



# **Year 6**

## **Wellbeing for**

### **SATs**

**How to Support Children  
Throughout KS2 SATs:  
Mental Health & Wellbeing  
Positive Approach**

# Contents

<b>Teachers and School Leaders Guide</b> .....	2
<b>Why wellbeing is particularly important in Year 6</b> .....	2
<b>Culture</b> .....	3
<b>Language</b> .....	4
<b>Environment</b> .....	4
<b>Creative approaches to learning</b> .....	4
<b>When should we worry about a child?</b> .....	5
<b>What should we do?</b> .....	5
<b>Spring and Summer Term before SATs</b> .....	6
<b>Summer Term SATs Week</b> .....	6
<b>After SATs</b> .....	7
<b>Parents and Carers Guide</b> .....	8
<b>Why Year 6 wellbeing for SATs is important</b> .....	8
<b>Keep talking</b> .....	8
<b>What can I do as a parent / carer?</b> .....	8
<b>Remember this about SATs</b> .....	9
<b>What should I do if I'm worried about my child?</b> .....	9
<b>Quick Steps</b> .....	10
<b>How can schools promote positive mental health?</b> .....	11
<b>Identifying the causes of primary school stress</b> .....	11
<b>What are the signs?</b> .....	11
<b>How to tackle stress during the lead-up to exam week</b> .....	12
<b>Managing stress during SATs week</b> .....	13
<b>Managing Post-SATs Stress</b> .....	14



# Teachers and School Leaders Guide

## Year 6 Wellbeing for SATs

Included within this resource is a 2-page Parents and Carers Guide, as well as a Quick Steps Guide for shorter reading.

### Why wellbeing is particularly important in Year 6

It is widely understood that positive health and wellbeing – including mental health – contribute to a child’s ability to **learn, grow, achieve** and **flourish**. Equipping children with the skills to enhance their resilience against adversity will enable them to navigate challenges without compromising performance.

The post pandemic years have been challenging for everyone, primary school children included. Lack of stability has caused many pupils to experience a loss of confidence and increased anxiety, particularly when it comes to maths and exams.

The phrase “Key Stage 2 SATs” can be a trigger for stress in teachers, parents and children all over the country. Opinion is divided over these National Assessments but it is still vital that Year 6 pupils are able to navigate SATs season without experiencing undue stress or anxiety.

### How do we do this?

It starts with a whole school approach to mental and emotional wellbeing, from Early Years right through to Year 6. This doesn’t mean talking about SATs from Reception, but rather teaching positive coping skills on how to communicate how you feel and how to manage when you encounter something difficult or upsetting.

By making space to talk about these things not only gives children ‘permission’ to express how they feel, but helps them to understand that emotions are global experiences common to everyone, which helps counter worries of being ‘different’ or ‘ashamed’.

# Culture

## Start with the staff team!

Children are very perceptive and detect when morale is low or their teaching staff are stressed, unhappy or worried. Emotionally well staff are more likely to instil confidence and reassurance in pupils and create a positive environment in which to learn.

## Look after yourself and your colleagues

- Make sure you take regular breaks.
- Work as little as necessary in school holidays.
- Rely on the support of your colleagues.
- Lead by example if you are in a senior position and model what you expect from the children.

## Consider alternative, less academic homework

- Encourage outdoor activities.
- Give your class a creative task such as creating an instrument from recyclables.
- Practise songs or making props for the End of Year Performance.
- Ask the children to keep a diary of what makes them laugh or a feelings log.
- Task them with doing undetected acts of kindness.
- Give pupils the time to rest.

## Remember the children who are looking forward to SATs!

They do exist! These children thrive on challenge, need additional stimulation and *want* to do extra work. It's important to provide suitable tasks for them.

## Be visible

- Display posters informing pupils who to talk to if they are worried.
- Create spaces in class and in assemblies to talk about emotions and how to cope.

## Encourage peer support

Buddy systems or peer pals can be incredibly effective at reaching children, and may help prevent bullying or loneliness at school. Sometimes the least confident children will thrive at being given an opportunity to support others. If ongoing peer groups are not in place in school, consider introducing a fixed-term group.

## Language

The language we use to communicate with children about SATs can have a powerful impact on how they're perceived. SATs are an indicator they do not award a pass or fail outcome.

