

# Children's Parliament Investigates: Our Health and Wellbeing Curriculum

Engaging children in the response to  
the PSE Review and associated actions

September 2020



## Acknowledgements

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We have been especially grateful for your cooperation and enthusiasm in embracing the digital approach adopted for part of this investigation, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been such a joy to learn with and from you during this challenging time.

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# Introduction

In 2019, the report 'Personal and Social Education: Preparing Scotland's Children and Young People for Learning, Work and Life' explored the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum, acknowledging that this is often done through what is commonly referred to as 'PSE', alongside wider pastoral guidance – for this reason the report is commonly known as the *PSE Review*. The report states the centrality of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum and as well as *learning* talks about *the whole approach of the early learning and childcare setting, school, college or other setting*.

In the Review report, it states:

"Children and young people should feel nurtured, safe, respected and included in the learning environment and all staff should be proactive in promoting positive relationships and behaviour in the classroom, playground, and wider learning community. Everyone within each early learning setting/school and its wider community, whatever their contact with children and young people may be, shares the responsibility for creating a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust; one in which everyone can make a positive contribution to the wellbeing of each individual within the school and the wider community." (Scottish Government, 2019)

In its recommendations, the Review expressed a commitment to ensuring that learner engagement and co-design of Health and Wellbeing programmes are taken forward. In February 2020, Education Scotland commissioned Children's Parliament, Scotland's centre of excellence for children's rights and participation, to progress this commitment. At its heart, this commitment aims to produce both learner insight and practical 'how to' approaches to enhance the delivery and experience of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum in our schools.

# A children's human rights-based approach: *Children's Parliament Investigates....*

Children's Parliament's practice is rooted in children's human rights, as described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The model of *Children's Parliament Investigates* provides an opportunity for a team of children to explore an issue that is of concern to them, through the lens of children's human rights.

In March and April 2020, Children's Parliament worked with 19 experienced Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs) from three local authorities: City of Edinburgh, Aberdeen City and East Lothian. Given their experience as MCPs, and knowledge and understanding of children's human rights, the children were well prepared to undertake the role of MCP Investigators<sup>1</sup> for this investigation.

The investigation was designed to take place in the children's schools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the process was adapted in line with the Scottish Government's COVID-19 legislation, policies and guidance and so workshops were a mix of face-to-face and Zoom sessions. Adapting to the emerging circumstances, Investigators received individual Investigator Toolkits made up of activities to be completed before or after a complementary series of group sessions facilitated by the Children's Parliament workers.

The findings outlined in this report are in response to a series of questions, which guided the investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, the MCP Investigators will be called 'Investigators' in this report.

## Part 1:

# A Happy, Healthy and Safe School Environment

The Investigators began their exploration of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum with consideration of the context within which learning and personal support take place – these initial discussions considered the environment and the experience of being in school. This starting point acknowledges that when a child is Happy, Healthy and Safe in school they are ready to engage with the opportunities available to them for learning and growth.

In the first part of the investigation children discussed these questions:

- What does a Happy, Healthy and Safe school environment look and feel like?
- What experiences would evidence that a school is a Happy, Healthy and Safe place?

## 1.1 What does a Happy, Healthy and Safe school environment look and feel like?

The Investigators began by identifying the 'look' and 'feel' of a Happy, Healthy and Safe school.

**It is bright, happy and colourful.** Considering the physical school environment, children at both primary and secondary school frequently described the importance of making the whole school environment feel welcoming, spacious, happy, colourful, bright and inspirational. Many children emphasised that schools should be designed to feel "homely" with comfortable furniture and colourful soft furnishings.

"Our classroom feels like our house. It is like a family and it is fun!" MCP, age 10

"I quite like how classrooms are colourful. It makes them feel like a happier place to be." MCP, age 14

"Classroom spaces have got to be big. If it's a small, dull room, I mean you don't really want to be there. It's got to be a room that really inspires education!" MCP, age 11

**It has artwork displays.** The Investigators described their vision of a Happy, Healthy and Safe school as being one where children's artwork would be displayed in corridors:

"Lots of art. People love art. We feel proud of ourselves when it is on the walls." MCP, age 10

**It has a library or reading room.** These were frequently highlighted by children as being particularly important for creating Happy, Healthy and Safe school environments.

"Children can go to the library at lunch. At our school, it feels safer than the lunch hall because it's smaller with less people. The people there are nice. We don't read books, but we can do Tiktoks and chat." MCP, age 12

**It has chill-out spaces.** Many children discussed the importance, and benefits, of ensuring schools have dedicated calm, relaxing and comfortable spaces where children can go to take time out, relax and rest or receive guidance support. These could be equipped with a range of books, board games and calming activities for children.

"If you're moody and storm off out of class, you can sit and relax, look at pictures and read a book. You can rest and have time to yourself." MCP, age 10

"It [the guidance room] is just a little room and you get to go in there by yourself or with a guidance teacher or even a friend just to talk and take a

little bit of time out of class if you need to or if something is wrong.”  
MCP, age 14

**It is clean.** Cleanliness and hygiene were also important factors, with secondary-aged children particularly reflecting on their experiences of unclean, dirty toilets at school and the impact this has had on them and their peers:

“Our toilets are nasty and so everyone holds their bladder all day and this gets in the way of focusing.” MCP, age 12

**It has a range of outdoor and indoor communal spaces, including where you can play.** The Investigators identified access to well-maintained playgrounds, school gardens, outdoor sports fields and outdoor learning spaces such as courtyards as being essential to creating Happy, Healthy and Safe school environments – although this appeared to be aspirational rather than a reality. Children described the benefits of outdoor play during the school day for their mental and physical health and wellbeing, as well as reflecting on the benefits for their learning and educational development.

