with multiple siblings
- Being caregiver to younger siblings in situation where parents are sick or working multiple shifts
- Undiagnosed and unsupported SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) needs
- Missing out on education for extended periods e.g., due to caring for a parent with serious mental health problems, getting excluded, being placed in EAP (Ealing Alternative Provision) for more than a year and getting no education etc.



Struggles of SEND CYP

For those with SEND the situation is much worse. Many CYP remain undiagnosed and unsupported and their needs are never understood or met due to years-long NHS and CAHMS waiting lists. We are sharing some of the challenges faced by the CYP with special needs and their families –

- Lack of awareness/clarity about the SEND system
- Delayed services & support
- Long waiting periods for each step in the SEND journey - assessment, diagnosis, EHC Plan, finding school placement which provides the right support, school transport
- Lack of resources and time both for families and LA

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- Unconscious racial bias, stereotyping and institutional racism
- Lack of early interventions
- Language barrier
- Difficulty of accessing translator services which further delays the SEND process
- Cultural differences
- Common SEND misconceptions
- Lack of support and social network
- Fear of stigma, shame and social exclusion
- Lack of confidence in dealing with officials & navigating the system

Introduction to this Survey Report

This report is part of ESDEG's partnership project with YMCA and a West London High School. 2 Youth Workers – one provided by ESDEG and the other by YMCA are based in this West London High School and currently work with, mentor and support the CYP at the school. The youth workers have conducted the survey and the data is compiled and report written by ESDEG's team.

Rahma, ESDEG's youth worker has over 14 years of mentoring and tutoring experience and strives to instil a sense of confidence and motivation in her students, which contributes to their academic success and overall well-being.

West London High School

We have selected one of Ealing Council's 35 secondary schools to partner with and conduct this survey in. After meeting with the school's headteacher in late June 2024, we have decided to keep the school's name anonymous and call it a generic West London High School to protect the identity of its students. It is an average-sized secondary school with 924 pupils according to the government website. The school has Good Ofsted rating. According to a report titled 'Equality in Ealing 2020' in Ealing schools 70% of the pupil population is from Asian, Black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. The report further states that 69.4% of primary school pupils and 72.9% of high school pupils are from an ethnic minority or global majority background. Conforming to this data, in the West London High School three quarters of the students are from global majority backgrounds including Asian, African, any other White and any other ethnic group. Over half of the students in this school speak English as an additional language, which is above the national average. The proportion of students who have disability or SEND needs is just above national average. Persistent school absence is just above the national average, whereas school attendance is at par with the national average. The school is located in one of Ealing's pockets of high levels of pre-existing deprivation and this is reflected in the higher than national average proportion of disadvantaged students. This is calculated on the basis of the number of students eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for children who are eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.

The Ofsted report complimented the school for promoting and imbibing the core values of courage, pride and respect to its pupils. The report found that the students feel happy and safe within the school premises, their work reflects good academic progress, they have positive attitude to work and treat each other, the staff and visitors with respect.

In January 2024 the school did a student survey, 209 students responded as compared to 128 responses in the previous year. 45% students responded saying that they enjoyed attending school, 34% students said that there is an adult in school they can talk to if something worries them, 33% students responded that bullying happens at school and the teachers are good at resolving it, 35.9% agreed that the school encouraged them to look after their emotional and mental health.

Mental Health Support Available at the School

- A full and free programme of extra-curricular activities to support students in developing friendships through non-academic engagement - all teachers offer one activity per week;
- A pre-CAMHS practitioner is available for 1:1 session with young people - the objective being to prevent a future need for CAMHS referrals;
- Two counsellors;
- Two teams of learning mentors through partnerships with two organisations to offer targeted support for students;
- Art Psychotherapy provision in partnership with Ealing Council;
- Two members of staff trained as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants offering sessions with young people;
- One learning mentor dedicated to supporting students with low attendance;
- From September 2024 the school is funding one day a week in order to host a clinical professional in school to work with young people and families, aiming to bridge the gap between the MHST and CAMHS support for young people;
- The school's Safeguarding team also refer students for various external support e.g., online counselling, SAFE, as applicable.

Research Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on 108 feedback sheets completed by the students of the West London High School mentioned above during the academic year 2023-2024.

Some students did not answer all the questions in the survey form. Few students participated in the survey more than once. Around 100 students took part in the survey.

Acknowledgements

ESDEG is thankful to the following people for their co-operation and support in conducting this survey and compiling the data.

- Headteacher and the staff of the West London High School
- The students of the West London High School for patiently filling out the survey forms
- The two youth workers Ms. Rahma Elmi from ESDEG and Mr Luke from YMCA who worked with 100 secondary school students to conduct this survey
- ESDEG team who compiled this data and wrote this report. Mr. Ahmed Hadhoud, Youth Mentor compiled the data and created the structure of the report and Ms. Suchismita Majumdar, Research and Policy Officer wrote the report.
- We would like to thank John Lyon's Charity for sponsoring this unique collaboration where 2 charities work with a local school to make a meaningful impact on the students. ESDEG and JLC aim to develop a collaborative model that can be replicated so that it becomes a force multiplier in the sector.
- We would also like to thank Esmée Fairbarin for sponsoring our SEND support and mental health services. Thanks to their support we now have a dedicated member of staff to write this report.

