



# The Evidence Base and Rationale for Compassion Matters

This document outlines the research, educational, economic and social rationale for the Dalai Lama Centre for Compassion's Compassion Matters educational outreach project. The information collected in this paper is the combined effort of many of the DLCC's staff and fellows. We are incredibly grateful for their time and dedications to ensuring that the project has a firm evidence base from which to build our project.

Following the piloting of the project in the 2017-18 academic year followed by a UK launch in September 2018, the project team have commissioned an external piece of research to assess the impact of the project in four key areas:

- Mental health & well-being of Children
- Socio-emotional learning of Children
- Academic development, engagement and attainment
- Socio-economic impact

The evaluation will take place between January 2019- April 2019 with a completed report published in May 2019. The report will be made available via the Compassion Matters website.

## Children's health, wellbeing and personal development

Pupils in modern schools receive little guidance on how to reflect on ethical issues and to develop moral virtues. This problem is especially acute in the UK. At the same time, children in the UK are reported to have unusually low wellbeing and mental health, described by [UNICEF](#) as 'unhappy materialists' due to an overemphasis on material goods as a source of wellbeing.

Children and young people in the UK are under unprecedented pressure to achieve good academic results while coping with considerable social and emotional demands. There is now tangible, credible research as to the scale of the problems faced by young people:

- In written evidence to the parliamentary Health Select Committee, Public Health England stated that 30% of English adolescents report sub-clinical mental health.
- 1 in 10 children have a diagnosable mental health disorder – that's roughly three children in every classroom



- Half of all mental health problems manifest by the age of 14, with 75% by age 24

Mental health issues ranging from stress and anxiety to depression, eating disorders and self-harming and even suicide. The average waiting time for the first appointment with CAMHS is six months and nearly ten months until the start of treatment.

The social pressures of adolescence today are driven by the inexorable progress of technology and social media. Exposure to inappropriate material, privacy, online security, bullying, trolling and the pressure of being 'liked' – can all affect the mental health and well-being of a young person.

Exploring positive aspects of mental health and moral challenges that children and young people will face in their lives via ethical education can potentially build a base from which children will become more resilient, make more positive decisions and challenge harmful norms and values.

Compassion Matters seeks to contribute to the broader need for engaging young people in mental health-focused interventions by delivering resources that focus on exploring fundamental values that will form an essential part of their future personal development. By developing a greater knowledge of the areas such as happiness, courage and compassion children will approach these areas of their life with a realistic expectation and strategies for how to positively achieve their potential in these value.

Compassion Matters also hopes that by working with younger students it can contribute to the development of attributes of positive mental health by enabling young people to form positive foundational skills related to socio-emotional learning (see section.4). This base will serve as an essential step towards developing SEL competencies during children's teenage years and early adulthood.



## **Government education policy, curriculum and Ofsted**

Ofsted's recent press release in (11<sup>th</sup> October 2018) outlines a change to school assessment with more focus on and a specific grading of child personal development provision provided by schools. Compassion Matters offers a ready-made solution for fulfilling this requirement. CM's learning materials teach students about moral and ethical concepts and through their exploration enhances individual and community well-being. Contents are current and enable teachers to access up to date learning resources developed by leading thinkers in their field. Using CM materials will complement existing personal development resources such as

mindfulness or philosophy for schools further strengthening schools ability to achieve top Ofsted ratings in personal development.

CM is timely for two further reasons. First, under the Education Act (2002) and Independent School Regulations (2010) UK school must provide spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Pupils in UK schools receive little guidance on how to reflect on ethical issues and to develop moral virtues. At the same time, children in the UK are reported to have unusually low wellbeing and mental health and are described by UNICEF as ‘unhappy materialists’ due to an overemphasis on material goods as a source of well-being.

Government policy on wellbeing sees mental and physical wellbeing as essential factors in academic and personal development. Compassion Matters can contribute to all three of these areas by supporting the development of academic skills, enabling children to explore critical personal values and concepts while contributing to the overall wellbeing of an individual as part of multi-intervention programmes in schools and beyond.

## UK ethics and philosophy curriculum

Official curricula in the UK do not provide for ethical education in schools. As a result, pupils are offered little guidance in reflecting on ethical issues, and in developing moral virtues. Traditional approaches to ethical education combined moral philosophy and character development with religious instruction. This approach is not feasible in most classes today, which must apply to pupils of any faith or none.

Two major non-curricular initiatives have taken steps to counteract the lack of ethical education in UK schools: character education and philosophy for children (P4C). The leading representatives of these initiatives are the Jubilee Centre for Character and Education, and the Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education. These organisations carry out excellent work providing ethical education for children. However, they currently reach only a small minority (a maximum of 10%) of pupils in the UK. Furthermore, these initiatives each cover one side of ethical education only. There remains a clear need for educational resources and teacher/facilitator training that combines moral philosophy and ethics.

