



Teach Well Toolkit

Education: State of the Nation August 2023



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The purpose of this report

This report sets out what Teach Well Toolkit believes to be the key issues facing education at the beginning of the school year 2023-24 and which are being discussed in education forums and on social media. Broadly, they can be categorised as:

- Approaches to teaching and learning.
- Pupil behaviour and teacher response.
- Pupil and teacher mental health.
- Ofsted.

The intention of our report is:

1. To provide an overview of some of the arguments for and against approaches taken towards each issue by teachers and schools.
2. To inter-connect the issues and identify their combined impact.
3. To enable the reader to reflect on their own views.

As teachers and school staff, we are heavily committed and invested in what we do. This can lead to us taking a 'for' versus 'against' binary position, especially in relation to teaching and learning and discipline. As you read, consider your own position in relation to each issue by rating your level of agreement using the rating scale on the next page.

During the course of the academic year 2023-24, Teach Well Toolkit will address each of the issues and state our position, offering a more nuanced perspective.

We hope that our report will be helpful to experienced educators, more recently qualified teachers, teachers in training, parents and governors.

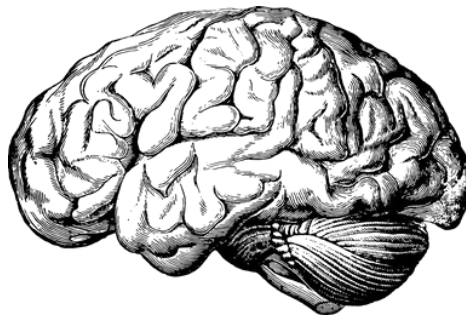
YOUR LEVEL OF AGREEMENT

Please rate to what extent you agree with the following statements

Page		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	Cognitive Load theory is essential to effective teaching					
6	Direct Instruction is the most effective teaching method					
8	Exploratory Learning is the most effective teaching method					
10	'No Excuses' is the most effective behaviour policy					
12	A restorative strategy is the most effective behaviour policy					
15	A 'No Excuses' behaviour policy affects pupils' mental health					
17	A trauma-informed approach to behaviour is essential for pupils' mental health					
19	Violence and aggression experienced by pupils outside school leads to violence and aggression in school					
21	There is a link between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and behaviour in later life					
23	There is a link between teachers' mental health and pupils' mental health					
25	A Knowledge-Rich curriculum is the best preparation for adult life					
27	Ofsted should be disbanded					



Cognitive Load Theory



Cognitive Load Theory is a concept used in educational psychology to understand how the human brain processes information and the effects of this processing on learning.

It suggests that learners have a limited amount of cognitive resources available for processing information. When these resources are overloaded, learning and understanding is less effective.

In a classroom context, Cognitive Load Theory emphasises the importance of presenting information in a way that minimises the cognitive load on students.

This can be achieved by:

- **Reducing extraneous Load:** This involves eliminating unnecessary elements or distractions that adversely affect the learning process. Teachers use clear and concise language and well-organised step-by-step presentation formats. They avoid unnecessary animations or graphics that could confuse students.
- **Managing intrinsic load:** Intrinsic load refers to the inherent complexity of the subject matter being taught. Teachers break down complex concepts into smaller, more manageable chunks and provide appropriate scaffolding or guidance.
- **Increasing germane load:** Germane load refers to the cognitive effort put into processing and organising information for meaningful learning. Teachers can promote germane load by encouraging active learning strategies, such as problem-solving, discussions and elaborative thinking.
- **Using visual aids:** Visual aids, such as diagrams, charts and illustrations, can help offload cognitive processing by presenting information in a more digestible format.

What is your opinion? Complete the self-assessment on Page 4.



Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is a teaching method that involves explicit and structured delivery of information to students, characterised by teacher-led lessons with the teacher as expert, clear objectives and step-by-step guidance. It is usually linked to Cognitive Load, a key concept in neuroscience applied to memory and learning (See page 5).

Arguments For Direct Instruction:

- **Clarity and Structure:** Direct instruction provides an overt and recognisable structure for teachers and students. Clear learning objectives, systematic content delivery and explicit teaching methods help students understand what is expected of them and how to achieve it.
- **Efficiency:** Direct instruction is efficient for teaching knowledge. It supports a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum.
- **Effective for teaching certain skills:** Direct instruction is particularly effective for teaching basic skills and foundational concepts, such as mathematical facts, spelling rules and grammar principles, where building on previous knowledge is essential.
- **Teacher control:** Teachers have more control over the learning process, allowing them to ensure that essential content is covered and students are on track.
- **Standardised testing and exams:** Direct instruction aligns effectively with standardised testing and public exams, as it focuses on explicit content delivery and emphasises the mastery of specific knowledge, information retrieval and skills.



Arguments Against Direct Instruction:

Direct instruction stifles critical thinking and creativity. It focuses on following instructions and rote memorisation, rather than encouraging students to think independently and problem-solve.