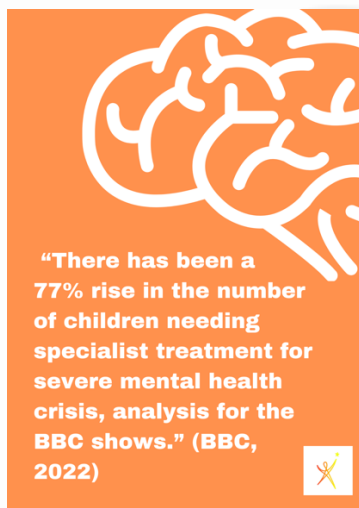


Why Mental Health?

Mental Health statistics for England in particular London is not very encouraging.

According to a [report](#) published by Public Health England in 2016

- More than 110,000 or one in ten children in London are suffering with significant mental ill health issues;
- Nearly 40,000 children suffer with anxiety;
- Over 10,000 children experience depression;
- Just under 19,000 children are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD);
- Over 68,000 children have conduct disorder (a serious behavioural and emotional disorder);
- 1 in 4 (25%) children across the country who need treatment for mental ill health receive it.



According to the [Mayor of London website](#) out of the 2.8 million CYP in London one in six young people aged 5-16 have mental health struggles.

Not only the statistics, the current mental health Act is also much criticised. The King's Speech, delivered on 17 July 2024, on [health-specific announcements](#) focused on reforming the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mental health groups and charities have long been demanding that the current Act should be reformed. According to the mental health charity Mind the current Act is outdated and not fit for purpose.

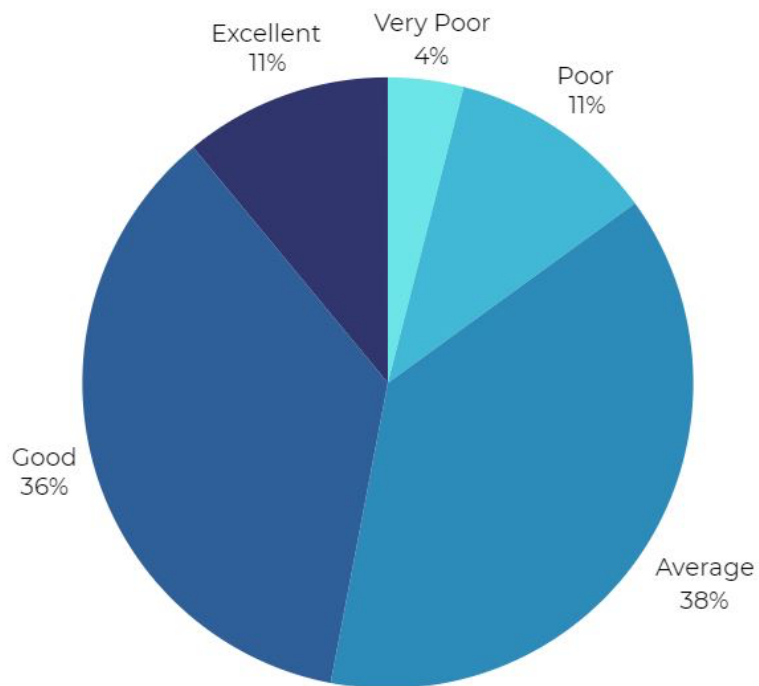
We quote from [Mind charity's website](#) about its drawbacks -

- "People detained under the Act don't have enough say in their treatment. They aren't able to choose the treatment that works for them, and the Act doesn't offer a way to appeal decisions.

- There are shocking racial disparities in how it's used. Black people are 4 times more likely to be detained under the Act than white people. They're more than 11 times more likely to be subject to a community treatment order.
- Community treatment orders don't work. Community treatment orders are meant to give people supervised treatment in the community. They give someone a set of conditions they have to follow when they're discharged from hospital. They were introduced to stop people repeatedly going back into hospital. But they don't work. They don't reduce the number of readmissions. They don't reduce the amount of time people spend in hospital. They're intrusive and restrict people's lives. And people don't know what they have to do to get off the order.
- It's unfair on people in deprived areas. People living in deprived areas are also more than 3 and a half times more likely to be detained than those in the least deprived areas.
- It doesn't work for young people. Young people are inappropriately put in adult wards and far from home. They're restrained, ignored and left to deal with a confusing system on their own. And when they get back to their communities, support they were promised often never materialises. "

