

MEASURING THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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In 2013, NPC was commissioned to develop modified versions of its [Well-being Measure](#) suitable for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This report outlines this adaptation process. It also presents the adapted questionnaires with an accompanying set of guidelines, so that others can also use them to measure the well-being of young people with SEN. By sharing some of these measures, we hope that others will build on our work and share their experiences of using the questions with us.

Defining well-being

Well-being describes a person's overall functioning and life satisfaction. It includes the physical and material aspects of their life that we can objectively measure—such as their health and wealth—and other subjective aspects—such as how an individual experiences their relationships with others, and their sense of self-worth.

In this report, we will focus on the latter—known as subjective well-being—as opposed to the former—known as objective well-being. For our purposes, subjective well-being refers to people's views and assessments of their life circumstances, including self-esteem, resilience, a feeling of connectedness to one's community, and the quality of one's relationships.

NPC's Well-being Measure

Schools, charities, and organisations working with young people typically measure objective outcomes such as school grades or attendance to assess whether they are having a positive impact on the young people they work with. The Office for National Statistics' (ONS) [proposals for measuring well-being](#) in children and young people are focussed on mostly objective measures like sports participation and health. Yet we know this is only part of the picture and it is for this reason that NPC has focused on well-being for many years; conducting initial research into the subject in 2005, publishing [Feelings count](#) in 2009, and launching [the Well-being Measure](#) in 2011.

There has been increasing recognition of the value of subjective approaches in recent years¹. Whether a child is enjoying school and getting the most out of it matters too. 'Soft' outcomes can be harder to quantify than 'hard', objective outcomes, yet they must also be understood if we are to comprehend the full effect an intervention has on a child's life. To help address this need to measure more subjective aspects of well-being, NPC developed its Well-being Measure which was launched after three years of development and piloting with a group of charities. It takes an entirely subjective approach, with young people asked to record how they rate aspects of their lives.

How it works

The Well-being Measure is an online questionnaire for 11–16 year olds that includes 41 validated questions covering eight aspects of well-being: self-esteem, resilience, emotional well-being, friends, family, community, school, and overall life satisfaction. Charities and schools use it to measure well-being before and after an intervention in order to assess the impact of the intervention on the well-being of its young people.

Domain	Aspect of well-being	Academic source
Self	Self esteem Resilience Emotional well-being	Marsh's self-description questionnaire Wagnild and Young's resilience scale Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
Relationships	Friends Family	Huebner's Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Score Huebner's Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Score
Environment	School Community	Huebner's Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Score Huebner's Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Score
Global subjective well-being	Overall life satisfaction	Cantrill's Ladder

Table showing aspects of subjective well-being measured by NPC's Well-being Measure for 11-16 year olds

Data collected through use of NPC's Well-being Measure has enabled organisations to compare their results against [a national baseline](#)². To date, the findings³ have provided evidence to help organisations improve their services and demonstrate impact to funders. It has been used by organisations like the [Outward Bound Trust](#), [Toynbee Hall](#) and [Save the Children](#), as well as by a number of schools.

Adapting the Measure for young people with SEN

The provision of support for people with SEN—known as High Needs provision—is going through significant change following the new [Children and Families Act](#), with the introduction of a [new education, health and care plan replacing SEN statements](#), and the introduction of personal budgets. Local authorities are now responsible for the commissioning of provision for High Needs pupils, which in broad terms aims to improve outcomes in the areas of educational attainment, independence, employment, and well-being. This increased focus on outcomes, including well-being, has therefore placed a greater need for their measurement by local authorities.

The existing NPC Well-being Measure, designed for 11–16 year olds, had not been tested for use by young people with SEN or outside of that age range. NPC was therefore commissioned¹ to develop a modified version (or a set of versions) of the Well-being Measure questionnaires to make them accessible to children and young people with SEN. To ensure that the Measure could be used in this context, NPC undertook a process to adapt and pilot the existing questions in the Well-being Measure questionnaire.

¹ This work was commissioned by the London Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (the Tri-Borough) to support their new programme of monitoring and reporting of well-being for High Needs pupils.