“In primary school, we used to go out if it was a nice day and read so you could be outside. There were also spaces for planting flowers and stuff to get the kids involved in gardening and the outdoors.” MCP, age 14

“Playgrounds are nice because you get some fresh air if you’ve just done something really hard [in the classroom]. Ours is a pretty good playground! It used to be tar[mac] with a tiny climbing wall. Now they’ve upgraded it and it’s great.” MCP, age 11

For secondary school pupils, having indoor and outdoor social areas (in place of playgrounds) were highlighted as being important for children; they requested common rooms for all year groups and communal courtyard spaces. This would be of particular benefit for children who do not like to or do not want to leave the school premises.

“The common room in our school is for the older kids so we’re not allowed in there which I think isn’t that good because there are kids that struggle with the whole going-out-of-school and down the street [for lunch]. It’s really busy and obviously there are members of the public walking about.” MCP, age 14

Some children said that they struggled with the change from play-based activity and equipment at primary school to their secondary school where this was no longer an option. Children in secondary school said they felt uninspired by what is on offer during breaks and lunchtimes and expressed there is ‘nothing to do’ in the school’s outdoor areas. They called for S1s and S2s to have appropriate space and equipment for play.

"We play in the playground at primary school but when you go to secondary school, all you do it eat and talk. It is very boring." MCP, age 12

"It's maybe a good idea for schools to have an indoor space for children - not just a social area but an actual little space with a computer and some sofas to chill out." MCP, age 14

**It is smoke-free.** Children at secondary school shared that they could not use certain outdoor spaces in the school to play or hang out because other pupils used them as smoking zones. Smoking made the children feel unsafe and that these spaces were off-limits to them. The children felt strongly that indoor and outdoor spaces at school should be smoke-free and that adults should enforce rules to make them so.

"People aren't allowed to smoke in the playground, but it happens all the time." MCP, age 12

**There are lots of creative ways for children to have their say.** The Investigators identified that often, only senior pupils in primary and secondary schools are given opportunities to participate. For example, P7s and S6s are chosen to be House Captains or Prefects and therefore given more opportunities to have their say in matters at school. This, combined with Pupil Councils or Pupil Voice initiatives, often means that only children who are nominated to be 'representative' of their class have the opportunity to have their say.

However, children want schools to ensure all children have opportunities to participate. The Investigators from Manor Park Primary School, Aberdeen had participated in a previous Children's Parliament project, which saw all P1-P7 children informing and influencing the new vision for their school. This resulted in a mural that hangs in the school corridor. During this investigation, the Investigators referred to their mural, suggesting that all schools should have school-wide creative projects for children to participate in. Participation in shared, creative projects helps children feel like they belong.

## 1.2 What experiences would evidence that a school is a Happy, Healthy and Safe place?

In addition to what one might see or feel, the Investigators discussed the experience of 'being' in a Happy, Healthy and Safe school. These characteristics were identified:

**Children would learn in a shout-free environment.** Rather than hearing shouting in classrooms and corridors, children imagine a Happy, Healthy and Safe school to be one where you would instead be likely to hear music playing. The school would feel calm.

"There's not one teacher that hasn't shouted at me." MCP, age 12

"Teachers yell at you a lot. When you get yelled at you don't listen. So, there is no point." MCP, age 12

"Shouting at a child won't do anything. It just makes them feel scared."  
MCP, age 10

**Children would feel loved, included and celebrated.** The language used in school would be positive and encouraging and adults would champion every child's uniqueness.

"There is a heart wall – every child gets a heart with something nice written about them on it." MCP, age 10

**Children would have special places to go to calm down or get support.** Schools would have chill-out spaces, dens, guidance rooms and/or support rooms where children can go to feel safe and take a breath. When children are upset, they could go out of class to calm down before being asked to engage with anyone.

**Everyone would be kind to one another.** Children and adults would understand how to be kind to one another. Children would feel supported by other children and adults in the school.

"Our PSA lets children go into the library if they are sad. She is kind and listens to children." MCP, age 10

"Having someone to talk to makes you positive. When you feel better, you want to do other stuff and be productive." MCP, age 12

**Children would have a relaxed 'soft start' to their day.** A soft start would see teachers 'check in' with each child in their class at the start of the day to know how they are feeling and support them if they are not feeling good. Children would have time to choose what they want to do and take their time to get settled in and ready to learn. In one of the children's schools their start is play-focused and is highly valued by the children. At secondary school, tutorial periods would be a relaxed, supportive space for children to check in with their teacher and their classmates. One child

suggested there could also be an option to meet with guidance during this time, if a child is struggling.

"School starts at 8.30am and we all just kind of sit around until the teacher does the registration and tells us any news for the day. We all get to sit and talk to each other before school starts and I think it's nice. Even though we're not learning, everyone has their own time to get ready for the day. You can finish off a piece of homework or catch up with your friends. It's nice having this time." MCP, age 14

"If you were having an issue at school, there could be an option to go to guidance instead of registration to go and talk about how they're feeling with someone before school starts." MCP, age 14

**Children would be able to share how they are feeling.** Adults would frequently check-in with children to know how they're feeling and support them if they're not feeling good. This might be done individually, in small groups or through whole class activities. It could be both informal and more structured. Children and adults would understand that it's ok to not be ok.

"Before I knew about feelings, I didn't know how to feel. Now I know what I am feeling." MCP, age 10

"Maybe if they set up sessions like with three kids from a class could go and talk to teachers. Imagine a pupil council group, but a lot smaller. Instead of talking about school, they'd talk about teachers and how teachers should respond to things kids say and how to be better with kids in general." MCP, age 11

**Children would have access to different clubs and activities.** Children would be able to choose which sports and clubs they wanted to do, during and after school. There would also be homework clubs for children "so you don't have to do it alone" (MCP, age 10).

**Children would have access to good quality food.** Children would have healthy free snacks "like apples from the free snack trolley" (MCP, age 9) and healthy lunch options at school.