The concept of 'passing' or 'failing' SATs is quite hard to digest and communicates that there are only two possible outcomes. No child likes to fail, and having a fear of failure may actually discourage them from engaging, rather than inspiring them to work hard to do well.

- **Emphasise** that everyone will get different results, as it's an individual experience.
- **Frame** SATs as assessments to see how much has been learnt at primary school – this also takes away the emphasis that it's only their Year 6 teaching and learning that counts.
- **Talk** them through techniques to enhance their senses - immediately after the lunch break is usually a good time.

## Environment

Children and primary schools are often a noisy combination, and so exam conditions can be incredibly alien at this age. Children are suddenly being asked to sit for prolonged periods in total silence, with no external stimulation from others. If they're used to concentrating with a backdrop of noise and movement then they're unlikely to produce their best work in silence.

- **Teach** children how to manage silence, prepare them for the exam hall, and equip them with the skills to remain calm.
- **Create** times and spaces that are tranquil and technology free.
- **Start** early. Not by mimicking exam conditions, but by having quiet times of day when talking and movement are kept to a minimum.
- **Introduce** mindfulness techniques and encourage the children to practice mindfulness at bedtime or when they feel worried. (See the Mindfulness in Schools Project website.)

## Creative approaches to learning

The children will know that SATs are on the horizon and it's possible to teach them all they need to know without constant reminders. The more children hear the 'SATs' word, the more likely they are to develop anxiety around having to do them.

- **Avoid** talking about SATs until mid-Spring Term – you're still teaching them what they need to know.
- **Maintain** a normal timetable. To reduce the range of lessons and focus almost exclusively on Maths and English purely for SATs reasons, not only gets boring for you, but it won't inspire the children. Instead, try a more cross-curricular approach, incorporating SATs learning into other topics.
- **Consider** running a homework club after school once a week for children who want a space to continue their studies. Not every child will have their own space at home to prepare.
- **Share** children's own ideas on learning techniques. Some children may have incredibly creative ways to remember facts and the children who are able to devise their own plan are more likely to stick to it.

# When should we worry about a child?

It would be unnatural for SATs not to induce a certain degree of anxiety. However, rather than being concerned about this, see it as an opportunity to instil resilience in the children, teaching them to manage (rather than avoid) it.

**There is, of course, a tipping point.**

**SATs should not:**

- affect a child's appetite
- affect a child's ability to sleep
- alter a child's personality
- induce panic, tears or disengagement from lessons
- be a reason not to attend school

If any of the above are evident, then SATs may be causing an excessive degree of emotional distress and the child in question may benefit from some intervention.

Again, this isn't about removing the stressor, but rather equipping the child to cope with the situation. The children undertaking these assessments are aged just 10-11 years old, so while it's important they go through the process, it's absolutely crucial they do so with the minimum of distress.

# What should we do?

## Talk to the family

It is important to get a snapshot of what may be happening at home. Ensure parents understand the reasons for SATs and can appreciate the child's perspective. This can help eliminate any negative attitudes the child may have picked up on outside of school. It's no secret some parents have been quite vocal on social media in the past and while you might not be able to prevent negative comments, you may be able to lessen the impact.

## Understand what aspect of SATs concerns the child

Identify the fear and take steps from there. Is it the environment? Is it the unknown of the SATs papers? Is it the prospect of failure? If so, reinforce that SATs performance does not define what they are capable of achieving later in life.

## Check that the children fully understand the purpose of SATs

When Third Space Learning researched children's responses, some children commented that they didn't want to disappoint their teachers; 'My teacher said ..... I didn't want to let them down'. Make sure you haven't projected any of your own anxieties about SATs on to the children.

## Will the child benefit from additional support during SATs?

Support can be as simple as having a familiar adult nearby, or maybe completing the papers in a room with fewer students. More formal arrangements are explained in the DFE Access Arrangements for SATs.

