

Our children do not need more 'grit'. They need a gover...

h.org.uk/Blog/2025/05/16/our-children-do-not-need-more-grit-they-need-a-governmmment-that-unde

Published: January 12, 2026, 8:02 pm

The [Telegraph has an article this morning](#) that features the combined thoughts of Health Secretary Wes Streeting and Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, who are noted as saying, whilst announcing a new initiative to support the mental health of children in school:

By deploying NHS-led, evidence-based intervention during children's formative years, we will not only halt the spiral towards crisis but cultivate much-needed grit amongst the next generation – essential for academic success and life beyond school, with all its ups and downs.

As the Telegraph then notes:

More than a fifth of eight to 16-year-olds had a probable mental health problem in 2023, according to the latest NHS data, an increase of seven percentage points since 2017.

As explanation of what is happening, they said:

Deteriorating mental health is driving record school absences, Department for Education data published last week showed, with the knock-on effects having an influence on pupils through to adulthood.

Under the government drive to improve mental health in schools, children will be offered sessions to “tackle anxiety and low mood”, with struggling schools receiving extra support through “attendance and behaviour hubs”.

The classroom interventions mark Labour's latest effort to crack down on worklessness, which in part has been fuelled by a surge in mental health problems since the pandemic.

There is no mention here, or in what Streeting and Phillipson have to say in their commentary, which shares the same link, that suggests that they realise that the issues

they are supposedly trying to address might come as a result of:

* Poverty. 31% of all children in the UK live in poverty. Solve that, and you might solve most of the mental health conditions many children face.

* Poor diet. In another [noted:](#)

How Hartlepool compares		
Overweight (incl. obesity)	Hartlepool	England
Adults	77.2%	64.5%
Reception pupils (4-5 years)	27.9%	22.1%
Year 6 pupils (10-11 years)	41.6%	35.8%
Obesity (incl. severe obesity)	Hartlepool	England
Adults	37.9%	26.5%
Reception pupils (4-5 years)	13.9%	9.6%
Year 6 pupils (10-11 years)	26.7%	22.1%

Source: Telegraph Analysis of data from the Department of Health and Social Care

* As is apparent, as a poor area, Hartlepool has a massive obesity problem, but so too does the UK as a whole. Poor mental health might well be fuelled by excessive sugar in diets, creating the inability to engage in school. Prioritise wholefoods throughout education, as Japan does, and obesity will tumble, and I strongly suspect mental ill health will as well, whilst attainment rates will rise.

* The reality of neurodivergence, whether that be autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia or any other related condition. Up to 14% of children might, based on the latest data, have these, and in an education system that tries to force these square pegs into round holes, of course there is education system-generated mental ill-health. The system, and not the children, has to change to alter this. There is no hint of recognition of that.

* When children are taught what appears to be meaningless to them in a world without hope, in which they see their parents living and to which neoliberalism has consigned them, of course, they have mental health issues, as well as major problems engaging with materials that appear almost irrelevant to them. It still seems that schools suffer the same problem as many university teachers do, which is in explaining why it is important to master some subjects, as a prerequisite to securing the attention of young people in learning them. I very much doubt that either Streeting or Phillipson come remotely near to understanding this.

And what is the solution these two neoliberal wannabe success stories have to offer? It is to deliver more 'grit'. Apparently, what our children lack is the determination to succeed in the face of all the adversity that a society that is stacked against them, as they can see in their parents' lived experience, puts in their way. What they need is the 'grit' to overcome them.

My suggestion is quite different. Why don't we stop stacking adversity in these

children's paths?

Why don't we redistribute income and wealth?

Why don't we create social housing for people to live in with dignity?

Why can't we improve social, health, education and other services in these areas - because most of the wealth of mostly local economies is based on the wealth that the people living in them create for each other, and that requires the catalyst of government investment in places like those that need most support to tackle mental health crises created by social adversity?

Why is it impossible to create jobs using local energy, [as I described yesterday?](#)

But why, most of all, do we have a government that refuses to understand the reality of life, and not least that one in seven will always be neurodivergent and suffering stress in a system that refuses to even recognise who they are?

Are Labour politicians really stupid enough not to get this? It seems they might be.