



Regional views on children and young people's mental health: briefing for South East England

In May 2024, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition worked with More in Common to conduct polling on children and young people's mental health. Based on a survey of 2,000 adults, the findings revealed the general public's views of children and young people's mental health, including the political action needed to create change. Further analysis of these findings now reveals the regional breakdown in these views. This short briefing paper provides a summary of findings from respondents living in South East England.

Key findings

- The mental health of children and young people has declined in recent years, with **one in five children and young people** aged 8 to 25 years with a reported mental health problem in 2023, compared to **one in nine** in 2017 (NHS Digital, 2023).
- Referrals to NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHC) have tripled from **40,000** in 2016 to almost **120,000** in 2024 (Darzi, 2024)
- 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 (Local Government Association, 2023).

For respondents living in South East England:

- Protecting children from harm online and from crime and anti-social behaviour, and ensuring children get a good education were seen as the most important election issues for children and young people. Action to address these issues must now be prioritised by the Government.
- **55%** believe that political leaders have failed to act on children and young people's mental health over the last decade.

And respondents living in South East England are clear on the change they want to see:

- **64%** felt that an increase in funding for mental health services would help improve children and young people's mental health.
- **65%** agreed that ensuring all educational settings embed a whole education approach to mental health and wellbeing would be valuable.
- **64%** agreed that establishing early support hubs (which allow children and young people access to mental health support without an appointment or referral) in every local area would make a difference.
- **51%** agreed that reforming mental health legislation, such as the Mental Health Act, would better protect the rights of children and young people.

As an MP working representing constituents in the South East England region, it is crucial that these findings are acted upon.

Introduction

The mental health of babies, children and young people has never been more important. There has been a rapid increase in need in recent years, with **one in five** of those aged 8 to 25 now experiencing a mental health problem (NHS Digital, 2023). This is an increase from **one in nine** in 2017.

Yet, the mental health system is struggling to meet this rising demand, and many children are forced to wait so long that their problems deteriorate. Referrals to NHS mental health services for children and young people have tripled from **40,000** in 2016 to almost **120,000** in 2024, and **75%** of children are forced to wait so long that their condition gets worse. The recent review of the NHS by Lord Darzi underscored the dire challenges facing the children and young people's mental health services and concluded that 'too many children are being let down' by healthcare systems (Darzi 2024).

However, our recent polling of 2,000 adults, found how political leaders have failed to act on this critical issues. **59%** the general public believe that political leaders have not done enough to address children and young people's mental health – rising to **69%** for 18-24 year olds.

Further analysis now reveals that in South East England, **55% of respondents believe that political leaders have failed to act on children's mental health.**

With a new government in place, it is now time that we create the change that is so urgently needed. The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition are calling on the Government to:

- The Spending Review must commit at least an additional £1.7bn per year for Integrated Care Systems to deliver a comprehensive mental health pathway for all babies, children and young people aged 0-25.
- Embed whole educational approaches to mental health and wellbeing across all education settings.
- Increase the provision of early intervention support in the community through the national roll out of early support hubs in every local area.
- To prioritise children and young people in the reforms to the Mental Health Act to ensure their rights are protected and they receive compassionate care.

To understand more about the general public's views on children and young people's mental health, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition commissioned More in Common to carry out a survey in May 2024. The survey is based on a representative sample of 2,000 people, aged 18 and over, who were asked a series of questions regarding the priorities for children's mental health among political parties in the July 2024 election. We published the full findings from this survey in June 2024 a briefing: [Shaping tomorrow: Prioritising babies', children's and young people's mental health in the 2024 General Election.](#)

Following the election, we have completed further analysis of the data to identify regional differences in responses. This briefing provides a summary of the findings from respondents living in South East England.

