The Relationship between Teacher Mental Health and English Language Proficiency for Children with English as an Additional Language

A) RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT
There are over 360 languages spoken in primary schools (NALDIC, 2013) and approximately 21% of children in UK primary schools have English as an additional language, EAL (Department of Education, 2017). Being bilingual is associated with a number of cognitive advantages. However, such advantages are not always translated into academic achievement for children with EAL (Department of Education, 2014). Some children with EAL have limited exposure to English before they start primary school meaning that much of their English language learning takes place in the classroom through interactions with their teachers and peers. To this end, English language proficiency is likely to be the best predictor of educational attainment (Strand et al., 2015).

Recent evidence suggests that poor mental health in teachers is associated with a poorer classroom learning environment, which is subsequently associated with poorer educational attainment (McLean & Connor, 2015). That is, teachers who have poor mental health are less likely to maintain a high-quality classroom learning environment than those with good mental health. This may have specific implications for children with EAL who rely on classroom interactions to increase their English language skills and subsequently their academic attainment. It may be that children with EAL are disproportionately disadvantaged by poor teacher mental health compared to their monolingual peers specifically in the first few years of primary school, Key Stage 1.

B) REFERENCES THAT SHOULD BE READ (if you do not have access to these, please email me)

C) RESEARCH AIMS / QUESTIONS
1. What is the relationship between teacher mental health and the quality of the classroom learning environment during Key Stage 1?
2. What is the relationship between the quality of the classroom learning environment and English language proficiency in children with EAL during Key Stage 1?
3. Does the quality of the classroom learning environment mediate the relationship between teacher mental health and English language proficiency in children with EAL?

D) METHODS
Children with EAL and their teachers will be recruited from local primary schools. Teachers will be asked to complete questionnaires about their own mental health and wellbeing. Children's English
language proficiency will be assessed directly using standardised measures of language. Observations of teaching sessions will be used to assess the quality of the classroom learning environment. The data will be analysed using quantitative analysis within a multilevel modelling framework to account for the clustering of children within schools (training in advanced statistical modelling will be provided). There is scope for longitudinal data collection and analysis depending on the interests of the candidate. There is also scope for the project to be extended to include educational outcomes for children with EAL.