Improving mental health within complex school systems

Professor Graham Moore
Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health
Cardiff University

Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health

Canolfan Wolfson ar gyfer Iechyd Meddwl Pobl Ifanc

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

Overview

- Schools as settings for improving young people's mental health

- Challenges in intervening in complex school systems

- A new Whole School Approach to Mental Health in Wales

wolfsonyoungpeople@cardiff.ac.uk

@wolfsoncentre

cardiff.ac.uk/wolfson-centre-for-young-peoples-mental-health

Wolfson Centre
for Young People's Mental Health

Canolfan Wolfson
ar gyfer Iechyd Meddwl Pobl Ifanc

CARDIFF
UNIVERSITY

PRIFYSGOL
CAERDYDD

Swansea
University
Prifysgol
Abertawe

Schools : important settings for health improvement

- Where education is universal, schools offer opportunity to reach (almost) all of the population

- Schools are settings in which young people spend much of their waking time

- Ottawa charter principles for health promotion (World Health Organisation 1986)
    - Not just about educating people about living healthier lives, or using as a channel to identify individuals to intervene with
    - But about ensuring the environments in which people 'live, work, love and play' are supportive of health and wellbeing

Schools as complex systems, within complex systems

- Schools are complex for many reasons

  - Diverse and ever changing groups of individuals form each school community
  - Formal and informal rules and norms, shaped by interactions among these individuals
  - Ceaseless adaptation to meet the needs of new generations of young people
  - Nested within regional and national 'supra-systems'
  - Interacting with various policy systems – education, health…

- Any new intervention takes place within a constantly evolving system

Challenges implementing change in complex school systems

- Schools are crowded contexts with finite resource and capacity

- Several examples of programmes which work better when not delivered by teachers (Stallard et al. 2014; Shinde et al. 2018)
  - Perhaps they require particular specialist skills
  - But perhaps the problem is that these add load to the system, without increasing capacity. What can school staff put to one side in order to deliver something new?

- What gets measured gets done
  - Historical focus internationally on performance against attainment metrics
  - Health and education as competing (rather than complementary) goals

