



# Not making the grade: why our approach to mental health at secondary school is failing young people

## Summary

As a young person struggling with your mental health, learning and taking part in school life can be really hard. What you want is for someone to listen to you, understand what is happening in your life and help you get the support you need. Mind's inquiry into mental health and secondary education in England has found that this often isn't happening.

## What we did

- Between September 2020 and April 2021 we researched the experiences of young people aged 11-25 in England affected by mental health problems at secondary school.
- We heard from over 2800 young people, parents, school staff and mental health professionals.
- We have published a report – [Not making the grade](#) – which makes recommendations for secondary schools and the UK Government on improving support for young people experiencing mental health problems.

## What we found

Young people's education is being damaged because they can't access good mental health support

- Almost all (96 per cent) of 1271 young people surveyed across England, reported that their mental health had affected their schoolwork at some point.

“It almost felt like you couldn't let anyone else know that you were seeing the school counsellor for fear of embarrassment.”

**Young person**



## Young people's mental health problems get treated as bad behaviour

- Almost half (48%) of young people told us they had been punished at school for behaviour that was caused by their mental health problems.
- One in four school staff (25%) said that they were aware of a young person being excluded from school because of their mental health.

## Racism in schools is impacting the mental health of young people

- Over half of young people from Black and Black British backgrounds (55%) and mixed ethnic backgrounds (57%) had experienced racism at school, as had over a third (36%) of young people from Asian or Asian British backgrounds.
- Almost six in ten (59%) school staff were aware of young people experiencing racism at school and almost half (47%) said it had affected the mental health of those who experienced it.
- The majority (70%) of young people who experienced racism in school told us that their experience had impacted their wellbeing.

## Recommendations

- **Provide mental health support that meets young people's needs.** Everyone aged 11-25 should be able to access [early mental health support](#), without an appointment or a referral, in their local area.
- **Tackle racism in secondary schools.** There must be a legal duty for schools to report on racist incidents.
- **Make it easier for young people to get help from NHS mental health services.**  
Everyone involved in providing NHS mental health services should work together to make it easier for young people to access mental health care.
- **Stop treating mental health problems as bad behaviour.**  
Schools should be banned from putting young people in isolation as a punishment. All teaching staff should take action to understand the causes of young people's behaviour.

## Getting support

We're here if you need us for support and advice. We help everyone understand mental health problems, so no one has to feel alone. Find out more [here](#).