The approach was iterative, with revisions and improvements made in light of the findings of each stage of the research. It was anticipated that several adaptations of the Measure would be developed, which could be used within schools and accessed by a wider age range and by pupils with more complex needs. Our broad approach to adapting the Measure for this purpose is set out in the following diagram:



The Well-being Measure adaptation process

Initial adaptation of the Measure

Following a review of the literature relating to existing measures, we began the initial adaptation. We held meetings with educational psychologists, SEN leads, and academics working in this field. The findings from this research were taken and used to produce initial adaptations of the Well-Being Measure for consultation. The major changes that were required included:

- reducing the number of questions and statements to those most relevant;
- simplifying the wording statements; and
- changing the scales so that they could be more easily interpreted.

Consultation with SEN pupils

It was recognised that in order to make the well-being questionnaire accessible to young pupils and those with more complex needs, there would need to be multiple iterations (or levels) of the questionnaire to cover the wide age range and complexity of need among pupils with SEN.

Therefore, the consultation involved two groups, as shown below:

Consultation phase	Age range	SEN level	Consultation process
Phase 1	11–16 years old	Accessing SEN departments within mainstream secondary or alternative provision	Visits to mainstream schools to discuss the Well-being Measure with staff, SEN pupils, and parents (where possible).
Phase 2	7–11 years old	Pupils with more complex needs	Visits to alternative provision, a primary school and special schools.

Table showing the two-stage consultation process

The main changes to the questionnaire following Phase 1 included:

- identifying ambiguous and confusing statements;
- improving the clarity of language in both scales and statements;
- adding visual elements to the scales to improve interpretation; and
- editing and streamlining the questionnaire instructions.

The main changes made following Phase 2 included:

- reducing the number of statements from 21 to 14 to account for the potentially lower attention span of the group;
- adjusting the scales to ensure that the same scale was used throughout the questionnaire;
- reversing the direction of a couple of statements; and
- using visual representations of some statements for those with more complex needs.

Adaptations of the Well-being Measure

Following the consultation process with the two different groups of SEN pupils, it was confirmed that to cater to the varying levels of need among the pupils, several versions of the well-being survey would be required.

NPC designed four well-being questionnaires. All of the adapted measures use the same statements on self-esteem, emotional health and resilience, relationships at home and friends, enjoyment of schools overall, and an overall rating of life satisfaction. The measures only differ in length and format to cater for the varying levels of needs, with completion times varying between 15 and 30 minutes.

The table below summarises the key elements of the four measures.

Survey	Likely groups	Age range	Length	Scale	Format
Level 1	Medium need	11–16 years	21 questions	5 point	Words
Level 2	Medium/complex medium need	11–16 years 7–10 years	14 questions	5 point	Words
Level 3	Complex need	7–10 years	14 questions	5 point	Words and symbols
Level 4	Highest level	7–10 years	14 questions	3 point	Words and symbols

Table showing the four adaptations of the well-being measure for different levels of educational need

The final questionnaire for the children aged 11–16 years within mainstream secondary or alternative provision (the lowest level of need) is called the Level 1 measure. The components of the Level 1 measure are shown in the table below:

Aspect of well-being	Description	Length and scale
Emotional well-being	Combines statements on self-esteem, emotional health and resilience	9 statements, 5 point agreement scale
Friends and family	Quality of relationships at home and with friends	5 statements, 5 point agreement scale
Safety online	Safety online	1 statement, 5 point agreement scale
School	Satisfaction or enjoyment of school	5 statements, 5 point agreement scale
Life satisfaction	Overall rating of life on scale of 0-10	Ladder scale

The components of the Level 1 adaption of NPC's Well-being Measure

To cater for younger children and those with more complex needs, NPC designed a further three measures (Levels 2, 3, and 4).

The measures are designed to be completed by children on their own, though assistance may be required for those with higher and more complex needs.

Piloting the measures

Although these measures are heavily reliant on statements used in other tools, including NPC's Well-being Measure, they required independent testing to ensure that they are reliable, valid, and practical for schools and pupils to use.