wolfsonyoungpeople@cardiff.ac.uk
@wolfsoncentre
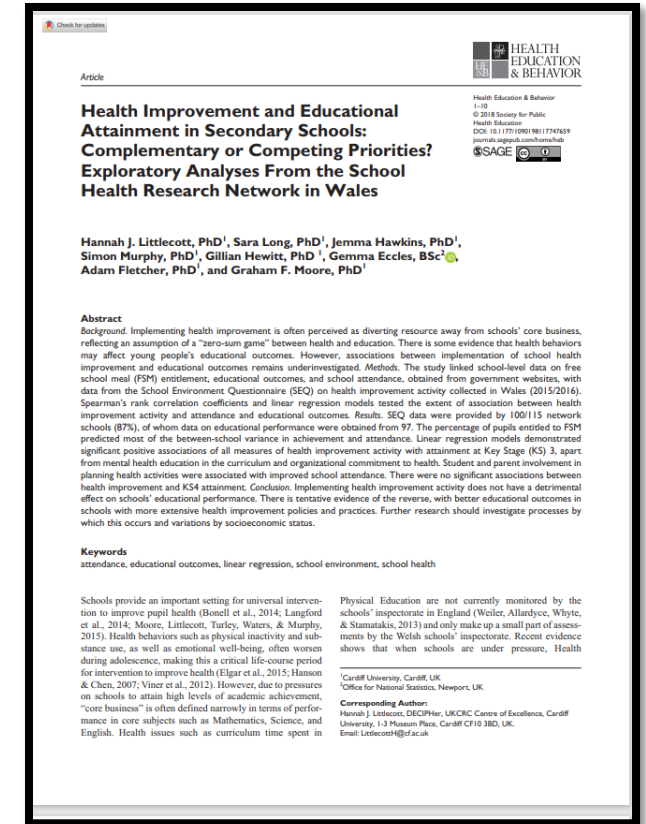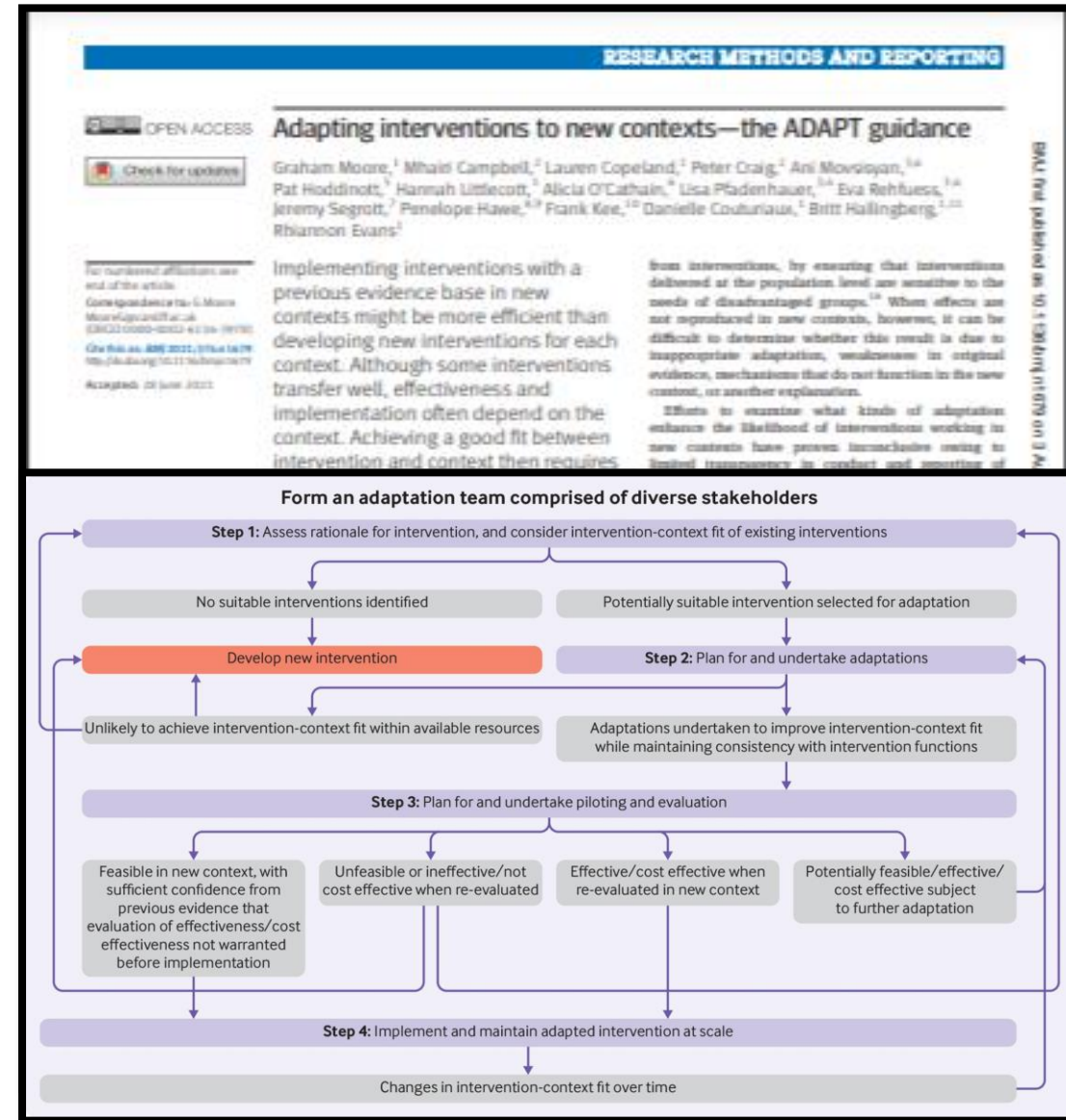cardiff.ac.uk/wolfson-centre-for-young-peoples-mental-health
