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Promoting Mental Wellbeing in Schools: BREATHE and SchoolSpace

ARC West Midlands

The challenge
With the importance of mental wellbeing on long-term health, around 20% of people aged 8-16 have a probable mental health disorder, and only 40% of these access professional support when difficulties first emerge. Birmingham faces a particularly acute challenge – as the second most ethnically diverse and seventh most deprived local authority in England, it reports the highest national prevalence of childhood mental health disorders.

The approach
Schools are well-positioned to intervene but often lack data and resources required to monitor wellbeing trends and enhance mental health literacy among staff and pupils. To address this gap, ARC West Midlands developed a wellbeing census and online resource, aiming to provide schools with robust, group-level data and bespoke lesson plans to enable identification and support for vulnerable sub-groups.

The outcomes and impact
Since 2021, over 32,000 assessments have been completed across 55 schools, providing digital dashboards that allow for precise benchmarking by ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. This work has informed the Birmingham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and regional Healthy Schools programmes and is being expanded nationally through the Children's Hospital Alliance and the UKRI Population Health programme. This will ensure targeted resource allocation and improved health literacy, establishing a scalable framework for school-based mental health intervention.

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