## Spring and Summer Term before SATs

- **Model** positivity about SATs – if the children can see how much you may be dreading SATs, they're going to follow suit.
- **Be clear** about what will happen. Ensure each child knows where they'll be completing their SATs and under what conditions. Make sure they know that the school may have visitors to see how the SATs are being run, and so not to be worried if there are people they don't know in the room.
- **Reassure** children that the outcome of SATs is not an indicator of what they may go on to do later in life. Emphasise this message to parents.
- **Reinforce** how proud you are of their efforts, and that effort is more important than outcome.
- **Explain** what free time they'll have after each assessment, and how the week will run – don't underestimate what an incentive this may be for some!
- **Discuss** coping strategies – what's a good thing to do if they feel anxious or worried? Why can anxiety be a good thing and how can we learn from it?
- **Acknowledge** if there's anything negative media about SATs and help them to unpick it. Children are exposed to headlines in a number of settings – from online, newspapers in the home or what they see in newsagents and supermarkets – so don't assume they're ignorant to media coverage.
- **Invite** parents to a SATs information evening and/or send written information. Make clear how you feel as a school about SATs and what you've put in place to help the children through the process.
- **Nominate** a designated member of staff to manage parental concerns and reinforce the school policy around pupil wellbeing.
- **Remind** pupils they have already taken SATs in Year 2. It is likely they will not remember, but this may ease their concerns.

## Summer Term SATs Week

- **Make** the weekend before SATs a homework/revision free time.
- **Tell** the children to rest and have fun.
- **Consider** offering a free breakfast club. Not only does this ensure that all children have had a healthy and decent amount to eat ahead of SATs, but may also provide a relaxed and fun start to the school day.
- **Play** music, games, laugh and set the mood for the day. This is a good way to make SATs week fun and help the cohort feel special.
- **Provide** down time before or after a paper that could include something physical (ideally outdoors) so the children can work off energy, be loud and let off steam. You could also do an art project for the week.
- **Suspend** assemblies. They're unlikely to add anything, and the children will just see them as something else to concentrate on.
- **Offer** praise and encouragement at every opportunity – children love to hear that you are proud of them.

## After SATs

- **Consider** letting the children have a week of fun activities including trips and sports. Let them know about this before SATs week so they feel they have something to look forward to.
- **Return** The end of SATs shouldn't mean the rest of year 6 isn't for learning. Children like routine, so create some fun projects for them to work on during the summer term that neatly wrap up what they've been studying all year, as well as continued learning.
- **Celebrate** together! Let them know how pleased you are that SATs season has come to an end for all of you.
- **Express** pride and thankfulness in writing from the Headteachers – it goes a long way and reassures them that the outcome won't necessarily reflect the effort they feel they put in.
- **Help** them to understand the results when the time comes. Getting a slip of paper saying they 'didn't meet the required standard' can be crushing for some, and will not tell the whole story. It also doesn't reflect how much hard work they'll have put in. Don't let any of the children feel that they 'failed'.
- **Ensure** parents and carers receive ample and appropriate feedback - open channels home to reassure both parents/carers and pupils.

# Parents and Carers Guide

## Year 6 Wellbeing for SATs

### Why Year 6 wellbeing for SATs is important

It is widely understood that positive health and wellbeing – including mental health – contribute to a child’s ability to learn, grow, achieve and flourish and equipping children with the skills to enhance their resilience against adversity will enable them to navigate challenges without compromising performance.

The phrase “Key Stage 2 SATs” is can be trigger for stress in teachers, parents and children all over the country. Opinion is divided over these National Assessments but it is still vital that Year 6 pupils are able to navigate SATs season without experiencing undue stress or anxiety.

### Keep talking

The most positive thing you can to contribute to your child’s wellbeing during SATS or at any time is to talk to them, reassure them, and where possible, provide a relaxed home environment.

### What can I do as a parent / carer?

- Attend any meetings the school holds about SATs.
- Direct any questions or concerns you have about SATs to your child’s teacher, rather than worry your child with them.
- Give your child opportunities to go outside and avoid overuse of screens - this can apply to leisure pursuits as well as how they study.
- Try to provide a quiet corner of the house for homework and study, that’s as free from distractions as possible.
- Encourage your child to talk to their teacher or another adult they trust if they express persisting anxieties about SATs. Remember that a small amount of anxiety is normal and not harmful.
- If your child is unwilling to talk to their teacher, talk to them yourself.
- Plan something nice and fun for the weekends before and after SATs – this will help your child start the week well and also give them something to look forward to.
- Ensure your child is eating and drinking well, and getting a suitable amount of sleep.

## Remember this about SATs

**SATs focus on what they know about Maths and English.** They won't reflect how talented they are at Science, Geography, Art or PE, and they certainly won't highlight positive personal characteristics such as kindness and integrity.