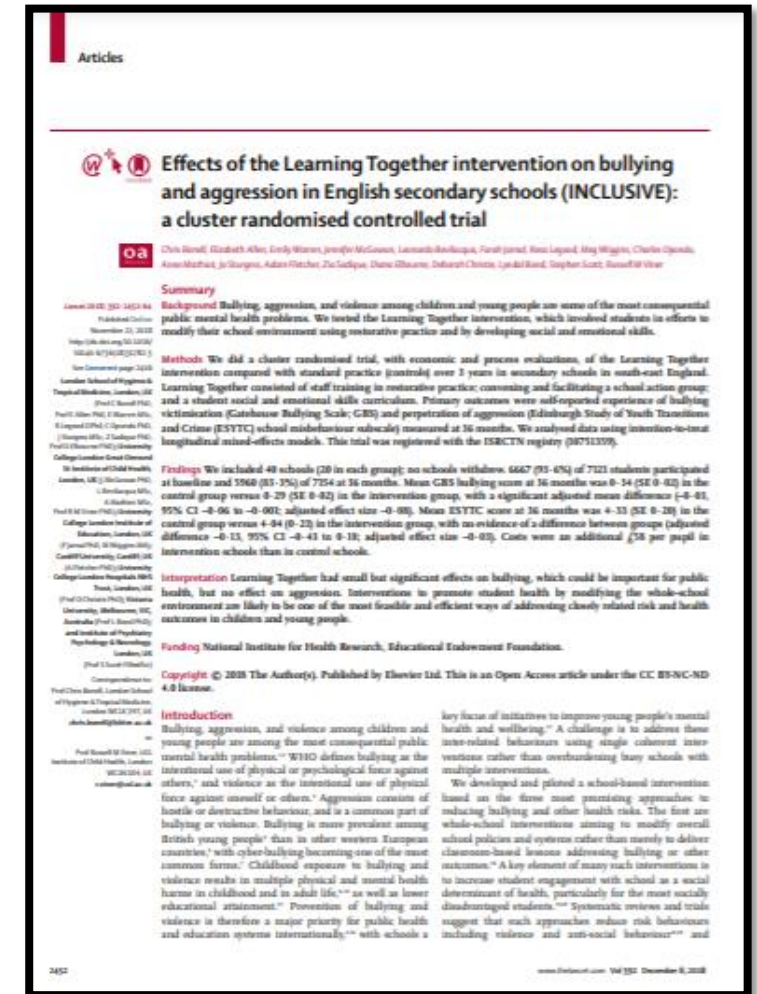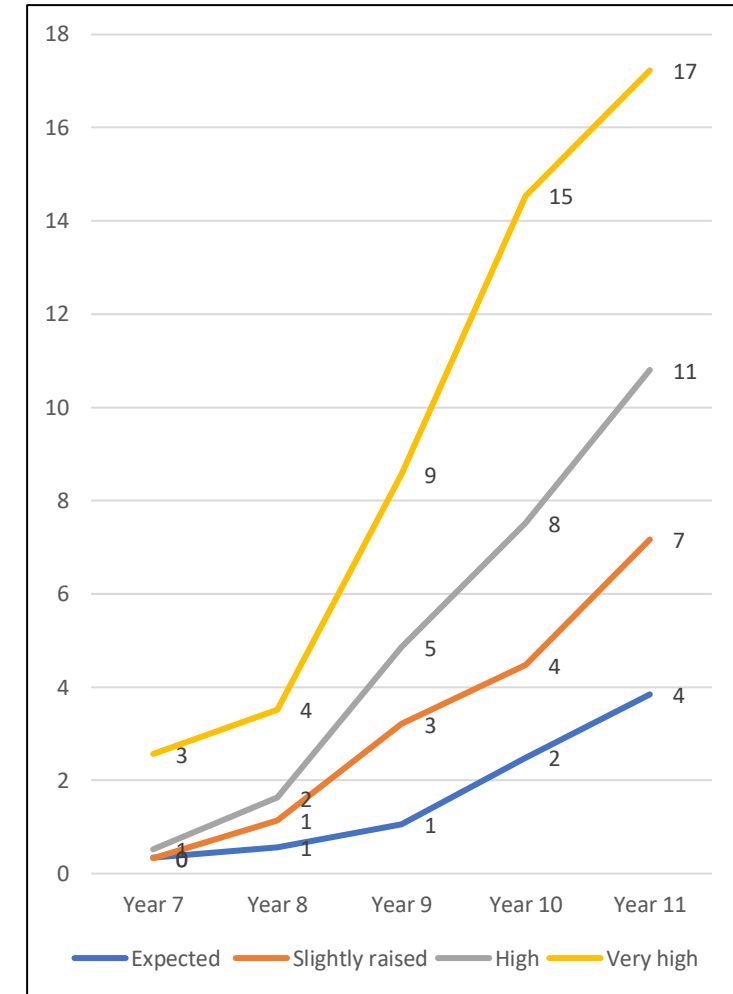
WOLFSON Centre for Young People's Mental Health
Canolfan WOLFSON ar gyfer Iechyd Meddwl Pobl Ifanc