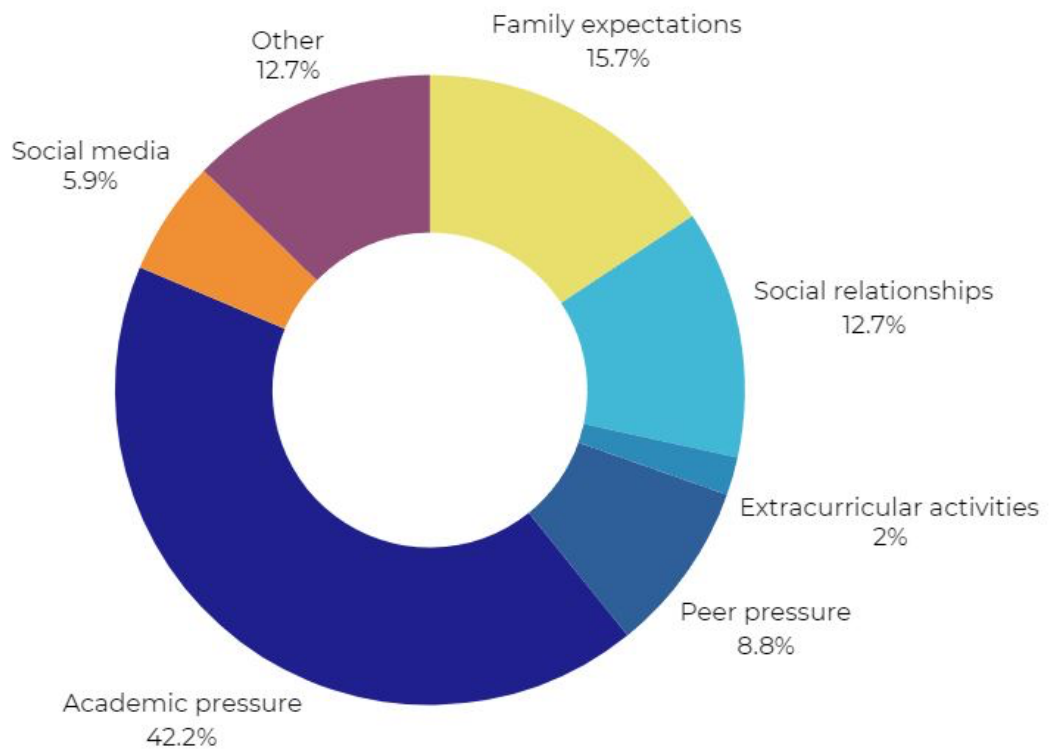
As work begins on this new bill to reform the Mental Health Act 1983, we would like to share the voices of 100 children from a deprived area of London with the aim that their voices are heard and their needs are also incorporated when drafting the new law.

1. How would you rate your overall well-being in high school?



Education and Skills Development Group

2. What are the most common sources of stress for you in high school? (Select all that apply)



Under “Other”, students wrote the following explanations:

- Overthinking
- School
- Failing
- School work
- Teachers: 3 responses
- Nothing/none: 3 responses