**SATs results don't always tell the whole story.** The results will say they DID or DIDN'T meet a certain standard, but not necessarily by what margin. Additionally, the thresholds tend to change each year according to overall national performance, so what was classed as 'did meet the expected standard' one year may have been considered a 'did not' in another. Your school may be able to provide you with more detailed feedback, so don't let your child see SATs as a simple case of 'pass' or 'fail'.

**SATs last for one week.** In reality, it's just one or two papers lasting 30-60 minutes each day. You can't emphasise enough the importance of keeping that in perspective.

## What should I do if I'm worried about my child?

It would be unnatural for SATs not to induce a certain degree of worry or anxiety but there is, of course, a tipping point. **SATs should not:**

- affect a child's appetite
- affect a child's ability to sleep
- alter a child's personality
- induce panic, tears or disengagement from lessons
- be a reason not to attend school

If any of the above are evident, then SATs may be causing an excessive degree of anxiety and your child may benefit from additional support. This isn't about removing the reality of SATs, but rather equipping your child to cope with the situation and be stronger for it.

### Steps to take:

- **Talk to the school.** Is your child showing the same symptoms at school as they are at home? Is there anything else going on at home which may be contributing to your child's overall level of stress? Work with the school so everyone concerned can be offering the support that's needed.
- **Spend time with your child.** Try to understand what aspect of SATs concerns them most. Is it the worry of 'failing'? Is it the worry of getting stuck on a paper? If your child can pinpoint what's bothering them most, you can take specific steps to help reassure them.
- **Try not to project your own anxieties or views.** If you don't believe in SATs, or do not think your child should be doing them, then they are likely to come to the same opinion.
- **Encourage your child to talk to their teacher.** SATs are obviously linked to school, so don't be surprised if they favour the reassurance of teachers above family members!

**Children are very resilient and with support from you and the school, most will have a very positive experience of SATs.**



# How To Support Children Throughout KS2 SATs: Mental Health & Wellbeing Activities For Children

Quick Steps



THIRD SPACE  
LEARNING

# How can schools promote positive mental health?

It starts with a whole-school approach to mental health, clear communication with pupils and parents, and specific strategies before, during, and after SATs week. Here's what you need to know.

Take a Whole-School Approach to Wellbeing Promoting positive mental health and emotional wellbeing should start in the foundation years and continue through to Year 6. This means schools should:

- Set a culture of openness about mental health and regularly communicate its importance to staff, students and parents
- Teach coping skills early on, like how to express emotions healthily and manage difficult feelings
- Involve parents and providing them with tools to support their children's wellbeing
- Ensure staff feel supported and model good self-care practices
- Train staff to identify warning signs of stress and anxiety

## Identifying the causes of primary school stress

More than ever, primary school children are feeling the stress and pressure of Year 6 SATs. In fact, the National Union of Teachers found that 76% of primary school teachers observed stress-related symptoms in pupils leading up to SATs.

Even when teachers try to reduce test pressures, the frequent mention of SATs can increase stress. Effective communication about mental health is crucial in mitigating this.

High-achieving pupils may experience stress if they do not meet their own expectations and those who struggle academically can often feel additional pressure.

## What are the signs?

- **Extreme emotional reactions to minor issues:** disproportionate responses to small mistakes.
- **Reluctance or refusal to attend school:** persistent reluctance to go to school near SATs.
- **Physical complaints:** stomach aches, headaches, and other issues.
- **Low self-esteem:** negative self-talk such as calling themselves 'stupid'.
- **Changes in daily patterns:** alterations in sleep and eating habits.
- **Avoiding schoolwork discussions:** reluctance to talk about schoolwork or SATs.

# How to tackle stress during the lead-up to exam week

## 1. Reduce stress levels over the weekend

Encourage stress-free weekends with fun activities to help children relax and reduced level of homework.

## 2. Avoid adding pressure

Reassure children you are proud of their efforts, regardless of test results. Both parents and teachers should let children know early on that whatever happens in the tests, they are proud of them.

## 3. Put SATs into perspective

Remind children that SATs are just one part of their education and do not define their worth. Reinforce they should try their best but nothing bad will happen if they don't get the results they want.

## 4. Support with revision

Support children with revision and guide how to revise content once it has been taught.

## 5. Talk about their stress and listen

Engage children in conversations about their worries and listen to their concerns. This will help them find a solution to the worry or put it into perspective. Listening to your pupil's problems can alleviate stress in the run-up to the tests.

