Mental Health in Schools
Ten-minute rule bill briefing
Tuesday 9th January 2024

Centre for Mental Health and the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition (CYPMHC) welcome the Ten Minute Rule Bill on Schools (Mental Health Professionals) sponsored by Munira Wilson MP, which will be debated on Tuesday 9th January 2024. The purpose of the Bill is to create a duty for the governing body of a state funded school to provide access to a qualified mental health practitioner or a school counsellor. This briefing provides insights and recommendations to strengthen mental health provision in all schools and colleges.

Summary
- In 2023, about 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8 to 25 years reported a mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression[1]. This is a sharp rise from 1 in 9 in 2017.
- Analysis by Centre for Mental Health suggests that 1.5 million children and young people under the age of 18 could need new or increased mental health support following the Covid-19 pandemic[2].
- It is estimated that around 75% of young people experiencing a mental health problem are forced to wait so long that their condition gets worse, or they are unable to access any treatment at all[3].
- Schools and colleges play an important role in children and young people's mental health, including the provision of information, advice, and support. Nearly a quarter of children and young people (23%) have accessed support at school for their mental health.[4]
- Centre for Mental Health and the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition are calling for:
  - **The full, national roll out of Mental Health Support Teams in all schools and colleges.**
  - **A fully resourced, national implementation programme to support every school, college, and university to adopt a *whole education approach* to mental health and wellbeing.**

1. The current state of children and young people's mental health

Over the last decade, there has been a worrying rise in mental ill-health among children and young people in England. The latest figures from NHS Digital finds that 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8 to 25 years reported a mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression, in 2023 (NHS Digital, 2023). This is a sharp rise compared to figures from 2017

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1 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england

2 https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/covid-19-and-nations-mental-health-october-2020/

3 https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-and

4 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up/part-3-education-services-and-support

with 1 in 9 reporting concerns. It is well established that half of all lifetime mental health problems are established by the age of 14 and 75% by age 24[5]. The education system is essential in both preventing mental ill-health in young people and in providing timely support.

Evidence suggests that some groups of children and young people are also disproportionately impacted by mental health problems largely driven by a complex interplay of social and environmental determinants of poor mental health. This includes children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), those from racialised and LGBTQ+ backgrounds, neurodivergent young people, those with physical health or long-term conditions, young carers, children in care and refugee and migrant children and young people[6]. Mental health provision based within educational settings must be accessible and effective for all.

2. The impact of schools and colleges on mental health

Our joint *Making the Grade* (2019) report explored children and young people's experiences of mental health provision within educational settings[7]. It found that schools and colleges can have both a positive and negative impact on young people's mental health and their learning outcomes. Positive impacts can include children and young people being able to establish healthy peer relationships, learn about their mental health, take part in creative and physical activities, and develop the vital skills they need in adult life. Negative effects include experiences of bullying and discrimination, poorly managed transitions between different educational setting, academic pressures, and high stakes examinations.

According to data from NHS Digital, children and young people with mental health problems are significantly less likely to report to say they enjoy learning at school (35%) compared to those without reported difficulties (71%)[8] and had much higher absence rates (almost four times as likely to have had 15 or more days off school in one term)[9]. Over 1 in 5 children were persistently absent in 2022[10].

A recent report by CYPMHC also found that mental health problems and special educational needs and disabilities can contribute to behavioural problems in school. [11] The report recognised that punitive behaviour management techniques, such as the use of remove rooms and permanent exclusion, by some schools, can negatively impact children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and may in turn worsen their behaviour.

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5 https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15939837/#:~:text=Main%20outcome%20measures%3A%20Lifetime%20DSM,%25%3B%20any%20disorder%2C%2046.4%25.

6 https://cypmhc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Review-of-CYP-Mental-Health-Policy-Final-Report.-2023.pdf

7 https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CentreforMH_CYPMHC_MakingTheGrade_PDF_1.pdf

8 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up/part-3-education-services-and-support

9 https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up/part-3-education-services-and-support

10 https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/briefing-on-school-attendance-in-england/

11 https://cypmhc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Behaviour-and-Mental-Health-in-Schools-Full-Report.pdf

3. The role of school-based provision: Mental Health Support Teams

The *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health: A Green Paper* (2018) committed to the establishment of new Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) in schools and colleges with the aim of reaching a fifth to a quarter of the country by the end of 2022/23[12]. These teams would support children and young people with mild to moderate mental health problems with evidence-based interventions. The green paper also committed to training up a Senior Mental Health Lead in every school and college to oversee the development of a whole school and college approach to mental health and wellbeing.

An evaluation of the MHST programme (led by NHS England) so far has found some positive outcomes. For example, staff feeling more confident talking to children about mental health problems, being able to access advice about mental health problems more easily and having quicker access to support[13]. However, some groups of children and young people continue to fall through the gaps in support. This includes those with more serious mental health difficulties and groups such as young people with special educational needs or neurodiversity, those from racialised communities and some religious backgrounds, and children with challenging family or social circumstances[14].

As of Spring 2023, 398 teams are operational covering 6,800 schools and colleges and 35% of pupils in schools and learners in Further Education. An additional 100 more teams undertook training during 22/23 and NHS England expect approximately 500 MHSTs to be up and running by 2024[15]. While we welcome the laudable progress made in rolling these teams out, the future funding and rollout of the programme remains uncertain, and without this, we are concerned about the continued post-code lottery of MHST provision.

4. Embedding a whole school and college approach

Early years settings, schools, colleges, and universities all have an important role to play in promoting and protecting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. A whole education approach encompasses a complete, setting-wide, and multi-component approach to the promotion of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and aims to place mental health as foundational to all aspects of educational life, for all students and staff. Whilst many schools are working to implement whole educational approaches this work is often underfunded, comes from core budgets, and remain optional within schools.

The Government should embed whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing in all of its policies and across all education settings to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for both learners and staff. This would have a universal impact on the health of every child and young person. A whole school approach programme in England would cost

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12 https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper

13 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK593268/

14 Ibid

15 https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/trailblazers/

approximately £530 million per year based upon the key elements of such an approach[16], as costed by our CYPMHC member Place2Be.

About Centre for Mental Health

Centre for Mental Health is an independent charity. We take the lead in challenging injustices in policies, systems and society, so that everyone can have better mental health. By building research evidence to create fairer mental health policy, we are pursuing equality, social justice and good mental health for all. Centre for Mental Health are proud hosts of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition.

About the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition is a collaborative network of nearly 300 organisations and individuals dedicated to advocating for and influencing policy in relation to the mental health needs of babies, children, and young people. Our coalition consists of diverse stakeholders, including mental health organisations, youth support services, educational institutions, and concerned individuals, all united by a shared commitment to improving the well-being of children. We aim to raise awareness of the importance of mental health and ensure that children and young people have access to the necessary support and services.

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16 https://cypmhc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Manifesto-Parliamentary-Briefing.pdf