- Journey to school is too long

- Exams/tests: 5 responses

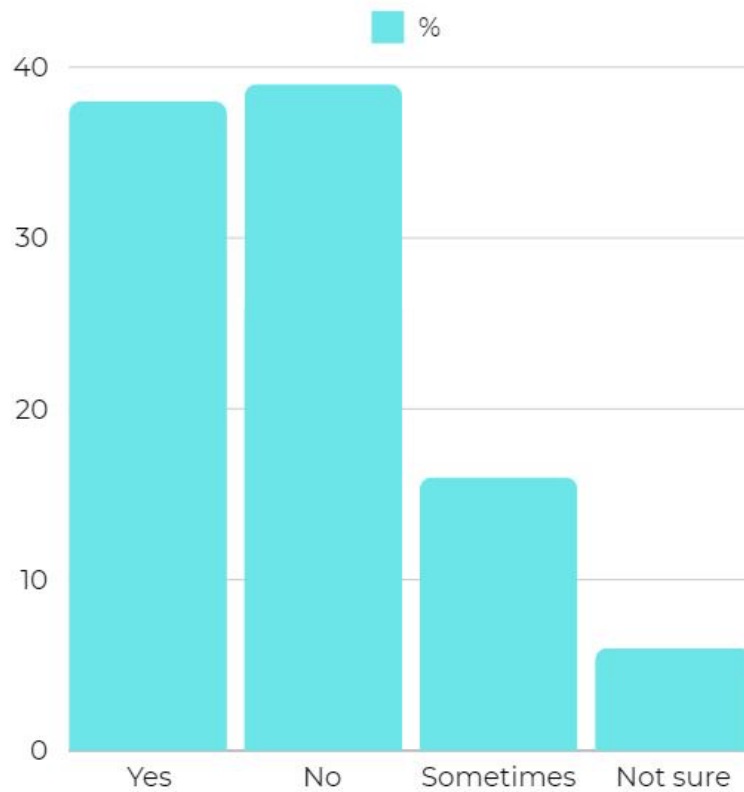
- Friendship issues

- Not taking it seriously when we are sick

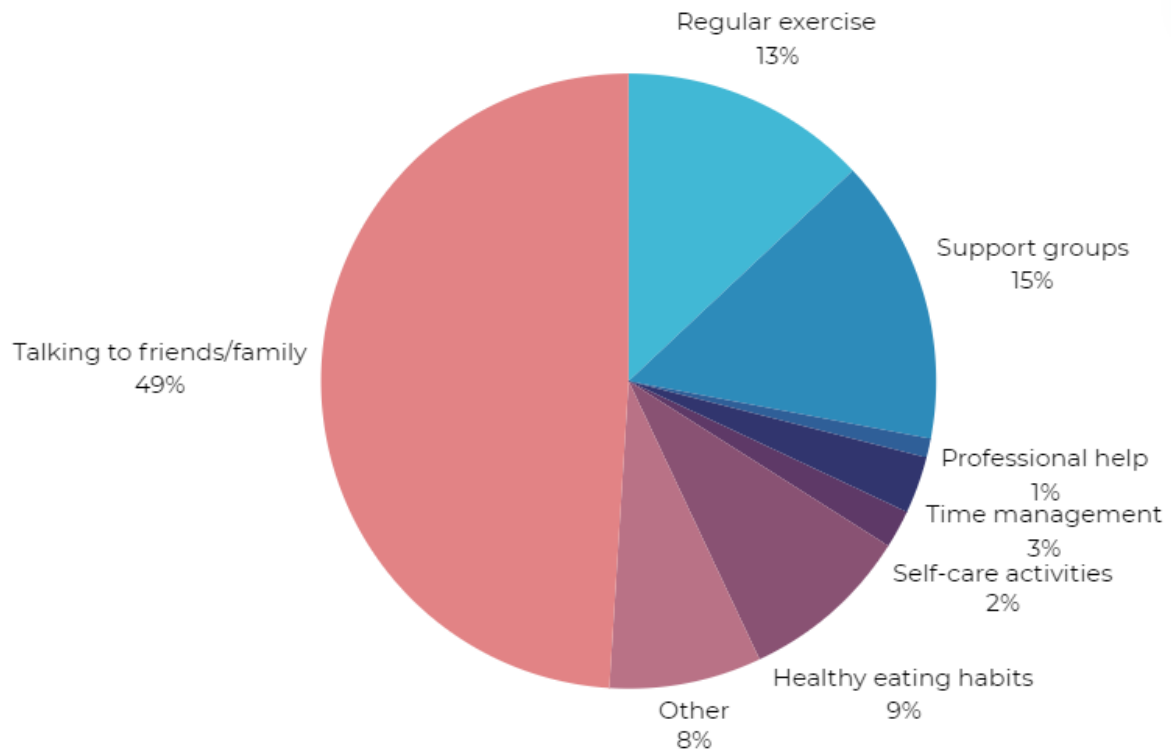
- Getting detention

- School environment

3. Do you feel adequately supported in managing your mental health in high school?



4. What strategies or resources have helped you improve your well-being in high school?
(Select all that apply)



Under “Other”, students wrote the following:

- No clue: 2 responses
- Nothing: 2 responses
- 1 response MH software
- Having some of my time talking to some teachers
- Room 2 /EISA/Mentoring