Compassion Matters project will meet this need by making resources for a publicly available; delivering accessible resources enabling classroom teachers to provide the materials to thousands of children, and supporting a community dedicated to ethical education. The project will, therefore, equip children to develop moral virtues, and to reflect seriously on the most profound questions about human nature and to flourish; it will empower teachers and facilitators to deliver these skills. By removing the need for a facilitator, the project is genuinely scalable to communities across the UK.



## The case for socio-emotional learning (SEL) interventions

Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process of acquiring core competencies to recognise and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively. The proximal goals of SEL programs are to foster the development of five inter-related sets of cognitive, effective, and behavioural competencies:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision making

*(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005).*

Current findings document that SEL programs yielded significant positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. They also enhanced students' behavioural adjustment in the form of increased prosocial behaviours and reduced conduct and internalising problems and improved academic performance on achievement tests and grades. While gains in these areas were reduced in magnitude during follow-up assessments and only a small percentage of studies collected follow-up information, effects nevertheless remained statistically significant for a minimum of six months after the intervention. Collectively, these results build on positive results reported by other research teams that have conducted related reviews examining the promotion of youth development or the prevention of negative behaviors (Catalano et al., 2002; Greenberg et al., 2001; Hahn et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2001; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

On average, SEL interventions have an identifiable and valuable impact on attitudes to learning and social relationships in school. They also have an overall average effect of four months' additional progress on attainment (EEF Foundation Report into the impact of SEL). An analysis of over 200 Social and Emotional Learning programmes by Durlak et al. (2011) demonstrated improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour and an 11% improvement in academic achievement.

Socioemotional learning interventions have been found to have a profound impact on the short-term and long-term academic attainment of pupils participating in projects. In a large-

scale study by CASEL (Centre for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) in 2011, 213 SEL projects involving over 200,000 children from kindergarten to high schools were analysed to explore the impact on academic attainment as well as socio-emotional learning.

When the research was followed up in 2017 researchers found that the interventions continued to have a significant impact between six months and 18 years after the end of the intervention.

- 3.5 years after the last intervention the academic performance of students exposed to SEL programs was an average 13 percentile points higher than their non-SEL peers, based on the eight studies that measured academic performance. “Although based on only eight studies, these long-term academic outcomes are notable,” the research said.
- At other follow-up periods, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use were all significantly lower for students exposed to SEL programs, and development of social and emotional skills and positive attitudes toward self, others, and school was higher.

Another important finding of the current meta-analysis is that classroom teachers and other school staff effectively conducted SEL programs. This result suggests that these interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practices and do not require outside personnel for their effective delivery.

In the UK high profile research has been undertaken by the Education Endowment Foundation on behalf of the Department for Education since 2011. This work led to the creation of The ‘SPECTRUM’: Social, Psychological, Emotional, Concepts of self, and Resilience: Understanding and Measurement project which includes evaluative frameworks and reviews of best practice in socio-emotional learning. On average, SEL interventions have an identifiable and valuable impact on attitudes to learning and social relationships in school. They also have an overall average effect of four months’ additional progress on attainment.

EEF research has found that SEL interventions are almost always perceived to improve emotional or attitudinal outcomes, not all interventions are equally effective at raising attainment. Improvements appear more likely when SEL approaches are embedded into routine educational practices and supported by professional development and training for staff. Also, the implementation of the programme and the degree to which teachers are committed to the approach appear to be important. SEL programmes seem to be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged or low-attaining pupils. SEL approaches have been found to be effective in primary and secondary schools, and early years settings.

## The case of philosophy and ethics education

Twenty major studies have had consistently positive results of teaching philosophy and ethics to children including marked improvements in cognitive abilities, academic outcomes, deliberative sophistication and classroom engagement. Teaching philosophy and ethics can have a profound impact on learning skills and attainment demonstrated during the Philosophy for Children (P4C) pilots studies conducted by the EEF.

- There is evidence that P4C had a positive impact on Key Stage 2 attainment. Overall, pupils using the approach made approximately two additional months' progress in reading and maths.
- Results suggest that P4C had the most significant positive impact on Key Stage 2 results among disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for free school meals).

However, teaching philosophy and ethics as a way of promoting a traditional mode of education or for the sake of promoting philosophy or ethics as a subject is not the primary aim of the DLCC or Compassion Matters. From the outset, the intention of our educational outreach projects focused has been for ethics to be the method for young people to develop skills to serve themselves and society in the future better. The DLCC and CM are motivated by a desire to see young people flourish into adults who can put fundamental human values, such as compassion, at the centre of the personal and professional lives.

In an important study, Keith Topping and Steve Trickey (2007) found that children display a marked gain in cognitive abilities, reasoning, discussion, communication and confidence, all transferable skills. The skills focus on in the moral reasoning approach are straightforwardly teachable. First, there is no controversy over whether these skills can be taught in the first place. Secondly, there exists a long and proven tradition of teaching them, as supported by studies like Topping and Trickey's (2007).