**Children would learn in bully-free environments<sup>2</sup>.** Children would learn about friendships and how to be friendly to each other. Everyone would be good at making friends. MCPs recognised that children bully when they are unhappy or scared. Children felt that bully-free schools could be created "by making sure that every child is happy" (MCP, age 10).

"Your teacher might think you're bad, but it might be something at home [that causes you to behave in that way]." MCP, age 12

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<sup>2</sup> See also Page 26.

**Children would have positive relationships with their teachers.** Teachers would get to know the children they work with and children would be able to trust their teachers.

"I'd prefer one teacher. In primary you know your teacher. At academy you get them at the most for 2-3 hours a week. They give you easy work because they don't know what you can do." MCP, age 12

"In high school, it's a lot easier talking to a teacher that you feel confident about talking to because it's not like you're stuck in a classroom all day with the same teacher. You're moving about all day and it's really easy to go and see a teacher and tell them how you're feeling." MCP, age 14

**Children would have space and time to play and relax.** There would be more play breaks, especially for younger children, and fun activities for all ages – such as watching movies together.

"At school, we have a class novel and we sit on the carpet and read it. Some classes think that's quite babyish but our class really likes it and it's quite nice end of the day to relax." MCP, age 12

**Children would learn about and experience their rights.** All teachers would understand children's human rights and "know that every child can have their say".

"By having a say, I don't feel like an ordinary child, I feel like something more." MCP, age 10

## Part 2:

# Learning about Health and Wellbeing

The second part of the children's investigation was concerned with the six areas of the Health and Wellbeing curricular area. It is essential to view these six areas in order to ensure a holistic view of Health and Wellbeing learning. In their investigation children discussed how they currently learn about these different aspects of the curriculum in school, what they enjoy and like about what they are learning and what they feel needs improvement. The Health and Wellbeing curriculum is concerned with learning about:

- Mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing
- Physical education, physical activity and sport
- Food and health
- Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood
- Substance Misuse
- Planning for choices and changes

The PSE Review states:

*Schools are encouraged to develop the curriculum to suit their local context and meet the relevant age and stage of development for children and young people. It is good practice for schools to consult with children and young people and respond to their views appropriately, to ensure this meets the needs of all children and young people in the school or educational setting. (PSE Review, 2019: 5)*

And also identifies as an aspect for improvement that schools should:

*Ensure that children's and young people's learning experiences in PSE/HWB are of a consistently high quality. (PSE Review, 2019: 11)*

With this in mind, this section of the report ends with the consideration the Investigators have given to how we know that a child is progressing in their learning about Health and Wellbeing.

### 2.1.1 Mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing

When asked about *how* and *what* children learn about this area, some Investigators referred to specific elements of the curriculum – such as when “learning about the digestive system” or that they had a time in the day or week when they “did” Health and Wellbeing.

“We mostly do it through Health and Wellbeing, maybe by playing some games and we don’t really do much about emotional health, mainly just physical. When I say physical, I mean sexual health and wellbeing. We learn a bit about body parts and things and what muscles we use. We’ve done that a couple of times but not very many times.” MCP, age 12

However, others did not connect their learning in this area to specific curricular activity, rather describing their knowledge and understanding through *experiences* they have at school such as through “emotions check-in”, “soft start”, and the support they receive from teachers and Pupil Support Assistants. This understanding was also reflected in the children’s views of what they like about learning in this area, giving examples such as:

“When teacher asks what is wrong and are you ok.” MCP, age 10

“Getting a big hug.” MCP, age 10

“When someone is upset, they can tell you how they feel and help.” MCP, age 10

The Investigators suggested that this topic includes “more about making friends”, “teamwork”, and how to “recognise and respond to the range of emotions we all experience”.

“Once you get past primary two-ish, you don’t really focus on mental wellbeing and having a healthy mind. We should do more mindfulness. We have a lot of it until P3 and then it completely stops. We should do more.” MCP, age 11

“I think handling your emotions some people still need to work on. Some people get quite a bit angry. Sometimes people get overly emotional and they do need help.” MCP, age 12

“To be able to handle and control mental health rather than getting angry and taking it out on someone else. I think that would be useful. I think for some people in class, we need to learn more about how we actually handle anger and losing. Some people in my class really don’t like losing. It’s ok that you want to win but sometimes they go a bit too over the top.” MCP, age 12

## 2.1.2 Physical education, physical activity and sport

The Investigators from primary schools described learning through physical education (PE), learning outside, taking part in after school clubs, and from visiting specialists such as Skills Schools and local football teams.

It was clear that many children at primary school feel their learning is predominantly activity-based. Whilst children do enjoy these elements, the Investigators described their current experiences of PE as being exclusively practical and not helpful for children's wider understanding of the importance of physical activity for health and wellbeing. One of the participating schools invites the local football club to facilitate regular football sessions and through this programme, children talk about nutrition, team building and why it is important to stay healthy. The Investigators found this approach useful.

"The PE teacher just tells us that it's good to be fit because when you're fit when you're younger, then you're more likely to keep it up when you're older. We learned a tiny bit about BMI but not very much." MCP, age 12

"What we learn is how to climb over a few bars - no life skills - then do handstands up against the wall and it's like, but you're not actually teaching us anything about why physical education is so important. You're just going around in a bit of a carousel doing different things." MCP, age 11

The experiences of the Investigators at secondary school were different; one Investigator acknowledged that in addition to PE classes some time was spent in PSE periods learning about the benefits of physical activity:

"In high school, I've noticed that you don't really learn much about what skills you're building and why it's important to keep fit and healthy in PE but you do in PSE which is more about health and wellbeing. We learn why it's important to keep fit and healthy." MCP, age 14

The Investigators discussed enjoying physical activity and sport outside of dedicated PE time - giving examples of dancing in the classroom or doing the Daily Mile. Some noted that whilst the Daily Mile is popular in some schools, it does not happen in all schools. Some children talked about particularly "fun" types of physical activity and the opportunity to go outside being a 'reward' for children for good behaviour or for doing well in class:

"I really like when they bring out this big climbing frame - I'm not sure if all schools have it - and you can add ladders on to it. I like this because it's like, if you do well, you get to go on it. Maybe once or twice a year. It's really fun to climb on them." MCP, age 12

The Investigators also described an eagerness to be shown demonstrations and techniques by their teacher. They value purpose and structure, and they can develop their skills.