- **Limited engagement:** Direct instruction can lead to passive learning, where students may become disengaged due to the lack of active participation and independent or group exploration.
- **One-size-fits-all approach:** Direct instruction does not cater for the diverse learning needs and styles of all students. It overlooks individual differences and fails to accommodate the different rates at which students learn and their learning preferences.

Long-term retention: While direct instruction might be effective for short-term memorisation, it may not always lead to deep understanding and long-term retention of concepts. There is a risk that students are likely to forget the material once the immediate



- **Teacher-centred:** Direct instruction is teacher-centred rather than student-centred, hindering student autonomy and the development of self-directed learning skills.
- **Overemphasis on testing:** Direct instruction, particularly when driven by the need to perform well on standardised tests, can lead to 'teaching to the test' and focusing narrowly on test-specific content.
- **Negative attitudes:** Over-reliance on direct instruction can contribute to students developing negative attitudes towards learning, perceiving it as monotonous and uninteresting.



Exploratory Learning



Exploratory Learning is an educational approach that encourages students to actively engage in discovering and understanding concepts through hands-on experiences and self-guided or teacher-guided exploration.

Arguments for Exploratory Learning:

- **Active engagement:** Exploratory learning promotes active participation and engagement. Pupils are encouraged to think critically, ask questions and seek answers on their own, which can lead to deeper understanding and retention of knowledge.
- **Intrinsic motivation:** When students have the freedom to explore topics that interest them, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn. This can foster curiosity and a love for learning.
- **Problem-solving skills:** Exploratory learning often involves encountering challenges and problems. Through the process of exploration, students develop problem-solving skills when analysing situations, experimenting with different approaches and learning from their mistakes. They can also work with others to solve problems, fostering team work.
- **Autonomy and independence:** By allowing students to choose their learning paths and set their own goals, exploratory learning nurtures a sense of autonomy and independence. This leads to increased self-confidence and a sense of ownership over their own education.
- **Holistic understanding:** Exploratory learning encourages students to make connections between different subjects and concepts. This holistic approach leads to a deeper understanding of how various ideas are inter-related in the real world.



Arguments against exploratory learning:

- **Lack of Structure:** Critics argue that exploratory learning might lack the structure needed to cover essential content thoroughly. Without clear guidance, students could miss out on foundational knowledge required for future learning.



- **Time constraints:** Exploratory learning can be time-consuming. With a curriculum already packed with specific topics, educators might find it challenging to allocate sufficient time for self-directed exploration.
- **Uneven learning:** In a classroom with diverse learners, some students might struggle with self-directed learning while others excel. This can lead to uneven learning outcomes and potentially exacerbate educational inequalities.
- **Assessment:** Traditional assessment methods, such as standardised tests, may not align well with exploratory learning. Evaluating students' progress and understanding can be challenging.
- **Lack of guidance:** Without proper guidance and support, students might not effectively navigate their learning. They could miss important concepts or misconstrue information, leading to gaps in their understanding.



No Excuses Behaviour v Restorative Strategies

No Excuses

A **'no excuses' approach to behaviour** in schools refers to a strict and disciplined approach to student behaviour management, often characterised by high expectations for student conduct, consistent enforcement of rules and a focus on accountability.



The term 'no excuses' means that reasons for the misbehaviour are not taken into account when applying the rules and punishments of the school.

Arguments for a 'No Excuses' approach:

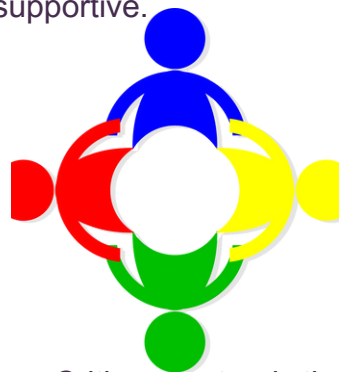
- **Orderly environment:** Advocates argue that a 'no excuses' approach helps maintain an orderly and safe learning environment. Clear expectations and consistent consequences can reduce disruption and create a focused atmosphere conducive to learning.
- **Preparation for real world:** Supporters suggest that instilling a strong sense of discipline and responsibility through a 'no excuses' approach prepares students for the expectations and demands of the real world, including the workplace.
- **High expectations:** This approach communicates high expectations for behaviour and academic performance. It sends a message that all students are capable of meeting these expectations and succeeding academically.
- **Reduced achievement gap:** Proponents contend that a disciplined and focused classroom environment can help close the achievement gap by minimising disruptions and providing equal learning opportunities for all students.



Teacher empowerment: A 'no excuses' approach can empower teachers by giving them the tools and support needed to manage the classroom effectively. This can lead to improved teacher morale, better mental health and increased job satisfaction.

Arguments against a 'No Excuses' approach:

- **Overemphasis on compliance:** Critics argue that a strict 'no excuses' approach places too much emphasis on compliance and rule-following, potentially stifling students' creativity, critical thinking and individuality.
- **Negative impact on relationships:** An overly strict approach can strain teacher-student relationships, as students may perceive the environment as authoritarian and unsupportive.