To do this, we conducted two pilots:

1. The first pilot involved testing the Level 1 measure with the same four schools in the Phase 1 consultation (involving children aged 11–16 years accessing SEN departments within mainstream secondary schools or alternative provision).
2. The second pilot involved limited testing of the Level 2, 3, and 4 measures in one secondary school and one primary school.

Piloting the Level 1 measure

This pilot was conducted on the schools involved in the initial Phase 1 consultation. This process sought to test the consistency, validity and sensitivity of the Level 1 measure.

The data collected during this pilot was analysed for four areas of validity and reliability. Reliability describes how consistent the results are of a measuring instrument. Therefore, a measure is said to have a high reliability if it produces similar results under consistent conditions. Validity is the extent to which a test measures what it claims to measure.

Level 1 pilot results

- The measure has a high internal consistency, suggesting that the responses to the questions are strongly related. For example, if a young person agreed with the statement 'I feel alone' they are likely to also disagree with the statement 'I have lots of fun'. (See Appendix 1, Question 3).
- With the exception of a few questions, which were subsequently amended, the measure is valid according to our analysis. This means it appears to measure what it claims to measure.
- The measure appears to be sensitive to statistically significant change over a reasonable period when questions have not changed. This was assessed by testing the Level 1 measure on the same group at two different points in time. Nevertheless, there are likely to be a number of factors that could result in this variation in results between the two time periods, which may affect the overall volatility of the measure over time.

Given the constraints to piloting, however, there are a number of limitations to the strength of the analysis undertaken:

- The sample size is small and as a result, the analysis has relatively weak statistical power. With a larger data set, it will be possible to repeat the same validity and reliability tests to double check the quality of the measures. We should therefore be cautious about drawing firm conclusions from this analysis until a reasonable number of survey responses have been collected.
- The distribution of the responses was significantly different from what would be expected (ie, a 'normal distribution'). This is not uncommon, but it may suggest that pupils engaged with the survey less critically or reflected less on their circumstances the second time we tested the measure with them.
- The sample demographics of the young people that we piloted the measures with (white British children, 11–16 years within urban schools) mean that more testing is needed to ensure that these surveys are generalisable to all young people with SEN.

Piloting the Level 2, 3, and 4 measures

The Level 2, 3, and 4 surveys for younger children and those with more complex needs were tested with a further small group of pupils. This resulted in some additional changes to wording, but the relatively small sample size means that we are unable to draw strong conclusions on the validity and reliability of these measures.

Guidance for using the measures

This section covers the next stage of launching the measures and makes recommendations on the way that the measures should be administered including the development of an online survey. It also considers opportunities, and makes recommendations, for further testing of the questionnaires.

Things to note before administering the survey

- If administering the survey in schools or across a large number of branches, it is recommended that schools/organisations nominate a 'well-being champion' who will serve as the main point of contact and head administrator of the survey for the class or local branch.
- Administrators of the survey should be fully briefed on the purpose of the survey so that they answer any questions that the young people may have about taking part. Young people could be given a named contact—ideally the well-being champion—who they can contact if they have concerns about the survey.
- Wherever possible, pupils should complete the questionnaire by themselves. If pupils require support to complete the questionnaire, staff or volunteers should ensure that they do not influence the young person's response.
- Survey users should give regard to the need for privacy while young people complete the questionnaire. During the consultation with staff, pupils and parents, there was a strong feeling that the anonymity of the questionnaire was important to consider. This anonymity can still be achieved by using a set of unique identity codes to confidentially link individual respondents to their surveys, thus avoiding the need to collect the personal details of respondents on their answer sheets. This will ensure that respondents can fill out the survey in confidence while still retaining the value of being able to link the surveys to other data that may be available to assess how well-being varies across cohorts, classes etc. The organisation's anonymity and confidentiality policies should be followed in this regard.
- The well-being surveys touch on personal issues and it was decided that all the questionnaires should include a section where pupils could add additional comments and ask for a conversation with a member of staff about issues raised.