"Something that's missing in our PE lessons is having an actual structure to it. Sometimes the specialist has a structure - like with gymnastics when we go round doing different activities but other times there's no structure. We just choose which game we want to play on the day. We need more structure so that we actually build on different skills for a few weeks. We'd do basketball for a few weeks or dodge-ball for a few weeks so we could build on what we already know and get better at it." MCP, age 12

"My class teacher explains why we're doing it, what we're doing and what skills we develop and it really helps everyone in our class know what we're actually trying to do whereas when we were with the PE specialist, we did some really fun stuff but it was all fun and we didn't really learn anything about what we were doing or what skills we were developing." MCP, age 12

The Investigators also acknowledged when a teacher is being creative:

"We play Maths Twister. You can spin the circle with signs and numbers. Up to four people can play. You can play with friends and people you don't know. It keeps your physical health good." MCP, age 10

The Investigators agreed that they would like more emphasis placed on learning about the anatomical benefits (cardiovascular, muscular, flexibility) of physical activity. They really want more opportunities for physical activity in the school day.

"Much more sport daily and more dancing! It makes us happy." MCP, age 10

### 2.1.3 Food and health

The Investigators' experiences of what and how they learn about 'food and health' varied significantly between different classes and across the different schools involved in the investigation. Some children shared a range of examples, one of the most common being different forms of 'taste testing' a variety of foods. In one school, children shared examples of learning about food from different cultures, for a variety of cultural celebrations and as part of a history topic.

"We learn about our own and different cultures like Children's Day in Poland, Ramadan and Diwali. We made Rangoli patterns and tried curry." MCP, age 10

"In our WWII topic, we were learning what they ate and then we made one of the things they ate - stone cakes. That was it." MCP, age 11

A few children referenced initiatives in school - such as breakfast clubs, free fruit and healthy snack trolleys - as helping children understand the importance of healthy eating and equal access to nutritious food. However, the extent to which all children are actively engaged in their learning was highlighted by one child's reflection:

"We learned about some of the different food groups, but I think we did that in P1. And when we go to get our school dinners, it has things about the food groups on it, but I don't think anybody really looks at that." MCP, age 12

The Investigators in one school touched upon learning about food safety and hygiene, mentioning the importance of washing hands and being aware of food allergies.

Above all, the Investigators were enthusiastic about experiences of learning to cook and agreed it was something they all enjoyed and would like to do more often. How often, and what children cook was varied across year groups, classes and schools.

The Investigators also made the connection between getting to grow vegetables and fruit so they can learn where food comes from. Some were interested in cooking with the food they had grown themselves. This gives them a more holistic approach to food, being outdoors and understanding nutrition.

"We cook at Skills School and get to try out the food. I know how to cook now. We taste food and then take it home." MCP, age 10

"Cooking depends on your teacher. Our class hasn't learnt how to make anything, but other classes have." MCP, age 12

"Cooking makes me feel like when I am older, it'll make me successful." MCP, age 10

In short, the Investigators identified a need for a more coherent approach to – as well as just 'more' - food education.

"I'd like to learn about different foods, where they come from and what goes into what food." MCP, age 12

"Educating older children, not just P1 and P3. We've learnt about the food pyramids, but we could look at this in more detail. Like how different vitamins affect your body, like how does the body use vitamin D?" MCP, age 12

"I'd like to know how different foods are made, like how to make different meals. I know we'll be doing all of this in high school, but I'd like to be doing it now. I'd like to learn how to keep healthy." MCP, age 12

## 2.1.4 Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood

The Investigators' views on learning about Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood varied significantly between age groups, classes and schools. The shared finding was that there are too few opportunities to learn about these topics.

"We don't learn much about sexual health yet. I think you learn in S2. I think children should learn about things earlier, so it stays in your brain."  
MCP, age 12

"We don't really learn about parenting and caring, that we're supposed to be looked after. We just kind of know that. Well, when we do children's rights, we learn that we should be looked after." MCP, age 12

"We don't really learn about sexuality. We learn, 'oh some people are gay, some people are bisexual', but we don't learn any more about it. I'd like to learn a bit more about that." MCP, age 12

"We learn that all children are different and unique, like we learn that children have different skin colours. But that's not something you just learn at school, it's something you live with. Our school is really diverse. In our school, people have lots of different skin colours and different hair." MCP, age 12

"We are learning about changes in our bodies and things like that. I like that we learn about it, but I don't like how we learn about it." MCP, age 11

A number of the Investigators suggested that these topics should be introduced to children at an earlier stage in primary school. They were critical of lessons using worksheets.

"The worksheets were more awkward to fill out because you were sat at a table, often with your friends because you were allowed to sit with them because of the topic. It was just a worksheet, and it was just a bit awkward." MCP, age 14

In one primary school, the Investigators reported that children are given space to talk about specific issues around Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood through "*girls talk*" and "*boys group*". These groups run at break and lunchtime and are facilitated by a teacher of the same sex. They are created as safe spaces where children can talk freely about what "*goes on with the body*". One child suggested that "maybe the girls would be interested in what boy's chat is about" and vice versa.