- **Limited understanding:** Critics contend that an exclusive focus on behaviour management may overshadow the understanding of underlying issues that contribute to misbehaviour, such as social-emotional challenges or external stressors.
- **Equity:** A 'no excuses' approach may disproportionately affect marginalised or disadvantaged students who may face external challenges in society and the home that impact their behaviour.
- **Excessive pressure:** An overly rigid approach creates excessive pressure on students, leading to mental ill-health, including anxiety, stress and depression.
- **Unintended consequences:** Strict discipline policies may lead to unintended consequences, such as suspensions or exclusions, fostering a negative school climate, or promoting only a 'punitive' approach to behaviour.
- **Lack of individualisation:** A one-size-fits-all 'no excuses' approach may



not account for individual student needs, backgrounds or circumstances, essential for creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Restorative Strategies

Restorative behaviour strategies in schools involve a proactive approach to addressing conflicts and misbehaviour. Strategies prioritise repairing relationships, promoting accountability and fostering a sense of belonging among students and staff. Restorative practices aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment where individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, understand the impact of their behaviour on others and work towards reparation, resolution and growth.



Rather than focusing solely on punitive measures, restorative behaviour strategies emphasise open communication, active listening and collaborative problem-solving. When conflicts arise, restorative practices often involve dialogue where those involved come together to share their perspectives, discuss the impact of the incident and collectively decide on appropriate actions to make amends.

The goal of restorative behaviour strategies is to create a positive school climate where conflicts are opportunities for learning and growth, rather than sources of division and punishment. By fostering empathy, understanding and a sense of community, the aim is to reduce incidents of misconduct by enabling students to take responsibility for their actions.

Arguments for restorative strategies:

- **Focus on accountability:** Restorative strategies emphasise accountability and responsibility. By involving students in conversations about their behaviour and its impact, they are more likely to understand the consequences of their actions and work towards repairing harm.
- **Conflict resolution:** Restorative practices promote open communication and conflict resolution skills. Students learn how to express their feelings, needs and perspectives in a respectful manner, which can lead to better relationships and a more positive school climate.
- **Empowerment:** Restorative approaches empower students by involving them in decision-making processes. This can help improve their self-esteem, problem-solving abilities and overall sense of agency in their learning environment.



- **Preventing repeated behaviour:** By addressing the underlying causes of misbehaviour and providing opportunities for reflection, restorative practices can help prevent repeated incidents and contribute to long-term behaviour change.
- **Positive school climate:** Implementing restorative strategies fosters a more positive and supportive school climate. When students feel heard and valued, they are more likely to engage in their learning and interact positively with their peers.

Arguments against restorative strategies:

- **Time-consuming:** Restorative processes, such as discussions and mediations, can be time-consuming and may disrupt the regular academic schedule. Critics argue that this could impact students' learning time and overall curriculum coverage.



- **Shortage of staff:** Schools that are struggling to appoint staff and/or are small might struggle to free up staff to spend time with pupils.



- **Ineffective for serious incidents:** Critics suggest that restorative strategies might not be effective in addressing severe or chronic behavioural issues. Some students might continue to exhibit disruptive behaviour despite engaging in restorative processes.
- **Lack of consistency:** Implementing restorative strategies requires consistency and commitment from all staff members. If not applied consistently, these strategies might not produce the desired results.
- **Victim's perspective:** In some cases, victims might not feel comfortable participating in restorative processes, especially if the original harm caused was significant. This could potentially re-traumatise the victim. If a class is frequently disrupted by a student and restorative strategies are ineffective, the learning of whole groups can be adversely affected.
- **Training:** To effectively implement restorative practices, educators need proper training and support. Without effective training, restorative strategies might be applied inconsistently and its benefits compromised.
- **Cultural diversity:** Restorative practices should be culturally sensitive and considerate of diverse backgrounds. If not implemented with cultural diversity in mind, they can potentially be discriminatory.



A 'No Excuses' Behaviour Policy, a Trauma-Informed approach and children's mental health

The connection between children's mental health and a 'no excuses' behaviour policy in schools is complex. A 'no excuses' policy can have both positive and negative implications for children's mental health. Here's how the two are interconnected:

Positive aspects:

- **Structured environment:** A 'no excuses' behaviour policy can contribute to a structured and orderly school environment, which may benefit students' mental well-being by reducing disruptions and creating a sense of order and predictability.
- **Clear expectations:** A 'no excuses' policy can provide clear expectations for behaviour, alleviating students' anxiety related to uncertainty about how to behave.
- **Safe learning environment:** Enforcing a 'no excuses' policy can help ensure that students feel safe and secure at school, which is essential for their mental health and emotional well-being.



- **Accountability and responsibility:** A policy that holds students accountable for their behaviour can teach them important life skills, such as responsibility and consequences, which can positively contribute to their emotional development.