Introducing the survey to pupils

- If using a unique ID to confidentially link individual surveys to individual respondents, it is important to ensure that the right questionnaire is given to the right young person.
- Let the young person know why you are surveying them; ie, that you would like to know more about how the support you give helps them, and to understand whether their well-being changes over time.
- Let them know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions and that we want them to be completely honest and to think about their life as it is now.
- Let them know that their answers will not be shown to anyone your organisation, and their names will not appear with their answers when these are analysed. They should be permitted to skip any question they do not want to answer, and to stop at any time.

While students are filling out the survey

- The survey has been designed for young people to complete by themselves. It should take around 15 minutes for a young person to complete.
- If a pupil needs assistance to finish the survey, please feel free to provide support—for example, by reading out the questions and possible responses. Try not to influence the way they respond—emphasise again that there are no right or wrong answers to any questions and check that they feel comfortable answering honestly.

- Some young people may want privacy while completing the questionnaire. Allow pupils to complete the questionnaire where they will not be overlooked or during a one-to-one support session, rather than an open classroom.

After the questionnaire is complete

Because the questionnaire asks young people about potentially sensitive topics, it is important to ensure that they have the opportunity to speak to a staff member about anything the survey addresses. If any young people request to speak to a staff member, you should make a note of the young person's request and make sure that they have the opportunity to discuss the survey in private.

Next steps

As described above, the testing of the questionnaires was limited by time constraints and the pilot's sample size. In the appendices, we have included copies of the Level 1 and Level 2 surveys for your own use. We are, however, unable to share copies of the Level 3 and Level 4 surveys because of copyright restrictions on the images used. We therefore hope that others take the opportunity to build on our work by further testing these measures and sharing their experiences of using these surveys with us.

To share your findings with us, please contact Laura Finch, NPC's Well-being Measure Manager
laura.finch@thinkNPC.org

Appendix 1

LEVEL ONE

About you

- Here are some questions about you
- This is not a test
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Be as honest as you can
- Only tick one circle for each question



1. How old are you?

2. I am a ...

Boy



Girl



3. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

I am proud of myself

I worry a lot

I have a lot of fun

I feel alone

I feel pleased with myself

4. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

Lots of things about me are good

I feel happy

I will reach my goals

I am a cheerful person

5. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

At home I am treated fairly

Everyone gets along well together at home

I enjoy myself with my friends

My friends don't respect me

My friends will help me if I need it

I feel safe online

6. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

I like being in school

I wish I didn't have to go to school

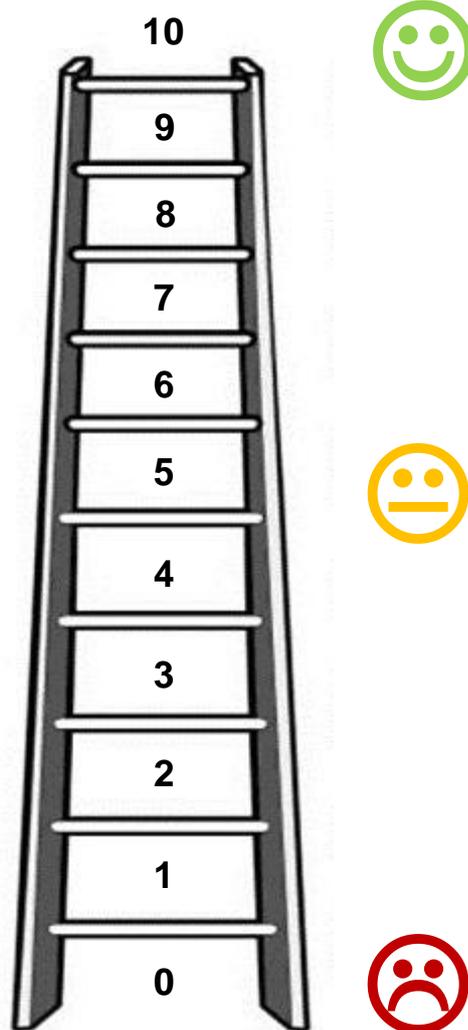
I feel safe at school

School is interesting

I feel like I fit in at school

7. How happy are you with your life at the moment?

Please circle the number.