- Knowing that I can play games when I get home

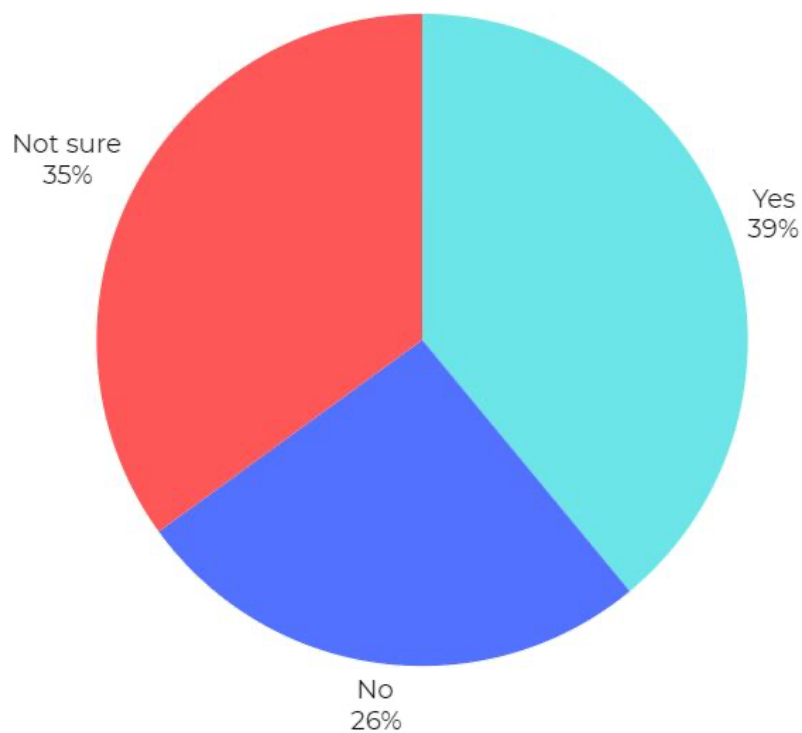
- Art or reading and music

- Talking to that one teacher

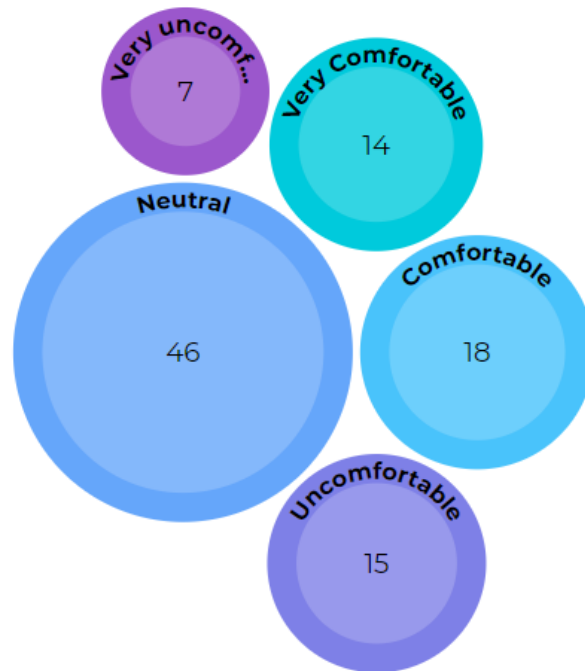
- None of the above

- Taking a break sometimes

5. Are you aware of any well-being programs or initiatives offered by your high school?



6. How comfortable do you feel discussing your well-being concerns with teachers or school staff? In percentage %



A student commented: "both neutral and uncomfortable. It depends how I feel that day and who I am talking to"

7. In your opinion, what additional support could the high school provide to improve student well-being?

-7 responses: "I don't know"

-4 responses: "More time to revise"

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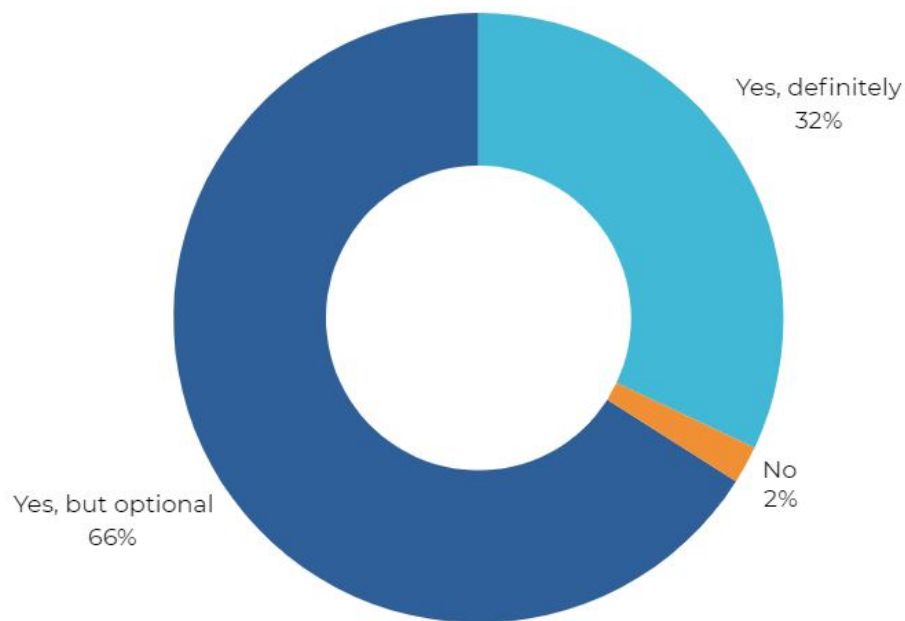
- 4 responses: "I believe they should do more (support)"
- 3 responses: "one to one talks/sessions"
- 2 responses: "Talk to more people like Miss Davis"
- 2 responses: "More mentors"
- 2 responses: "More PSHCE"
- 2 responses: "More time for lunch"
- 2 responses: "Speak with friends"
- 2 responses: "Therapy rooms"
- 2 responses: "Help me with my subjects"
- "Have people come in and do talks"
- "More teachers to talk to"
- "Add long break. One later short time"
- "More mental health help"
- "Students to have a teacher to be with them"
- "Raising standards for other students"
- "School to support those who joined school late (in the term/recent arrivals)"
- "GCSE help at an earlier date"
- "More awareness of mental health"
- "More activities"
- "More extra-curricular clubs"
- "Being there for students and not judge or discriminate"
- "Time out cards"

- “Checking on everyone”
- “Help more students”
- “Talking to teachers more in special places”
- “Active classes”
- “Therapy lessons”
- “More studying activities”
- “A TA (Teaching Assistant)”
- “Make the student feel safe”
- “Do more to understand students”
- “Add clubs that help students talk about their MH”
- “After school clubs that offer a place to just talk about feeling or do fun activities that also help students”
- “More time to revise for tests”
- “Maybe a club where you just sit and do something that’s not technology in peace and quiet”
- “Like talks about effects of things such as alcohol, drugs or about mental health and all that”
- “Always being with them (students) and helping them with their problems”
- “More freedom in general. Also decrease 2-hour detentions”
- “A mental health dog/care dog”
- “Group sessions”
- “More time for break”
- “A support teacher in every class”
- “Making a lesson where we speak about how we feel”