Negative Aspects:

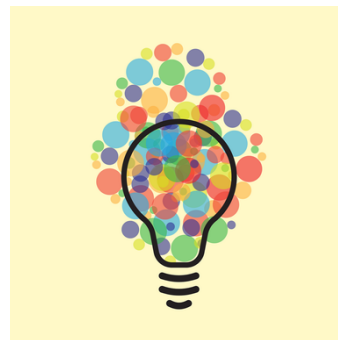
- **Stress and pressure:** A rigid 'no excuses' policy can create excessive stress and pressure on students to conform, which may negatively impact



their mental health. Fear of punishment or consequences may contribute to anxiety and feelings of inadequacy.

- **Lack of Flexibility:** A strict policy may fail to account for individual differences and challenges that students face, such as mental health issues, trauma or learning disabilities. This lack of flexibility can exacerbate stress and negatively impact mental well-being.
- **Labelling and stigmatisation:** Enforcing a punitive 'no excuses' policy may lead to labelling and stigmatising students who struggle with behaviour issues, potentially affecting their self-esteem and mental health.

What is your opinion? Complete the self-assessment on Page 4.



'No Excuses' Behaviour Strategies and Children's Mental Health

Underlying causes: A behaviour policy that focuses solely on behaviour without addressing underlying mental ill-health may miss opportunities to provide appropriate support and interventions for students who need them.

Emotional expression: A strict policy may discourage students from expressing their emotions or seeking help when they are struggling, fearing punishment for breaking the rules.

Social and emotional learning: A policy that prioritises strict discipline over social and emotional learning can hinder the development of important skills,

such as emotional regulation, empathy and conflict resolution.

Trauma-Informed Behaviour Strategies and Children's Mental Health



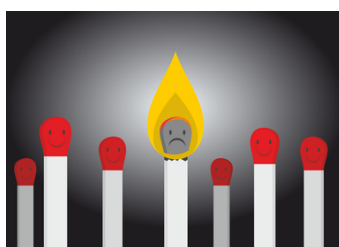
'Trauma-informed' in schools refers to an approach that takes into consideration the potential impact of trauma on students' learning experiences and behaviour. It involves creating an environment that is sensitive to the needs of students who may have experienced trauma, such as violence, abuse, neglect, loss, or other adverse experiences.

Arguments for trauma-informed approaches:

- **Holistic understanding of students:** Trauma-informed approaches recognise that students' behaviour and emotions may be influenced by past traumatic experiences. This understanding helps educators to respond empathetically and supportively, promoting overall student well-being.
- **Creating safe environments:** Trauma-informed schools aim to create safe and supportive environments where students feel understood, accepted and empowered to learn. This can positively impact their sense of belonging and engagement in the educational process.
- **Improved academic performance:** By addressing students' emotional and psychological needs, trauma-informed approaches can lead to improved academic performance. When students feel safe and supported, they are more likely to focus on learning and reach their potential.



- **Fewer discipline issues:** Trauma-informed practices contribute to a decrease in disciplinary issues. By addressing the root causes of behaviours, schools can reduce the need for punitive measures and focus on teaching students appropriate coping strategies when they feel overwhelmed.
- **Long-term wellbeing:** Trauma-informed approaches not only benefit students in the short term but also equip them with skills to manage stress and adversity throughout their lives. This can contribute to improved mental health outcomes as adults.



Arguments against trauma-informed approaches:

- **Limited resources:** Implementing trauma-informed practices may require additional resources, such as specialised training for educators and support staff, which some schools may struggle to allocate due to budget constraints.
- **Shift in focus:** Critics argue that focusing extensively on trauma-related issues may divert attention from core academic subjects, potentially impacting students' overall educational attainment.
- **Lack of clear framework:** Some opponents point out that the concept of 'trauma-informed' can be vague and lack a standardised framework, leading to inconsistencies in implementation across schools.
- **Professional boundaries:** There are concerns that educators might feel unprepared or uncomfortable addressing complex trauma-related issues, potentially blurring professional boundaries and responsibilities.
- **Stigmatisation:** While trauma-informed approaches aim to reduce stigma, there are concerns that excessive emphasis on trauma could unintentionally label students and perpetuate a sense of victimhood, rather than promoting resilience and empowerment.



The Link between violence and abuse experienced outside school and aggressive behaviour within school



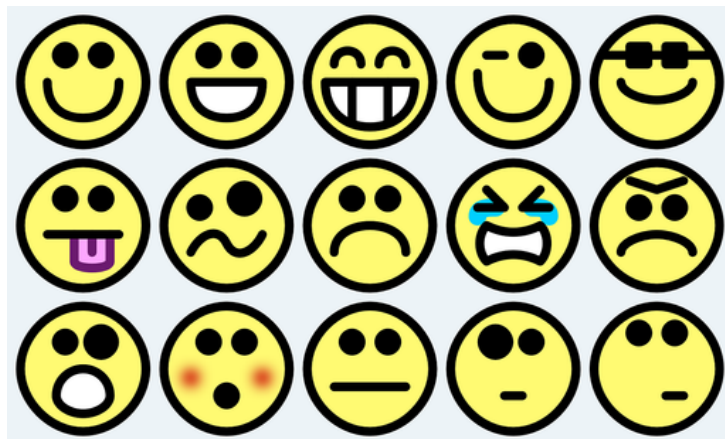
There is a body of research that suggests a link between violence and abuse experienced as a child and the development of aggressive and violent behaviour in children in school. Here are some key findings from research:

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** ACEs, which include experiences such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and household dysfunction, have been shown to have a significant impact on children's emotional and behavioural development. Children who have experienced ACEs are more likely to exhibit aggression, violence and behaviour problems in school.
- **Modelling Behaviour:** Children often learn behaviour by observing and imitating those around them, particularly parents and caregivers. If a child witnesses or experiences violence at home, they may internalise aggressive behaviours and display them in various contexts, including school.
- **Trauma and Emotional Regulation:** Children who have experienced violence or abuse may struggle with regulating their emotions, leading to



impulsive and aggressive behavior as a way to cope with their feelings of anger, fear or helplessness.

- **Neurobiological effects:** Traumatic experiences can have lasting effects on brain development, especially in areas related to impulse control, emotional processing and decision-making. These effects can contribute to aggressive and violent behaviour.
- **Disrupted attachment:** Children who have experienced violence or abuse may have disrupted attachment relationships with caregivers, affecting their ability to form healthy relationships with school staff and other authority figures. This can contribute to social isolation and difficulty in managing conflicts.
- **Coping mechanisms:** Some children may use aggression as a defence mechanism to protect themselves from perceived threats.
- **Social learning theory:** This theory posits that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation and reinforcement. If children are exposed to violent or aggressive behaviour in their environment, they may learn to use similar behaviours to achieve their goals or cope with challenges.
- **Emotional dysregulation:** Trauma and abuse can lead to difficulties in children managing their emotions, which may manifest as outbursts of aggression.



Childhood experiences and adult behaviour

Research has demonstrated a significant connection between children who are abused and/or experience violence in the home and how they behave as adults. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse and exposure to violence, can have long-lasting effects on children's psychological, emotional and social development. Here are some key findings from research on the relationship between childhood abuse, exposure to violence and adult behaviour:

- **Mental health issues:** Adults who experienced abuse or witnessed violence during childhood are at an increased risk of developing mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mood disorders.
- **Substance abuse and addiction:** Childhood abuse and exposure to violence have been linked to an increased likelihood of engaging in substance abuse and developing addictive behaviours in adulthood.
- **Interpersonal relationships:** Individuals who experienced violence and abuse as children may struggle with forming healthy and stable relationships in adulthood. This can include difficulties in establishing trust, maintaining boundaries and managing conflicts.
- **Re-victimisation:** Some research suggests that individuals who experienced abuse or witnessed violence in childhood may be at a higher risk of re-victimisation in adulthood, either through experiencing further abuse or becoming involved in abusive relationships.
- **Criminal behaviour:** There is evidence to suggest a link between childhood abuse and exposure to violence and an increased likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour in adulthood, including committing violent offences.



- **Parenting and family dynamics:** Adults who have a history of childhood abuse and exposure to violence may face challenges in parenting and family relationships. They may struggle with effective parenting strategies, emotional regulation and creating a safe and nurturing environment for their own children, thus creating a self-perpetuating vicious cycle.
- **Health outcomes:** Childhood abuse and exposure to violence have been associated with negative health outcomes in adulthood, including chronic diseases, poor self-care and a decreased quality of life.
- **Emotional regulation:** Individuals who experienced trauma as children may have difficulties regulating their emotions as adults, which can manifest in impulsive behaviour, mood swings and emotional dysregulation.
- **Cognitive functioning:** Childhood abuse and exposure to violence can impact cognitive development, leading to difficulties in areas such as attention, memory and problem-solving.
- **Resilience and coping:** While many individuals who experienced childhood abuse may face challenges, some may develop resilience and coping strategies that enable them to overcome adversity and lead fulfilling lives as adults.



Link between teachers' mental health and pupils' mental health

The connection between teachers' mental health and pupils' mental health is a reciprocal and interdependent relationship that can significantly impact the overall well-being and academic success of both teachers and students.

Several factors contribute to this connection:

- **Emotional contagion:** Teachers' emotional well-being can affect the emotional climate of the classroom. Emotionally regulated teachers are more likely to create a supportive and nurturing environment that positively influences students' mental health.
- **Role-modelling:** Teachers serve as role models for students. Their behaviour, attitude and emotional expressions can influence how students perceive and manage their own emotions and mental health.



- **Teacher-student relationships:** Teachers' mental health can impact the quality of their relationships with students. A teacher who is stressed, overwhelmed, emotionally drained or suffering from Burnout may have difficulty forming strong connections with students which can affect students' sense of belonging and emotional support.
- **Classroom climate:** Teachers' mental well-being can influence the overall classroom climate, including the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by students. A positive classroom climate is conducive to better mental health outcomes for both teachers and students.
- **Teaching effectiveness:** Teachers who are experiencing mental health challenges may have difficulty effectively managing classroom behaviour, delivering engaging lessons and providing individual support to students.