## 6. Communicate

Parents and teachers must communicate to understand what might be causing stress in children. Behaviours in the classroom and at home can highlight what is causing the stress. Teachers and parents should communicate regularly and keep an open dialogue if children feel stressed.

## 7. Plan enjoyable activities ahead of and during SATs

Organise a fun activity the weekend before SATs to take children's minds off the imminent exams, alleviate the stress and improve wellbeing. This can continue during SATs week between exams.

## 8. Highlight their strengths

Remind children of their talents and skills that SATs do not assess. Emphasise the importance of skills in subjects SATs do not test such as history and PE as well as other skills that make your pupils great that tests do not measure such as kindness, generosity and being a good friend.

## 9. Remind them SATs are brief

SATs take place over 4 days in May. Reassure children that once the week is over, so are the tests.

## 10. Use positive language

Replace negative phrases with growth mindset language. For example, *"I can't do this"* becomes *"I am going to work hard to get better at this."* and *"I feel stupid"* becomes *"I only feel like this right now because I'm nervous about the tests."*

## 11. Discuss physical and mental signs and effects of both anxiety and stress

Children may not know how to describe what they are feeling if it's their first experience of anxiety or stress. Help them to become able to articulate their feelings and ask for help.

# Managing stress during SATs week

## 1. Host a SATs breakfast

Eating breakfast amongst peers each morning before SATs can help calm nerves and distract from the imminent exams. While this is a little extra work for staff, the positive impact on pupils is huge. A relaxed, healthy breakfast eliminates hunger during tests and also reduces bouts of nervous tummy eruptions!

## 2. Talk about stress and listen

Allocate time daily to listen to pupils' worries. Use methods such as a worry box or circle time. Address worries anonymously as a class to ensure all concerns are heard.

## 3. Encourage relaxing activities

Whether it's playing with the family dog, kicking a football around outside, or watching their favourite episode of a show, encourage pupils to spend some time each day during SATs week doing something they love.

## 4. Promote physical activities

Include physical exercise and fresh air during the day for pupils. This might include the daily mile or an extra 10-minute afternoon break in the lead-up to and during SATs week.

## 5. Maintain positivity

If children see adults remain positive during SATs week, pupils are more likely to remain positive too.

## 6. Encourage peer support

Pupils will always see eye to eye, however, it's important to encourage them to support each other, particularly during a stressful period.

Planning in circle time or extra PSHE lessons during SATs week can help pupils express their feelings and alleviate stress.

## 7. Limit screen time

Advise pupils to limit their screen time, particularly before bed. A good night's sleep will help reduce stress and help pupils feel more alert during SATs week. Consider sending letters home to parents to help with this or hold a meeting for parents about good practice during SATs week.

## 8. Arrive early to school

Holding a SATs week breakfast has benefits other than peers enjoying each other's company:

When pupils arrive early to school, they have time to relax and prepare for the coming day. Rushing through the gates at 8.29am for an 8.30am start can add to an already stressful week. Inviting pupils into class earlier helps support a calm start to the morning.

## 9. Ensure pupils are prepared

Eliminate any extra worries that you can for pupils. Ensure they have all of the equipment they need for each SATs paper laid out on the table.

## 10. Practise exam technique

During SATs week, focus on the exam technique rather than the content.

# Managing Post-SATs Stress

Some pupils may continue to worry about SATs after the tests are over. While it may be lessened, it might not be gone entirely.

Monitor pupils to ensure they aren't worrying about test performance and that they can enjoy their time before moving on to secondary school!

## 1. Remove revision items

Clear the classroom of any SATs revision resources and encourage pupils to do the same at home.

## 2. Promote relaxation and mindfulness activities

There will still be a few weeks left of school and parts of the curriculum left to learn, however, still make time for relaxing activities. This may include a post-SATs picnic in the playground, a team sport activity or mindful colouring.

## 3. Return to normal routine

Children love routines and SATs are anything but routine. Once they are over, return to as much of a normal classroom timetable as soon as possible to keep some structure within the school day.

## 5. Remind them that SATs are over

Reinforce the fact that SATs are finished and your pupils have done all they can.

Let them know that you are proud of them for sitting the tests and doing their best whatever the results are. Encourage them not to spend time thinking about them now.