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

Which interventions?

- Growing number of mental health interventions, often promoted to schools by interested parties.
  - Often limited evidence base.
  - But even where a good evaluation has been done, will it work here? Can it be adapted to fit a new context while still functioning in the same way?

- Opportunity cost in selecting and embedding an ineffective (or harmful) intervention.

RESEARCH METHODS AND REPORTING

Adapting interventions to new contexts—the ADAPT guidance

Graham Moore, Mhairi Campbell, Lauren Copeland, Peter Craig, Ani Movsisyan, Pat Hoddinott, Hannah Littlecott, Alicia O'Cathain, Lisa Pfadenhauer, Eva Rehfuess, Jeremy Segrott, Penelope Hawe, Frank Kee, Danielle Couturiaux, Britt Hallingberg, Rhiannon Evans

Form an adaptation team comprised of diverse stakeholders

Step 1: Assess rationale for intervention, and consider intervention-context fit of existing interventions

No suitable interventions identified | Potentially suitable intervention selected for adaptation

Develop new intervention | Step 2: Plan for and undertake adaptations

Unlikely to achieve intervention-context fit within available resources | Adaptations undertaken to improve intervention-context fit while maintaining consistency with intervention functions

Step 3: Plan for and undertake piloting and evaluation

Feasible in new context, with sufficient confidence from previous evidence that evaluation of effectiveness/cost effectiveness not warranted before implementation | Unfeasible or ineffective/not cost effective when re-evaluated | Effective/cost effective when re-evaluated in new context | Potentially feasible/effective/ cost effective subject to further adaptation

Step 4: Implement and maintain adapted intervention at scale

Changes in intervention-context fit over time

How soon can we expect to see effects?

- Psychological interventions often have immediate effects, which fade just as quickly

- Interventions which centre around more fundamental system change may do the opposite

- Hence, we might disregard things which work because we were unrealistic in how quickly we anticipated effects

- INCLUSIVE trial
  - No effects at 2 years
  - Convincing effects across multiple domains at 3 years

wolfsonyoungpeople@cardiff.ac.uk

@wolfsoncentre

cardiff.ac.uk/wolfson-centre-for-young-peoples-mental-health

Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health

Canolfan Wolfson ar gyfer Iechyd Meddwl Pobl Ifanc

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe

Can we address common causes of multiple well-being related issues at once?

- Plethora of literature on single risk factor interventions

- But what school will ever be able to effectively deliver
  - One comprehensive intervention for smoking, one for mental health, one for alcohol use, one for dietary behaviours…and so on…

- These various aspects of wellbeing are connected

- Can targeting common causes have multiple benefits
  - Increasing young people's sense of belonging to their school community may improve mental health,
  - May also remove the need to engage in counter-school bonding and identity processes commonly associated with behaviours like smoking

Smoking by mental health status and age (SHRN 2019 Student Health and Wellbeing survey data)

Wales as an early adopter of 'whole system' approaches and health in all policies ambition

- Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes (https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/welsh-network-of-healthy-school-schemes/)

  - Launched 1999
  - 'Healthy school' takes responsibility for maintaining and promoting health of all who 'learn, work, play and live' within it

- Wellbeing of Future Generations (2015)

A new Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing: strategic context

- Together for Mental Health 2012

- Together for Children and Young People programme 2015

- April 2018 publication of 'Mind Over Matter'

- Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing September 2018

- Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being March 2021
  - New statutory guidance for all governing bodies of maintained educational settings, and local authorities, in Wales

- This intersects with ongoing major curriculum reforms in Wales, to be rolled out in phases in coming years

Theory of change and evaluability assessment

- DECIPHer commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake evaluability assessment

- Develop a theory of change

- Identification of options for evaluation

- Led by Dr Rachel Brown

- Published last month

- [Development of a theory of change and evaluability assessment for the whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing (gov.wales)](#)

Where are we now in terms of young people's mental health in Wales prior to framework implementation (National Data - School Health Research Network (shrn.org.uk))?