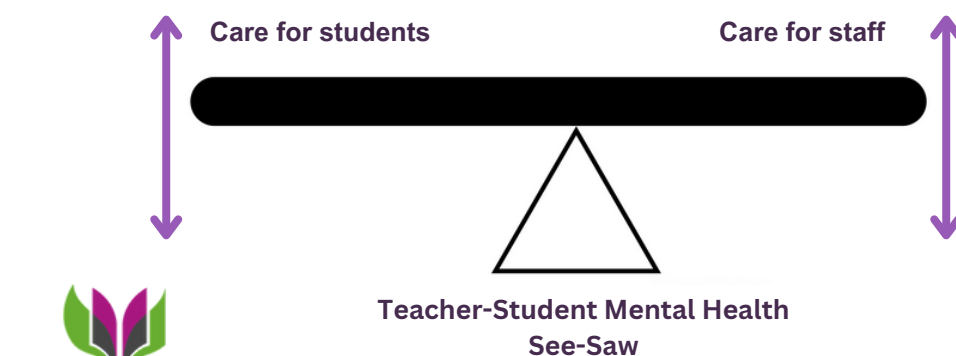
This can impact students' learning experiences and well-being.

- **Stress transmission:** High levels of stress among teachers can contribute to a stressful and tense learning environment, potentially leading to negative effects on students' mental health.
- **Support systems:** Teachers who have access to strong support systems and resources for managing their own mental health are better equipped to create supportive environments for their students.
- **Resilience and coping:** Teachers who model effective coping strategies and resilience in the face of challenges can positively impact students' ability to manage stress and adversity.
- **Teacher Burnout:** High levels of Burnout and emotional exhaustion among teachers can impact their ability to provide adequate emotional support to students, potentially leading to negative mental health outcomes for both teachers and students.
- **Positive teacher wellbeing:** When teachers prioritise their own mental wellbeing, they are better equipped to handle the demands of their profession and provide optimal support to students.

The wellbeing of teachers and students is interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Schools that prioritise the mental health of both teachers and students create an environment that promotes positive emotional experiences, learning and overall wellbeing. Providing teachers with the resources, training, and support they need to manage their mental health can contribute to a more positive and conducive learning environment for all students.

Similarly, creating a supportive and trauma-informed environment for students can help alleviate the stress and challenges that teachers may face in managing classroom behaviour and facilitating effective instruction.



The Knowledge-Rich Curriculum

A **knowledge-rich curriculum** is an educational approach that prioritises the systematic and comprehensive delivery of specific factual content, concepts and information to students. The emphasis in a knowledge-rich curriculum is on building a solid foundation of essential knowledge across various subject areas. This approach values the acquisition of core knowledge, facts, and information as a means to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities and a deep understanding of the world.



Arguments for a Knowledge-Rich Curriculum:

- **Foundation of Critical Thinking:** A knowledge-rich curriculum provides students with a solid foundation of factual information, which is essential for developing critical thinking skills. When students have a strong base of knowledge, they can analyse and evaluate information more effectively.
- **Cultural Literacy:** A knowledge-rich curriculum ensures that students are exposed to a wide range of cultural, historical, scientific, and literary content. This helps students become culturally literate and have a deeper understanding of the world around them.
- **Vocabulary and Communication:** A curriculum rich in knowledge exposes students to a diverse vocabulary and helps improve their communication skills. A strong vocabulary allows students to express themselves more eloquently and effectively.
- **Preparation for Higher Education:** Many standardised tests and higher education programmes require background knowledge. A knowledge-rich curriculum can better prepare students for success in higher education by providing them with the foundational information they need.



- **Informed Citizenship:** A well-rounded education that includes a broad range of knowledge helps students become informed and engaged citizens. They can better understand complex social, political, and historical issues, enabling them to make more informed decisions.

Arguments Against a Knowledge-Rich Curriculum:

- **Overemphasis on Memorisation:** Critics argue that a knowledge-rich curriculum might focus too much on rote memorisation of facts, leaving little room for deeper understanding and critical thinking. They believe that education should prioritise skills over facts.
- **Lack of Relevance:** Some educators argue that a knowledge-rich curriculum may include outdated or irrelevant information, which might not resonate with students or prepare them for the modern world.
- **Narrow Focus:** Critics contend that an overly structured knowledge-rich curriculum might limit teachers' flexibility to adapt to the individual needs and interests of students. This could hinder the development of a well-rounded education.
- **Exclusion of Practical Skills:** Advocates for skills-based education argue that a curriculum focused on knowledge might neglect the development of practical skills that are crucial for success in the workplace and daily life.
- **Equity Concerns:** There is a concern that a knowledge-rich curriculum might disadvantage students who come from less privileged backgrounds. Students with limited resources might struggle to access the same depth of knowledge, exacerbating educational inequalities.