Some Investigators felt there should be more time for discussion and sharing worries. One child in primary school, for example, described that their teacher answers questions and worries that children can anonymously place in a box.

"You should get more time in PSE – that's the only time we talk about it. We need to talk about it more." MCP, age 12

"I think it's good to have discussion even though lots of people find it awkward. It's still good because it's so important that everyone has a good understanding." MCP, age 14

When asked how and what they learn in this area, Investigators from one school explained that in their school children would be taught some aspects of the curriculum as a whole class whereas certain topics were taught to girls and boys separately in different classrooms. Children felt that separating the class into girls and boys for certain topics meant that children would have different understandings and expectations. They suggested that it would be beneficial for all children to learn about all aspects – particularly pregnancy, periods and parenthood.

When asked about what they like about their current learning and what could be better, children emphasised the role of teachers and other educators. Most of the children agreed that this topic easily sparks feelings of discomfort, embarrassment and awkwardness amongst children, which, in some cases, can escalate into laughter, teasing and disruption in the classroom. From the children's reflections, it is clear that teachers' responses to this vary between schools:

"We were literally told 'no laughing' and we weren't allowed to laugh. We were taken outside the room if we laughed. Our teacher was quite strict." MCP, age 11

"The only thing I think is good is how the teacher responds and acts whilst you're learning about it. We were allowed to laugh and things if we had to just so that we didn't feel like we were under pressure." MCP, age 10

The children agreed that some laughing was inevitable and that children should not be punished or shamed by teachers for doing so. They felt this was unfair as it failed to recognise or understand laughter as being a sign of feeling awkward, uncomfortable or embarrassed. Children recognised that some people do feel embarrassed and so it is important to make everyone feel ok and able to talk.

The Investigators agreed that teachers have the responsibility to create a comfortable space for this learning to take place, but that for this to happen, teachers need to have developed good, trusting relationships with the children in their class beforehand. Investigators also acknowledged the usefulness of class agreements so that children had a sense of discussions being respected as confidential.

"It's important to have a good relationship with adults at school so you feel comfortable talking to them about these things. You won't feel comfortable with someone who barely knows you." MCP, age 12

"I like how we do it because we signed something at the start of the year and it was like we wouldn't laugh or make fun of each other. We'd all just talk about it really. I liked that as what we say in the classroom doesn't leave the classroom."  
MCP, age 12

### 2.1.5 Substance Misuse

The Investigators in secondary school had more to say than their younger peers about what they have learned and how they have learned about substance misuse. For younger children, this area had not yet been covered in their class or their learning had focused primarily on smoking. Through this conversation, some of the children in the primary age group did express that were not sure why they do not learn about this area until they are older, and felt it was important that they did.

"We learn about what drugs look like but not the effects. We need to know what they do so we can keep safe from things that might hurt us." MCP, age 10

The Investigators in one primary school talked about their experiences learning about the impact of smoking on health and wellbeing, explaining that an expert from the NHS had come to their school to talk to the class:

"She came in and then told us that there's rat poison in tobacco and so you think in your head 'I don't want to smoke something like rat poison or car fumes or other dodgy stuff'. You start to think 'I don't think this is a good thing so I'm not going to have that'. The way they explain why it's a bad thing and what's in it." MCP, age 11

The secondary school-age Investigators described their learning as predominantly taking place during PSE lessons, with either a guidance teacher or local police officer.

"We get taught about drug use and substance use a lot in school. Sometimes it's the teacher who does it but normally we get a police officer in who's really nice and like over the years, he came into our primary schools as well to teach us about it. So we've developed a bit of a relationship with him. He came in and showed us all the different kinds of drugs and how bad they are – like the ones that can kill you if you take one or too many." MCP, age 14

One of the Investigators at secondary school who requires daily medication for a chronic mental health condition, pointed out that their education about substance use does not cover prescription medication or the side effects such medication can have. The children agreed that schools should include this in the curriculum so children who do need to take medication feel supported and not judged.

“My medication is technically a drug. It makes me eat at random times instead of getting hungry when I’m meant to – that’s a down effect.”  
MCP, age 14

Reflecting on all types of legal (prescribed) and illegal drug use, some children felt there needs to be greater emphasis on the mental health side effects drugs can have, particularly after the physical effects have worn off. As one child summarised:

“Sometimes they shouldn’t teach you how the drug affects you and how for a certain amount of time it makes you feel happy and then when all the bad stuff happens to it. They really need to teach you what it can do to your mindset. Like, certain drugs can make you happy for a certain amount of time, but when that wears off...for example, if you’re using a drug because you’re depressed and just want to be happy, then when it wears off you’re like ‘boom’, you’re back in reality and you just want to die.” MCP, age 14

When discussing substance misuse education, the Investigators also saw a role for peer education.

“Older kids can teacher younger kids about smoking.” MCP, age 10

## 2.1.6 Planning for choices and changes

Children’s experiences of planning for choices and changes varied from school to school. The Investigators from one primary school reported that their school employed a teacher whose prime role was to support the learning in this area, while other schools organised quizzes and events. The Investigators reported that as children move to secondary school, more focus is placed on choosing subjects and deciding what might impact on future career options. The Investigators attending both primary and secondary reported a need for more opportunities to talk about the different paths they can take and opportunities on offer to them.

In consideration of this curricular area, the Investigators said that they would like to learn how to take care of themselves and the practical skills they will need when they become adults, like “learning how to pay bills and buy a house” MCP, age 12. Investigators identified that not all parents or carers are in the position to help with this and it “could be stressful if you have to do it alone” (MCP, age 12). The Investigators were of the view that it is important that school prepares young people for real life challenges, as one Investigator put it “to be strong and independent” (MCP, age 10).