Is there anything else you would like to say?

If you want to talk to someone about this survey, please tick this circle.

If yes, please write the name of the staff member you would like to speak to here:

**Thank you for your help with this study.
Please give the survey back to your teacher.**

Appendix 2

LEVEL TWO

About you

- Here are some questions about you
- This is not a test
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Be as honest as you can
- Tick one circle for each question



1. How old are you?

2. I am a ...

Boy



Girl



3. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a
lot



Yes, a
bit



Not
sure



No, not
much



No, not
at all

I am proud of myself

I worry a lot

I have a lot of fun

4. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

Lots of things about me are good

I feel pleased with myself

I am a cheerful person

5. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

At home I am treated fairly

Everyone gets along well together at home

I enjoy myself with my friends

My friends will help me if I need it

6. How much do you agree with each sentence?



Yes, a lot



Yes, a bit



Not sure



No, not much



No, not at all

I like being in school

I feel safe at school

I feel like I fit in at school

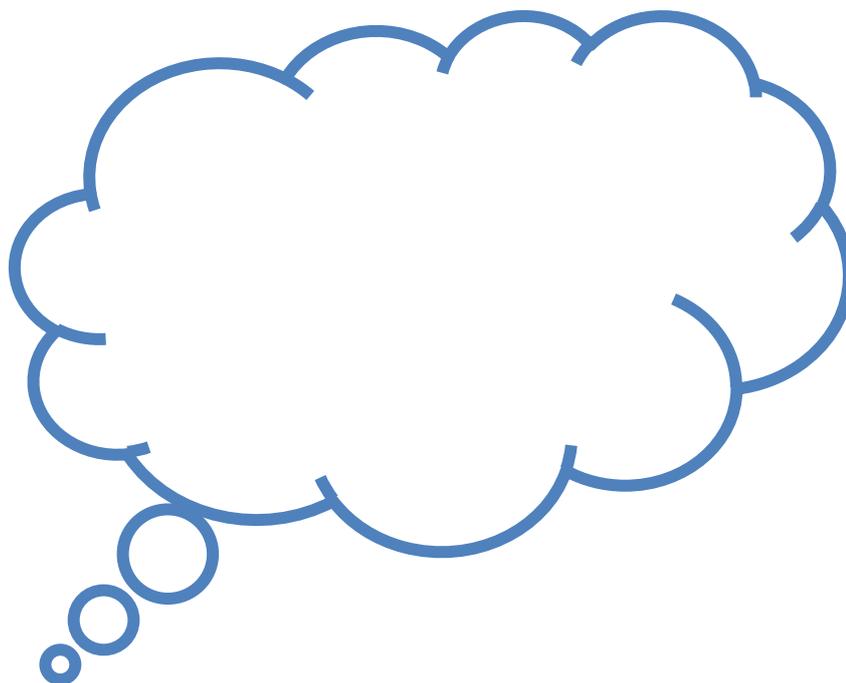
7. How happy are you?

Please circle the number.

A vertical ladder-shaped scale with 11 rungs, numbered 0 to 10 from bottom to top. To the right of the rungs are three smiley face icons: a green happy face at the top, a yellow neutral face in the middle, and a red sad face at the bottom. The ladder is drawn with black outlines and grey shading on the sides.

10	😊
9	
8	
7	
6	
5	😐
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	😞

8. Is there anything else you would like to say?



If you want to talk to someone about this survey, please tick this circle.

If yes, please write the name of the staff member you would like to speak to here:

**Thank you for your help with this study.
Please give the survey back to your teacher.**

References

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- ¹ Office of National Statistics, (2010) *Measuring Subjective Wellbeing in the UK*
- ² Well-being Measure website: <http://www.well-beingmeasure.com/the-national-baseline>
- ³ Finch, L., *et al* (2014), *Measure what you treasure*. New Philanthropy Capital, p. 6

TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: NPC's mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve their vision.

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