Ofsted and the teaching profession

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, (Ofsted) has been a topic of discussion and controversy for some time. Criticism intensified after Ruth Perry, Headteacher of Caversham Primary School in Reading, ended her life following a school inspection. Ofsted graded her school as Inadequate whereas a previous inspection had judged it to be Outstanding.

Ruth Perry's death led to two major inquiries into Ofsted. Former schools minister Lord Jim Knight opened an inquiry in May 2023 into the future of Ofsted initiated by the National Education Union (NEU). The inquiry, which is called 'Beyond Ofsted', will 'develop a set of principles for underpinning a better inspection system and proposals for an alternative approach. It will 'consider input from a wide range of well-informed voices, in order to set out the framework for an inspection system fit for the increasingly complex needs of schools today'. (The author of this 'State of the Nation' document, Steve Waters, is a member of the Knight inquiry). The inquiry aims to publish its findings in November 2023.

In June 2023, a Commons Select Committee launched an inquiry to investigate the impact of Ofsted's use of single-word gradings and examine the effect of school inspections on the wellbeing and workload of teachers and school leaders.

Some common criticisms of Ofsted include:

Demoralisation of Teachers: Ofsted has faced criticism for demoralising teachers. The high-stakes nature of inspections and the focus on ratings and rankings can create stressful environments for teachers, affecting their morale and job satisfaction.



- **Stagnation of school improvement:** Critics argue that Ofsted's emphasis on inspections and evaluations leads schools to focus on meeting inspection criteria rather than genuinely improving education. This could result in a culture of 'teaching to the test' rather than fostering holistic learning.
- **Overemphasis on performance metrics:** Ofsted's reliance on quantitative metrics, such as exam results and attendance rates, as measures of school performance has been criticised. Critics contend that this approach may not fully capture the quality and effectiveness of education.
- **Inconsistent and unreliable inspections:** Some critics point to inconsistencies in Ofsted inspections, where schools with similar characteristics and performance receive different ratings. This inconsistency raises concerns about the judgements, reliability and fairness of the inspection process.
- **Narrow definition of success:** Ofsted's focus on academic achievement and exam results neglects other important aspects of education, such as students' personal development, critical thinking skills and wellbeing.
- **Negative impact on school culture:** The fear of negative inspection outcomes can create a culture of anxiety and stress within schools. This focus on avoiding poor ratings might hinder innovation and risk-taking.



- **Labeling and Stigmatization:** The labels and ratings assigned by Ofsted inspections can stigmatize schools, making it harder for them to attract students, teachers and resources, even if they are making efforts to improve.
- **Lack of Understanding of Context:** Critics argue that Ofsted inspections might not take into account the unique challenges and



contexts of individual schools, especially those in areas of high deprivation.

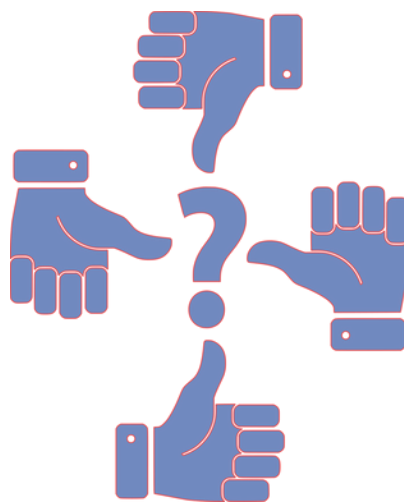
Arguments in support of Ofsted inspections:

Ofsted inspections in schools serve as a critical mechanism for evaluating the quality of education provided to students:

- **Accountability and Quality Assurance:** Ofsted inspections hold schools accountable for the quality of education they deliver. By assessing various aspects of a school's performance, including teaching, leadership, student outcomes and safeguarding, inspections ensure that schools meet the necessary standards and provide a high-quality education.
- **Improvement:** The feedback provided by Ofsted inspections enables schools to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Schools can use this information to implement necessary improvements, refine teaching methods and enhance the learning experience for students.
- **Transparency:** Ofsted reports are made publicly available, allowing parents, students and the wider community to understand a school's performance. This transparency fosters trust and informed decision-making when parents are choosing a school for their children's education.
- **Equality:** Ofsted inspections aim to ensure that all students, regardless of their background or community, receive a high standard of education. This promotes equity and helps identify disparities in education provision.
- **Professional development:** Inspections can guide professional development for teachers and school leaders. By highlighting areas needing improvement, educators can focus their training efforts on addressing specific challenges.



- **Benchmarking:** Ofsted inspections provide benchmarks for schools to measure themselves against. Schools can compare their performance with that of others and learn from best practices.
- **Safety and wellbeing:** Inspections include evaluating safeguarding measures and ensuring that schools provide a safe and secure environment for students. This focus on safety contributes to students' overall wellbeing.
- **Parental engagement:** Ofsted inspections empower parents with valuable insights into their child's school. This information enables parents to actively engage with the school and support their child's education.
- **Data-driven decisions:** Ofsted inspections rely on data and evidence-based assessments. This approach ensures that judgments are objective and informed by school performance.
- **Continuous improvement:** The cyclical nature of Ofsted inspections encourages schools to engage in an ongoing process of improvement. Schools are incentivised to continually enhance their practices and adapt to changing educational needs.