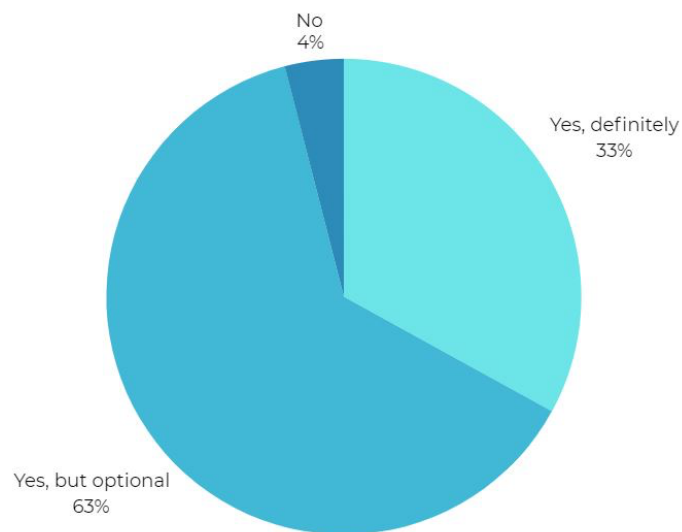
- “Not sure”
- “Nothing”
- “Boxing clubs / more football”
- “Counselling”
- “Allow more trust between teachers and students”
- “More boxing or classes that make kids take their mind off school”
- “Multiple staff”
- “A safe space for all students”
- “Teacher understanding - Empathy”
- “Sport activities”
- “More freedom in lessons”
- “Students should be talked to rather than punished”
- “One on one”
- “School should let us take breaks if we feel overwhelmed and if they do that to not embarrass people who request this”
- “Additional time out of stressful lessons”

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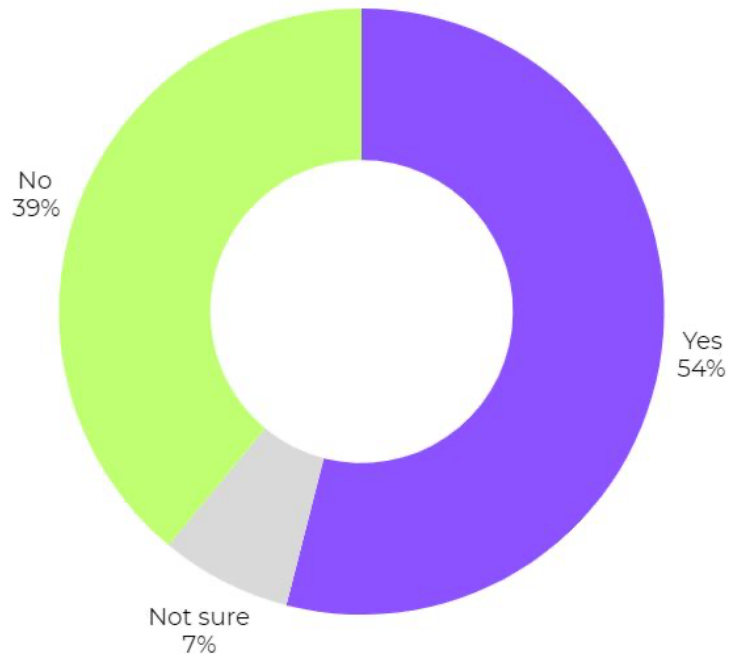
8. Do you believe high schools should have mandatory well-being education programs or classes?