The Investigators felt it was important to make the learning of skills for their future fun and practical. The Investigators from one primary school talked about having a teacher who taught financial education and they learned about tax, bills and insurance in creative ways:

"You could play Monopoly or a life simulation game to teach you how to pay for stuff." MCP, age 10

The Investigators agreed that they would like more time to talk about different jobs or life choices and would like visitors from their community to come in and talk about their experiences. They would like the opportunity to try out different work experiences and have visitors come in and tell them about their career. This should happen from early primary school and continue into secondary school.

"We'd learn how lights work. An electrician would come in and explain." MCP, age 10

"We have visitors like the school dentist, who tell us about their job or a subject." MCP, age 10.

One child, who had a recent experience of meeting a university PhD student and researcher at her school said:

"It is inspiring and makes me happy." MCP, age 10.

The Investigators identified the need to learn the right tools to help them manage and cope with their planning for choices and changes. They also agreed that adults play a big role in supporting children by offering hugs to keep children happy, offering the right guidance and praise, and equipping children with the skills to be resilient and resourceful.

"[We should learn] to relieve stress and play with friends for when you are older." MCP, age 10

"Everyone should get a planner, so they can see what they have to get done and what classes they have." MCP, age 12

"[A good teacher] helps children think about their future and encourages them if they want to go to college." MCP, age 12

"We could get help to choose subjects based on what jobs you would like to do. It would help you know what qualification you need." MCP, age 12

## 2.2 How do we know that a child is progressing in their learning about Health and Wellbeing?

In all learning, there is a need to identify how children are progressing. The different areas of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum described so far are not elements of the curriculum that are assessed formally through examinations, and so Investigators were asked to consider how one might know a child is progressing in their learning.

They advised as follows:

Children would:



## Part 3:

# Supporting Children and Young People

A central part of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum and the PSE Review is consideration of the support children and young people should receive. In the introduction to the Review report 'Personal and Social Education: Preparing Scotland's Children and Young People for Learning, Work and Life' the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills states the following:

*As well as learning in PSE, the health and wellbeing of every child and young person should be assisted by a network of support which includes pastoral guidance to ensure they get the right help at the right time in line with the Getting it right for every child approach. The responsiveness of our education system in deploying early interventions and targeting support is key if Scotland's children and young people are to grow up loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential.*

This promise is embedded in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). As the Review acknowledges, *Building the curriculum 3 – a framework for learning and teaching* (2008) stated that every child and young person is entitled to expect their education to provide them with personal support to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which CfE can provide.

In this part of their investigation children considered these questions:

- What support might a child sometimes need?
- What gets in the way of children accessing support?
- Supporting children: what should teachers think, know, say and do?
- What is it *every* school needs to best support *every* child?

### 3.1 What support might a child sometimes need?

The Investigators identified a number of areas in which a child might need support in school.

**Support with money.** Children recognise that for many families, money is an issue and this can affect children's experiences at school. Children, and their families, might need support from schools to make sure they can afford food, clothes, school items, medical items, after-school and homework clubs for children whose parents are working late.

"Our school has a big black box with lots of clothes in it, if you need them." MCP, age 10

"Money support because sometimes you can struggle with money. It can be a problem, like say with homework you have to buy pencils and things to do your homework, medical support like if you fall over or something like that; and school work if someone is finding school work challenging, even at home; and work support if parents are working late and there's no one to look after a child, then there's after school clubs, they can really help so the parents can keep on doing their job and they know their children are fine." MCP, age 12

**Support with friendships.** The Investigators emphasised the importance of friendships as a form of support in school. Children discussed needing friends so they have someone to talk to, someone they know can help them, make them feel calm and included.

"They [my friends] make me feel safe and that I belong. It feels like a better environment when I am with them." MCP, age 12

**Support with mental health and emotions.** The Investigators agreed that all children need support, love, nurture and care from adults at school. This might include giving hugs, cuddles and checking to see if you're feeling ok.

"My teacher is like a mother to us. She always cares, and she listens." MCP, age 10

"Some of the people who go around the playground [playground supervisors] also help and the janitors are really nice. They ask you how you're feeling to make sure you're ok." MCP, age 12

**Support with difficulties at home:** The Investigators highlighted that some children may need extra support if they are experiencing difficulties at home.

"If you find something difficult at home, the school can often support you with that. Say there was something going on with your parents, that you were finding really hard, you might go to a teacher that you

trust and tell them about it and the school might support you with that.”  
MCP, age 11

“Support with home experiences because some people have really tough times at home.” MCP, age 12

**Support with learning.** The Investigators acknowledged that children will need different types of support with their learning. Some children pointed out that whilst this support will most likely come from teachers, PSAs and other adults in the school, it could also come from classmates and older children too.

“It’s supporting your education when you’re not fully confident.” MCP, age 12

“My teacher helps me with my literacy. I find literacy really hard so that’s really helpful. She takes us down for lessons and then she helps us with our writing and typing to make it easier. She was the one who introduced us to Nessy, a dyslexia support website, which is really helpful.” MCP, age 11

**Support with bullying.** MCPs shared that if their school was bully-free, children would be better able to learn without getting distracted or distressed.

“If adults took every child seriously, there would be no problems, and everyone would get along. We would all be happy.” MCP, age 10

In a previous investigation - Children’s Parliament Investigates Bullying – children have explored this issue in greater detail. Their findings and calls to action should also inform progress towards making all schools safe for children:

[www.childrensparliament.org.uk/cpinvestigatesbullying/](http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/cpinvestigatesbullying/)

### 3.2 What gets in the way of children accessing support?

Reflecting on the types of support children may need from school, the Investigators discussed why children might struggle to access the support they need. Here are the barriers the children identified:



Not trusting the teacher

Teachers might react in the wrong way by shouting or blaming people

Unkind teachers - you don't want to go to them for help or with a question

Being embarrassed

Being ignored

Feeling tired, upset or sad

Being scared to ask the teacher

Not having the chance to speak

Your behaviour is bad

Feeling stressed

Not having friends

People talking over you

Being bullied

In these quotes the Investigators share more views on the kinds of blocks or barriers there are to a teacher fulfilling their role as a support for the child.