The teaching profession:

Key facts

Teachers

- There were 468,371 Full-Time Equivalent FTE teachers in England in 2022 (Gov.uk).
- 43,997 teachers left the profession in 2022, almost 9% (Gov.uk).

The teachers' charity Education Support surveyed teachers for their 2022 Wellbeing Index. They found that:

- * 59% of teachers had considered leaving because of mental ill-health.
- * 78% had experienced mental ill-health as a result of their work.
- * 47% always go into work when unwell (known as 'Presenteeism').
- * 55% had actively sought to change or leave their current jobs.
- * 68% cited workload as the main reason for thinking about leaving their jobs.
- More than 100,000 under-40s have quit teaching in the last 5 years (Lib Dems website).
- A third of teachers quit within 5 years of qualifying (Lib Dems website). 12.8% leave at the end of their first year (Schools Week).
- The number of teaching vacancies has more than doubled in the last 2 years (Lib Dems website).
- 22% of maths teachers and 42% of physics teachers have no relevant post-A-level qualification (Lib Dems website).

Children/Young People

- Among children aged 6 to 16 in England, one in six had a probable mental health condition in 2021, up from one in nine in 2017. Current figures are especially concerning for adolescent girls aged between 17 and 19: one in four had a probable mental health condition in 2021 (The Health Foundation).
- 1.4 million children and young people were referred to mental health services in 2022 (@75ThunderRoad on Twitter).
- This rise in prevalence of children's mental ill-health since 2017 corresponds to an additional 500,000 young people between 6 and 16 with a probable mental health condition, who may need support from children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) (The Health Foundation).
- 753,795 children/young people were on the CYPMHS waiting list in 2022 (NHS). Examples of national wait times for first contact after referral: 23,538 waited between 4-6 weeks; 81,377 were still waiting for first contact 12 weeks after referral.
- The attendance rate across the academic year 2022/23 was 92.5%. The absence rate was, therefore, 7.5% across all schools (Gov.uk).
- There were 6,495 permanent exclusions in 2021-22, up from 3928 in 2020-21 (Gov.uk).
- There were 578,280 suspensions in 2021-22, up from 352,454 in 2020/21 (Gov.uk).

About Teach Well Toolkit



Steve & Suneta

Who are we?

Teach Well Toolkit Supports schools to build a culture of staff and pupil wellbeing and mental health. We believe that in order to teach effectively and take care of the children, teachers must first look after themselves.

Suneta Bagri

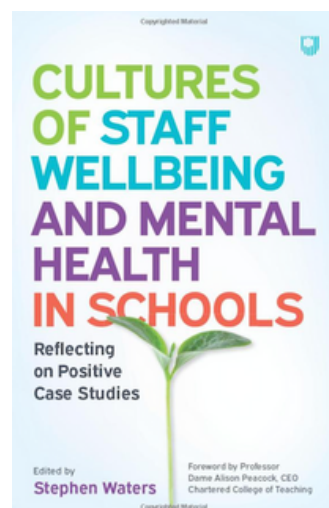
Suneta is an experienced primary interim headteacher with over 20 years experience, a SEND expert and a wellbeing leadership coach with Leadership Edge and the teachers' mental health charity Education Support. Suneta is also a First Aid for Mental Health Instructor.

Steve Waters

Steve has 30 years experience of teaching English and Drama in secondary schools, including as a Head of Dept and Assistant Principal, and 6 years as an LA consultant. He is a qualified counsellor and First Aid for Mental Health Instructor.

We offer the following training courses to schools:

- **Senior Mental Health Lead Training:** Fully funded by the DfE.



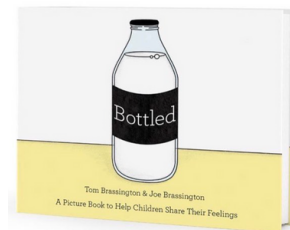
<https://teachwellall.samcart.com/products/senior-mental-health-lead-training>

- Level 2 First Aid for Mental Health (Minimum age 14)



<https://teachwellall.samcart.com/products/first-aid-for-mental-health-schools-level-2>

- Student Wellbeing and Mental Health Ambassador Training (KS4)



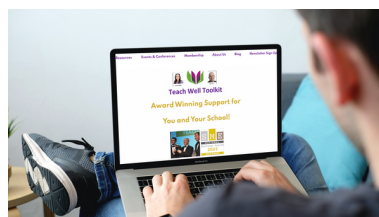
<https://teachwellall.samcart.com/products/student-wellbeing-and-mental-health-ambassador-training>

- Fit 4 Reading [Yr 10 coaching Year 7 struggling readers]



Fit 4 Reading

<https://teachwellall.samcart.com/products/fit-4-reading>



VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION

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