Emotional and behavioural difficulties among 10 year olds (primary school Health and Wellbeing surveys 2019 and 2021)
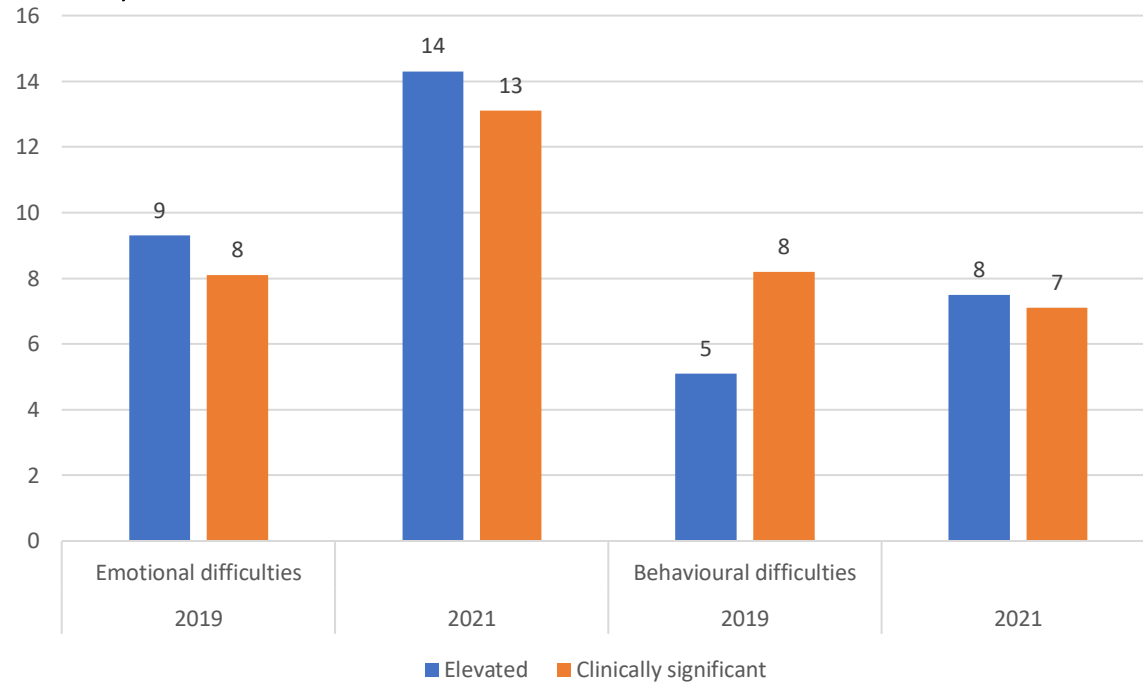
Total SDQ scores among 11-16 year olds in 2019 (secondary school survey)

Figure 3.17 SDQ total scale score (%)
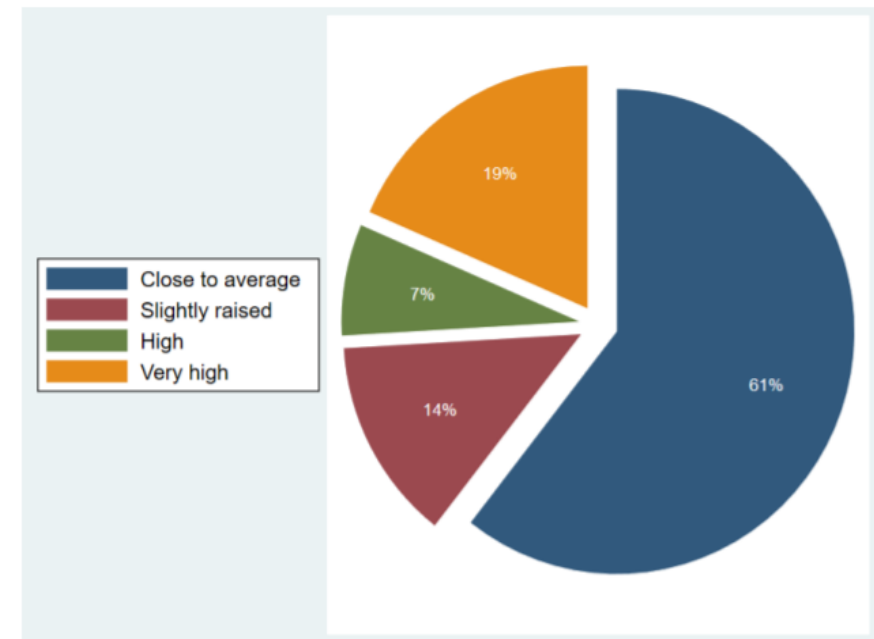
- Close to average — 61%
- Slightly raised — 14%
- High — 7%
- Very high — 19%

Next steps

- Development of a protocol for evaluation of the Whole School Approach within the Wolfson Centre

- Taking advantage of unique data infrastructure in Wales to understand what difference this makes to young people's mental health and well-being

    - Separating effects of framework implementation from effects of post-COVID recovery will be a key challenge here

- In depth process evaluation work to understand how it takes shape across diverse school systems, and what difference it makes to young people's experiences of school

Thank you for listening. Any questions?

wolfsonyoungpeople@cardiff.ac.uk

@wolfsoncentre

cardiff.ac.uk/wolfson-centre-for-young-peoples-mental-health

Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health

Canolfan Wolfson ar gyfer Iechyd Meddwl Pobl Ifanc

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PRIFYSGOL CAERDYDD

Swansea University Prifysgol Abertawe