**Sutton Youth Board Thursday 13th March, “Mental Health in Schools” topic**

*Speech by Kiana, aged 14, Sutton High School and Young Commissioner*

Good afternoon, everyone,

Today, I want to talk about something that affects all of us, whether we realise it or not — mental health in schools. It’s a topic that often gets overlooked or brushed aside, but it's one that deserves our full attention, especially in an environment like a school, where students are learning and growing in many aspects of their lives.

Why I’m passionate about the topic ‘Mental Health in Schools’?

Mental health in schools is a topic that I care deeply about, and my passion arises from both personal and societal reasons. I’ve seen firsthand the impact that mental health challenges can have on students, not only in their academic performance but also in their overall well-being. Schools are places of learning, growth, and development, yet many students are facing invisible battles with their mental health. This is why I’m so passionate about advocating for better mental health support in our educational system.

We often think about school as a place for academic achievement — our exams, grades, extracurricular activities and competition. But what about the students themselves? Their emotional well-being, their mental health, and their ability to cope with challenges? How often do we stop and ask: How are you *really* doing?

The reality is that mental health challenges among students are on the rise. According to the World Health Organization, one in seven adolescents worldwide experiences a mental health disorder. In schools, students are facing increasing pressure to perform academically, navigate complex social dynamics, and figure out who they are in a world that is constantly changing. Add to this the struggles that many students face at home or within their communities, and it’s no wonder that mental health issues are becoming more prevalent.

When we think about the impact of mental health on education, it’s clear. A student who is struggling with anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges is less likely to perform well academically. They may have trouble focusing, attending school regularly, or engaging in class discussions. They might feel isolated or disconnected from their peers. The emotional burden can be overwhelming, affecting every aspect of their life, not just in the classroom.

We need to involve families and communities in this effort. Mental health support doesn’t end at the school gates. Parents, guardians, and community organisations can play a crucial role in ensuring that students have a strong support network. By working together, we can create a better approach to mental health that helps students feel supported at school, at home, and in their community.

In conclusion, mental health is not just an individual issue — it’s a collective one. When we prioritise mental health in our schools, we create a safer, more supportive, and more successful learning environment for everyone. The well-being of students should be at the forefront of our efforts, because when students’ mental health is nurtured, they can achieve their full potential and go on to lead fulfilling lives.

Let’s commit to making mental health a priority in schools. Because when we support students’ minds, we’re giving them the foundation they need to thrive. Thank you.