"Something that could get in the way is bad teachers or ones you dislike. They might misunderstand, tell you off or call you stupid. We had a good teacher but he asked the class what  $7 \times 4$  was and I said 32 because I thought he said  $8 \times 4$  but then he said 'oh my gosh, I can't believe you guys can't do your times tables'. When my friend was finding something hard in his assessment, our teacher said 'oh my gosh, that's so easy, how are you not getting this?'. It always makes me put off from asking him because he might call me stupid or something." MCP, age 12

"Some people might not have as many friends or you might not really have a person you want to trust because it might be a bit embarrassing. You might not know who to tell without getting made fun of. Another one is scared. If you go and tell someone, you might be worried about what the people at home might do if they're going to harm you or get angry." MCP, age 12

"When something happens and the teacher gets mad at you, I think there should be a different way of dealing with it. We've talked about this with our teacher as it's a bit shameful. You do something, he takes you out and you can see through the window that he's shouting at you or speaking to you about something. And when you come back in, everybody is like 'oh, what were you talking about?' I think it should be a different way. It's shameful. Everybody can see that you're in trouble." MCP, age 11

### 3.3 Supporting children: what should teachers think, know, say and do?

In this Investigation, we asked the children to create a model of their 'ideal' teacher. The Investigators were asked to think about what qualities, skills and attributes their teacher would have, how they would act towards children, what they would think about children, the types of things this teacher would say and do to make every child know that they are supported at school.

It is clear that many children share a similar vision of how teachers should think, and what they should know, say and do. Here, we share the children's reflections along with a summary of the key themes to emerge across the children's descriptions of their models.

- Be Kind.** Teachers would be kind and caring towards children, actively nurture children's positive self-esteem and self-belief whilst looking out for children who may be feeling down or experiencing difficulties at school or at home.
- Be Fair.** Teachers would be fair towards children. The Investigators acknowledge that every child is different and needs different types of support from teachers. Children also recognise that misbehaviour requires action from a teacher. However, the Investigators feel that children are often treated unfairly. Teachers would not have 'favourites' and choose the same children time and time again in the classroom. Teachers would not punish a child in a humiliating way – such as shouting or exclusion. Teachers would not punish a whole class of children for something one child has done. Teachers would always seek to understand why a child is misbehaving rather than jumping to their own conclusions.
- Have Fun.** Teachers would bring fun and humour into the classroom and their interaction with children. Teachers would be funny to help children feel comfortable and relaxed in the classroom. Teachers would make lessons fun, creative, playful and interactive to help children engage in their learning. Teachers would enjoy working with children, and everyone would feel this.
- Be Supportive.** Teachers would invest in building positive, trusting relationships with each child. Teachers would encourage and support children to do their best. Children would feel reassured that their teacher is there to support them. Teachers would help children to feel good about themselves.
- Be Inclusive.** Teachers would not judge children. Teachers would seek to understand and celebrate children's differences. They would create an inclusive environment and ensure children of all backgrounds, abilities, genders, races and religions are treated with fairness and respect.

In these quotes Investigators reflect further:

"High school teachers, because you're a bit older, kind of just act as someone who helps you to do the work whereas primary school teachers are looked at as the person you have to follow the instructions from. We definitely get more freedom in learning at secondary school. In primary, you have more of a bond with your teacher but at secondary school you don't see your teachers as much." MCP, age 12.

"I'd like my teacher to be funny, sensible, fair and organised. If you were a bit nervous about something, they might come up and say 'it's going to be ok' or if you had a nice, funny teacher and you were feeling down in the dumps, they might be able to cheer you up by making jokes to make you laugh. This teacher would need to know that they couldn't always choose the same child to do everything. They need to know maths, literacy, everything you need to learn in school. They've got to know how to add a bit of fun into lessons. They've got to know how to be kind to people. They've got to be a bit sensible and know when it's too far or things have crossed the line." MCP, age 11

"My teacher needs to be kind and caring to her students so that they feel happy in their school environment. She needs to have a good temper and not go off at the whole class when one person has done something wrong. She needs to be funny but not take it too far. Don't stand on the tables with her dirty shoes. She needs to be good at talking to people and stuff. She would believe everyone is unique and not everyone learns at the same pace. She'll have to take her time with some people and not lose her temper with them. If someone does something wrong once, she shouldn't assume that it's their fault when something happens in class and she hasn't seen it. She'd make them feel happy and safe and she wouldn't make them not want to come to school some days. She'd make them feel good and not like if someone is misbehaving that they're all going to get blamed." MCP, age 12

"My teacher would be fair, she would be kind but she wouldn't be too strict but she would be slightly strict, like if someone was misbehaving, she would stop it so it doesn't disrupt others from learning. She would be smart, she would cheer people up and actually ask them how they're doing, if they're ok, if they need help with anything and she'd make you feel really lovely. She would be good at making you feel more comfortable or if you're nervous, making you feel better and she'd be good at explaining things in such a way that everyone could understand during the lesson. I think she would encourage others to help learn and to help each other, and to ask each other how they're doing and for everyone to be friendly, to create a happy, healthy, safe school. I don't think she would judge people on what religion or what colour skin was or if they wore glasses or not. She'd be fair and treat everyone with the same respect as each other." MCP, age 12

"So my teacher knows what children like and doesn't get mad. He's engaged in any learning; he's not some teachers, who sit down, give you a sheet and that's it. He actually engages and does fun stuff. He's not one of the teachers who doesn't give you help during the class. If you need help or if you ask him about anything, he'll try to respond the best he can and try to help you. He makes children feel good about themselves and everything is happy and good around the teacher." MCP, age 11