9. What impact do extracurricular activities have on your well-being in high school?



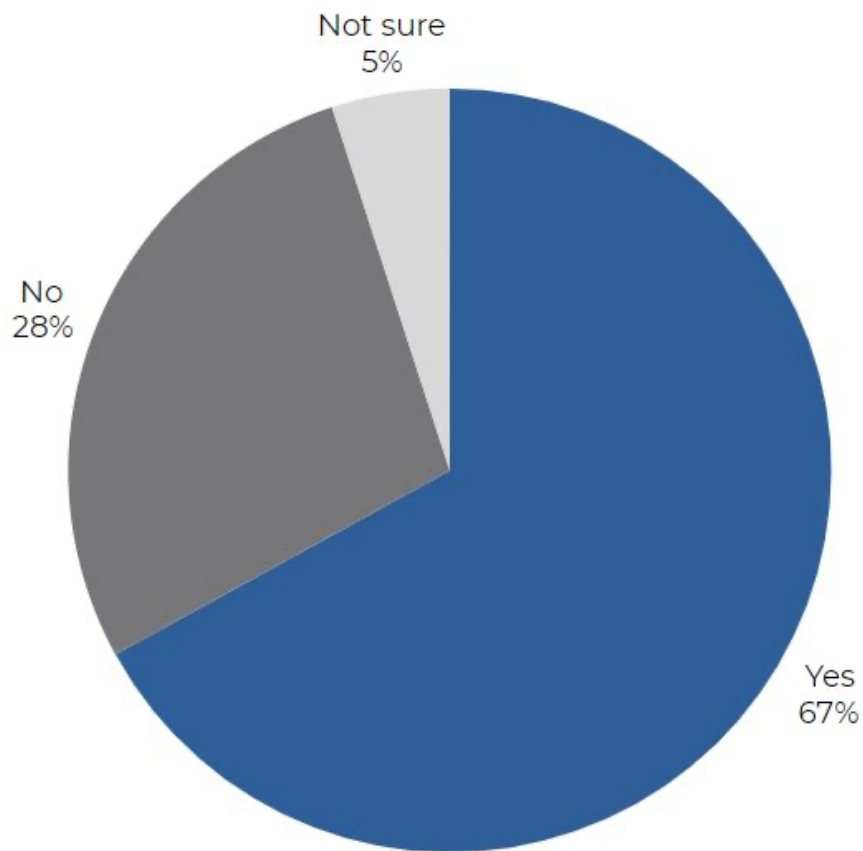
10. Do you feel that your high school prioritizes student well-being enough?



11- What improvements would you like to see at school to help your well-being?.....

- "I can't figure anything"
- "Teachers need to be more aware of what they do"
- "People coming in to talk to us"
- "More mentors and more therapy"
- "Improvements like feeling good walking to school"
- "People take into account what students say and act on it"
- "To prioritise our mental health and our needs"
- "To take us seriously when we ask for help"
- "Teachers being less dismissive when it comes to wellbeing /mental health"
- "School closing down"

12- Would you like to have one to one support sessions at school to boost your well-being?



Education and Skills Development Group

Recommendations

We have drawn up two lists of recommendations, the first list is provided by the Headteacher of the West London High School during her meeting with the ESDEG team, and the second one has been listed by Mr. Ahmed Hadhoud, ESDEG's Youth Mentor on the basis of the feedback provided by the students in the survey.

List of recommendations by the headteacher. ESDEG endorses and agrees with the headteacher's list.

- Co-produce a school strategy for emotional and mental health, prioritise its dissemination through assembly, youth hubs, chats during lunch breaks;
- Select and train Youth Ambassadors for Mental Health - Since both the school survey and ESDEG survey have shown that the youth prefer speaking to their own friends/peers, it is imperative that the youth are involved in the mental health awareness and support initiative. They could be trained during half-term and provided with an identifying badge or a pin which will help others students recognize them and approach them.
- Reduce instability – Strong relationships are difficult to build when the school suffers from shortage of permanent staff. With the temporary staff it is extremely difficult to build trust which is essential if a student were to approach a staff member for advice and support.

List of recommendations drawn up by Mr. Ahmed Hadhoud.

1.General recommendations at the national and LA level

For the school to have any meaningful impact the Department of Education (DeF) need to increase their funding so that the secondary schools can provide better mental health support to their students, also CAMHS services in Ealing needs to improve and the long waiting list has to reduce as well CAMHS's referral acceptance rates has to improve, also more funds are needed for youth clubs, after-school initiatives and extra-curricular activities both during termtime and term breaks and summer holidays etc.

In this report, we are concentrating particularly on the mental health support at school level and what could be done to improve those provisions.

2. An urgent need for optional Mental Health training & resources for families & peers

49% of students find that talking to families and friends is the most popular strategy to improve their wellbeing. This aligns well with research findings.

However, there are risks attached that should be mitigated. According to BMC Psychiatry (2022): “Individuals with depressive disorders prefer seeking help from informal sources such as family and friends ahead of formal sources. However, this preference has its disadvantages such as experiencing actual perceived and internalised stigmatising responses from them which may delay or deter help-seeking”. Furthermore, “a large number of multidisciplinary, qualitative and quantitative research suggests that providing care for family members with mental health illnesses can have both positive and negative effects on the carers’ wellbeing” (Oxford Academic, 2022). To mitigate the aforementioned risks, we could provide families and friends/peers with optional training and tools around mental health, suicide prevention, self-care, NHS approved well-being apps etc. These skills will: contribute to healing MH wounds, prevent counter-productive advice, enhance community resilience, dispel myths, debunk stigma, reduce self-harm, tackle harmful coping mechanisms and suicide.

3. An urgent need to establish supervised peer support groups online and offline, and empower CYP to become young MH ambassadors

According to CYP, the second most popular strategy to improve their well-being is joining support groups. A CYP-led (but supervised) MH (Mental health) peer support group could be established online (as a WhatsApp group) to share information, mutual aid, peer support, signposting etc. In-person meetings or ‘Speak to me walks and talks’ can be facilitated and supervised by school.