A danger of formal ethical instruction is that it will be dogmatic or even manipulative. This danger is especially great for ethical instruction that adheres to what UNESCO describes as the 'patrimonial paradigm'. The moral reason approach entirely avoids this danger. By focussing on pupil's development as autonomous ethical reasoners, this approach is resolutely undogmatic and respectful of pupils' autonomy.

Compassion Matters can successfully implement secular ethics and more philosophy interventions that avoid the dogma associated with certain modes of teaching ethics. By drawing and synthesising content from a wide range of traditions, beliefs and cultures a pan societal approach to teaching ethics can be achieved.



## Current affairs, media and politics

Fundamental concepts related to the aims of the Compassion Matters project have been prevalent discussions in education over the past ten years including; resilience, character, emotional intelligence and moral philosophy, virtues and values. The desire for teachers, parents and educationalists to see children develop these skills has come at least partly in response to a narrowing of the national curriculum, and outcomes-focused assessment method for schools introduced by the department for education since 2010.

The department for education funded paper 'Developing character skills in schools'(2017) found that 97% of schools wanted to engage with values-based education initiatives to support their pupil's personal development. However, the majority of schools use a school-wide, cross-curricular approach with no specific time in the curriculum dedicated to exploring this area. Few schools had a formal plan for promoting values or character education (17%) and less than a 25% in the study had a member of staff leading this area within the school. The report also highlights a lack of time, knowledge and funding for values focused provision. Compassion Matters is well placed to meet schools desire to focus on character and values education by providing cost-effective and accessible materials that teachers with no expertise in this specific area of education can engage with. We also support the teaching of specific values focused lessons as part of a cross-curricular and school-wide approach to supporting the development of positive values and related skills.

The rise of the academy and free schools and their ability to move away from the national curriculum has led to the adoption of interventions to support students acquisition of socioemotional learning skills including projects such as Philosophy for school (P4C), forest schools and mindfulness in schools. These interventions were originally almost exclusively focused on secondary educations where the need to respond to increased student disillusionment, skills gaps and mental wellbeing deficit led to leaders seeking proven methods of supporting this area of learning. However, primary and early years interventions have followed with interventions such as forest schools and outdoor learning a core element of primary and early years educations. This is partly due to the higher level of flexibility that previously existed in the KS1/2 curriculum and the response to leading educational research pointing to the importance of earlier interventions to enable academic success in the long term especially with socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged children (Sammons, P et al. 2008).

Compassion has been a prominent focus in other areas of society including politics where Lord Dubs recently launched a scheme, Compassion in Politics (<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/oct/18/lord-dubs-to-launch-compassion-in-politics-cross-party-campaign>). The promotion of a Charter for Compassion by leading author Karen Armstrong (<https://charterforcompassion.org/>). The adoption of mindfulness-based

interventions by many adults, children and media personalities leading to a greater exploration of values and philosophy related to meditative practice.

## The economic case for ethics and moral philosophy projects as a part of SEL

A 2015 study by researchers at Columbia University (Bellfield et al. 2015) found that the measurable benefits of SEL exceed the costs, often by considerable amounts. The aggregate result of the analysis showed an average benefit-cost ratio of about 11 to 1 among the six evidence-based SEL interventions studied. This means that, on average, for every \$1 invested in SEL programming, there is a return of \$11.

*“Each of the interventions showed measurable benefits that notably outweighed costs, with an average cost-benefit ratio of about 11 to 1.”*

(Bellfield et al., 2015, p. 5).

In the Early Intervention Foundations, 2005 UK government reports ‘*Social-emotional learning: skills for life and work*’, the foundation highlight £17 billion currently spent on services to support young adults and teens in mental health, education, social welfare and employment. The report poses that this total could be reduced by effective socio-emotional learning programmes. Evidence has shown that these interventions contribute positively to building a foundation of skills such as self-awareness, self-control and relationship skills. The report goes on to report that compared to cognitive abilities, socio-emotional learning matters as much for labour and employment, health and welfare and is more critical to long-term mental wellbeing.

*“A paradigm shift in education that places a stronger investment in social and emotional learning will be important in creating productive, equitable and socially cohesive societies and economic growth.”*

(Levin, 2012, p. 279).

The impact of improving employability skills in schools could be significant, not just for individual pupils but the whole economy – according to a CBI-backed study; such skills could make a £109bn contribution to the UK economy over the next five years. Several studies already mentioned have pointed to the importance of skills such as relationship management,

self-awareness, self-regulation are crucial within a current and future employment environment.

A report from the World Economic Forum published this year outlined skills required for the future of work. The reports focused on the idea of a 'fourth industrial revolution's' impact on employment and skills.

*By one popular estimate, 65% of children entering primary schools today will ultimately work in new job types and functions that currently don't yet exist. Technological trends such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution will create many new cross-functional roles for which employees will need both technical and social and analytical skills.*

(WEF report 2018)

The report poses that rather than a focus on industry and specific skills related to working young people need a curriculum which supports the development of a wider set of analytics and socio-emotional skills for a future workplace. Socioemotional projects such as Compassion Matters can create these learning opportunities for children making them ready for the challenges of a future economy.

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