

Thanks to the media and the likes of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, the state of our children's health has become an emotive issue. Indeed the current generation of young people are predicted to be the first in history with a lower life expectancy than their parents.

The state of our health is related not only to our long-term physical well-being but also to emotional and social factors – our general happiness, confidence and outlook on life. There is also a clear relationship between health and educational attainment. Poor health deters educational success and educational achievement strongly affects social and economic prospects, and choices about health.

Recent data (2002) relating to the health and health-related behaviour of schoolchildren aged 11–15 years in England found:

- One in three (33%) report feeling low each week.
- Over half of students (56%) do not meet the recommended level of physical activity for at least an hour a day, five days a week.
- Under three in ten students (27%) eat fruit or vegetables daily.
- 16% of students are smokers. Girls are more likely than boys to smoke and the prevalence of smoking increases with age so that by the age of 15, 34% of girls and 28% of boys smoke.
- One in three students (34%) have been bullied at least once in the past couple of months.

### Healthy Living and schools



In order to be healthy, children and young people ideally need a family, a home, a school, some friends, somewhere to play, a future and access to treatment and support services. Schools play a significant role in delivering these outcomes. It has been estimated that children spend on average 15,000 hours at school. School years are an impressionable period in the lives of young people and most pupils will, at some stage, be subjected to a range of social pressures that may affect their health, from bullying and the stress of exams to peer pressure and experimenting with smoking or drugs.

Schools are key to promoting the health and well-being of young people and the wider community in the following ways. They can:

- Provide pupils with structure and consistency and opportunities for social engagement.

- Provide emotional support and create a supportive, safe environment that will give pupils the confidence to learn.
- Actively promote health through the curriculum and in the way the school is managed both in its culture and ethos.
- Influence the quality of the meals served within the canteen and provide healthier options for pupils through tuck shops or vending machines.
- Encourage pupils and staff to be more physically active both in and out of school.
- Help equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and attitudes which provide springboards to future long-term health.

**Further information**

The Case Studies section provides details of how Eco-Schools promote a healthy lifestyle. Also visit the National Initiatives section which highlights how Eco-Schools dovetails with Healthy Schools and Every Child Matters, embodying the principles of caring for oneself, caring for others and caring for the environment. The Links and Resources section includes details of a range of organisations that can offer your school help on healthy lifestyle issues.