"My teacher would give lots of support for autism, ADHD and dyslexia because my teacher did that and that worked out well for me. They'd ask you if you need any help with stuff. The teacher would need to know why children are getting support so they can figure out how to help children. So for example, see if a teacher is working in the hub or whatever it's called in other schools, for people with severe disabilities like they can't walk or speak or stuff like that, they'd need to know how to take care of them so they can properly do their job. The teacher would try to help children with bullying issues." MCP, age 14

"I made little symbols to symbolise what the teacher would be like. The heart represents that she would be caring, she'd encourage you to do sports and things and she/he would encourage you to be successful, which is the wee medal. The teacher would probably support you if you were feeling down. They'd be good at making sure everyone is involved and everyone is happy. I think the teacher would probably have to enjoy their job and want to help children. They'd make children feel like they want to go to school and enjoy being in class." MCP, age 14

### 3.4 What is it *every* school needs to best support *every* child?

In every school, teachers love and care about children.

"Some teachers just don't care about children's problems and what they find hard and what support they need. So make sure, if a teacher is going to join the school, make sure they actually care about supporting children. A teacher being caring, if you're finding something hard, would probably ask you 'are you okay?' or 'do you need some help?' A teacher who's not being caring would probably just be like 'ok, deal with it yourself' or 'you're bugging me, go away'." MCP, age 11

Every school has quiet, calm, safe spaces for children to go if they need to get help from an adult.

"My teacher made a space for me where, if I want to, I can go. It has things to help me calm down, relaxing things - like putty. It just has everything I need." MCP, age 12

Every school has different ways for children to share and talk about how they're feeling.

"I thought that it'd be good if teachers told their class a time of day that they could come and speak to them. Every day, it could be in the middle of lunch or something and the teachers says 'you can find me here and have five minutes if you need to talk to me'." MCP, age 14

"The Worry Monster is a little monster with a zip that goes across the mouth and you can put your worries in there or anything you want to talk to the teacher about. It's quite nice to have it there because if someone is having a worry and they might not want to share it and just forget about it, it's kind of nice to zip it up and pretend it's in the monster's stomach." MCP, age 12

In every school, children and adults respect one another.

"People just being genuinely respectful to the teachers and their classmates – and their needs. Let's say you're the class clown or the class bully and one of your classmates says 'Miss, I can't really do this work because I've got dyslexia', the bully would be like 'why can't you do it?' and that's being disrespectful. They could try and embrace the fact they have that disability and help them." MCP, age 14

"Older children could think of younger children more. If they thought about what they are going through and thought back to their past experiences, then they would understand." MCP, age 12.

## 4. Calls to Action

In its recommendations, the report '*Personal and Social Education: Preparing Scotland's Children and Young People for Learning, Work and Life*' expressed a commitment to ensuring learner engagement and co-design of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum. In February 2020, Education Scotland commissioned Children's Parliament to progress this commitment. In this *Children's Parliament Investigation*, the intention was to produce both learner insight and practical 'how to' approaches to enhance the delivery and experience of the Health and Wellbeing curriculum in our schools.

With this in mind, this *Children's Parliament Investigation* concludes with the following Calls to Action. It is important to our Investigators that these Calls to Action apply to both primary and secondary schools.

### **A Happy, Healthy and Safe School Environment**

- Make schools bright, beautiful and welcoming places with exciting places to play indoors and outdoors.
- Make sure everyone understands, and respects, children's human rights. This means making schools a place where everyone feels included and listened to.
- Create opportunities for adults to learn from children about listening, being kind and respecting children's human rights.
- Make our schools free from all bullying.

### **Learning about Health and Wellbeing**

- Make Health and Wellbeing topics a clear part of children's learning throughout primary and secondary school and not something that happens occasionally.
- Make learning about mental, emotional and physical wellbeing a regular part of timetabled classes. Listen to children's experiences and feelings through regular check-ins, talking about feelings and learning how to manage emotions. It should be like this for all children, not just when a great teacher thinks it is a good approach.
- Make school an active place to be with more learning outdoors and more opportunities for clubs and out of school activities. Support children to learn about their bodies and the benefits of being active.
- Make schools places where children learn about, cook and enjoy food – every day! Invite adults and experts from outside school to help children create school gardens for planting and growing.
- Make learning about Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood something that all children do. Teachers who build trust and good relationships do this best. Learning should never make someone feel uncomfortable or ashamed.
- Start learning about substance misuse in primary school and make it about more than just smoking. Learning about all drugs should be about the impact on physical *and* mental health. Older pupils can help younger pupils learn.

- Start learning about planning for choices and changes in primary school and help children to think about and learn the practical skills they need for adult life.
- Inspire and help children to imagine all the possible things that they could do and achieve in their life.

### **Supporting children and young people**

- Make sure teachers love and care for children and enjoy working with them.
- Help every child feel comfortable and confident to ask for help and support.
- Establish easy ways for children to find someone to help when they need it.
- Make sure there are quiet places for children to calm down, think and talk about feelings.
- Help all children and adults to understand how to be respectful to one another.
- Make sure teachers do not shout at children. If a child is upset, struggling in class or needs support, make sure teachers take time to understand how they can help them.
- Make sure the barriers to getting support identified by the Investigators are addressed within each school.
- Praise children, encouraging them to be the best they can be.

# About Children's Parliament

Established in 1996, Children's Parliament is Scotland's centre of excellence for children's participation and engagement. Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire greater awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland.

Through our rights-based, creative practice, we provide younger children from diverse backgrounds across Scotland with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and in the community. We work with children from their early years to age 14. Whilst we ensure our work reflects the universal voice of all children in Scotland, our targeted programmes work with marginalised and seldom heard children.

Children's Parliament uses a rights-based approach and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the foundation for all our work.