Furthermore, Young MH ambassadors can play an active role in detecting hidden MH struggles and providing peers with moral, emotional and practical support. Due to the stigma attached to MH, ‘MH ambassadors’ as a term might be counter-productive. CYP could be encouraged to propose a better alternative.

4. Upskilling School Staffs’ Mental Health Monitoring skills

Some students reported that teachers are a common source of stress for them. We understand that teachers are themselves stressed under heavy workloads and difficult working conditions. More mental health and self-care training for teachers could serve 2 purposes:

- a) Staff would relate better to CYP's mental health struggles
- b) Staff themselves will benefit by learning coping strategies, self-care skills etc.

5. Pressing need for more and better extra-curricular activities

Majority of students (63%) agreed that extra-curricular activities have a positive impact on their well-being. In addition to the popular football and boxing clubs, we need to introduce new and innovative extra-curricular activities that contribute to developing soft and employability skills for CYP and divert them away from the criminal economy for example workshops on how to start a business, how to run an online business, content creation for social media, robotics and coding are a few suggestions.

6. A clear need to educate CYP about mental health in general and raise their awareness about mental health support available at school

Only 38% of students reported that they feel adequately supported in managing their MH at school. 39% of students are aware of MH support available at school. Hence, we need to raise mental health awareness and tackle stigma through assemblies, school events, stalls, lunch time discussions, one-to-one chats, leaflets, posters, discreet confidential support in a safe space etc.

Moreover, 67% of students want one to one support sessions at school to boost their well-being.

Only 2% of students reported that self-care activities helped them improve their well-being. This indicates that more work needs to be done to educate students about effective self-care tools/techniques and enable different support strategies.

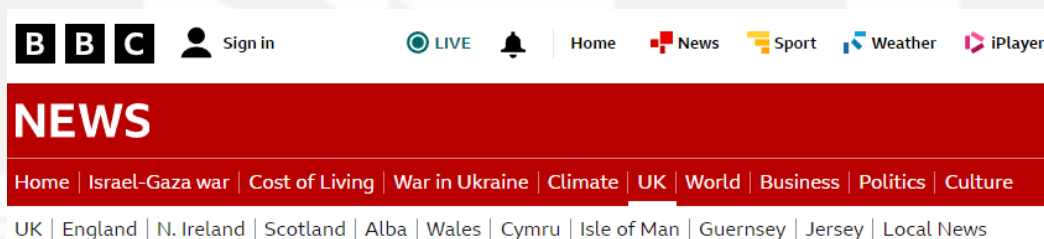
7. Need for a discreet safe space for CYP to "let it all out" and open up about their MH struggles

About 22% of students reported feeling uncomfortable or very uncomfortable discussing their well-being concerns. Furthermore, 28% of students expressed that they do not want 1-2-1 support sessions at school to boost their well-being. This might be due to the fear of being seen/known to be attending MH sessions which might trigger bullying, stigma and shame.

To overcome this barrier, we can signpost students to community organisations that offer culturally competent MH support. Additionally, we can provide a safe space at school where CYP help us understand their barriers and work with us co-producing interventions to help them overcome their fears, misconceptions and stigmas.

An over-arching aim is to ensure that CYP remain at school and limit school exclusions as much as possible. More support at school means that CYP are not only heard, but also understood and accommodated more, thus leading to less behavioural issues and reduced school exclusions.

Our recommendations are nothing new, the national and local media has been discussing and highlighting these issues consistently along with the charities working with CYP. Sharing recent newspaper headlines which supports our research findings.



School exclusions 'fuelling gang violence' - Barnardo's

News > UK > Home News

Children in prison twice as likely to have special needs, figures show

Exclusive: Experts warn sending youngsters with special educational needs to jail 'only compounds damage caused', condemning 'failure' of services to provide for children in community

Hundreds of children thrown out of school in English county lines hotspots

Gangs target minors who are out of school and BBC report shows rise in exclusions and suspensions in biggest drug-exporting areas



Unfortunately, SEND YP are disproportionately represented in prison. We work on providing support to prevent the SEND school to prison pipeline. Our vision is to empower SEND CYP and their families to thrive against all odds.

Conclusion

In conclusion we would like to repeat our gratitude to the Headteacher and the staff of the West London High School for letting us do this survey and in allowing us to make this survey public. We often hear discussions about the 'hard-to-reach-communities' and how difficult it is to hear their voice. Here we present to you the voice of 100 young people attending secondary school in one of the deprived pockets of West London, many of whom belong to global majority migrant as well as low-income households. It is imperative that their voices are not only heard, but also listened to, understood and their needs are catered for. These young people are the future citizens of this country and given the right support at the right time they have the potential to contribute to the future workforce and economy of the country.

ESDEG
Education and Skills Development Group

List of Abbreviations

CYP – Children and Young People
EAP – Ealing Alternate Provision
EHCP – Education and Health Care Plan
LA – Local Authority
MH – Mental Health
NHS – National Health Service
PSHCE -- Personal, social, health and economic education
SEND – Special Education Need and Disability
TA – Teaching Assistant
YP – Young People