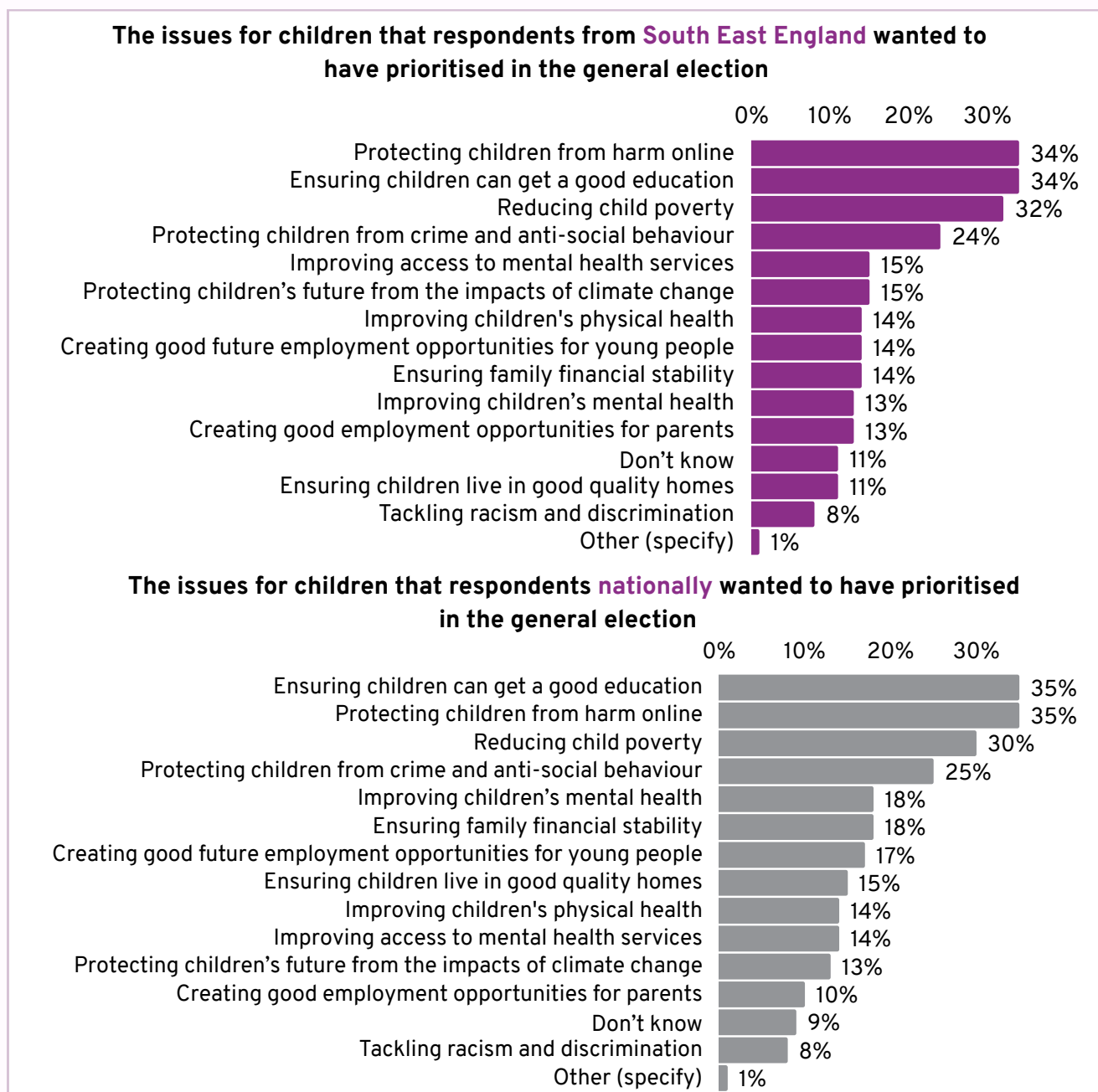
We are very grateful to The Prudence Trust for generously funding this work.

Priority issues for children and young people

The survey asked respondents to choose the top three issues they wanted to see addressed for both children and teenagers in the election. It is now crucial that these issues are prioritised by the Government.

For respondents living in South East England, they prioritised the following issues for children under the age of 12:

- Protecting children from **harm online (34%)**
- Ensuring children can get a **good education (34%)**
- Reducing **child poverty (32%)**

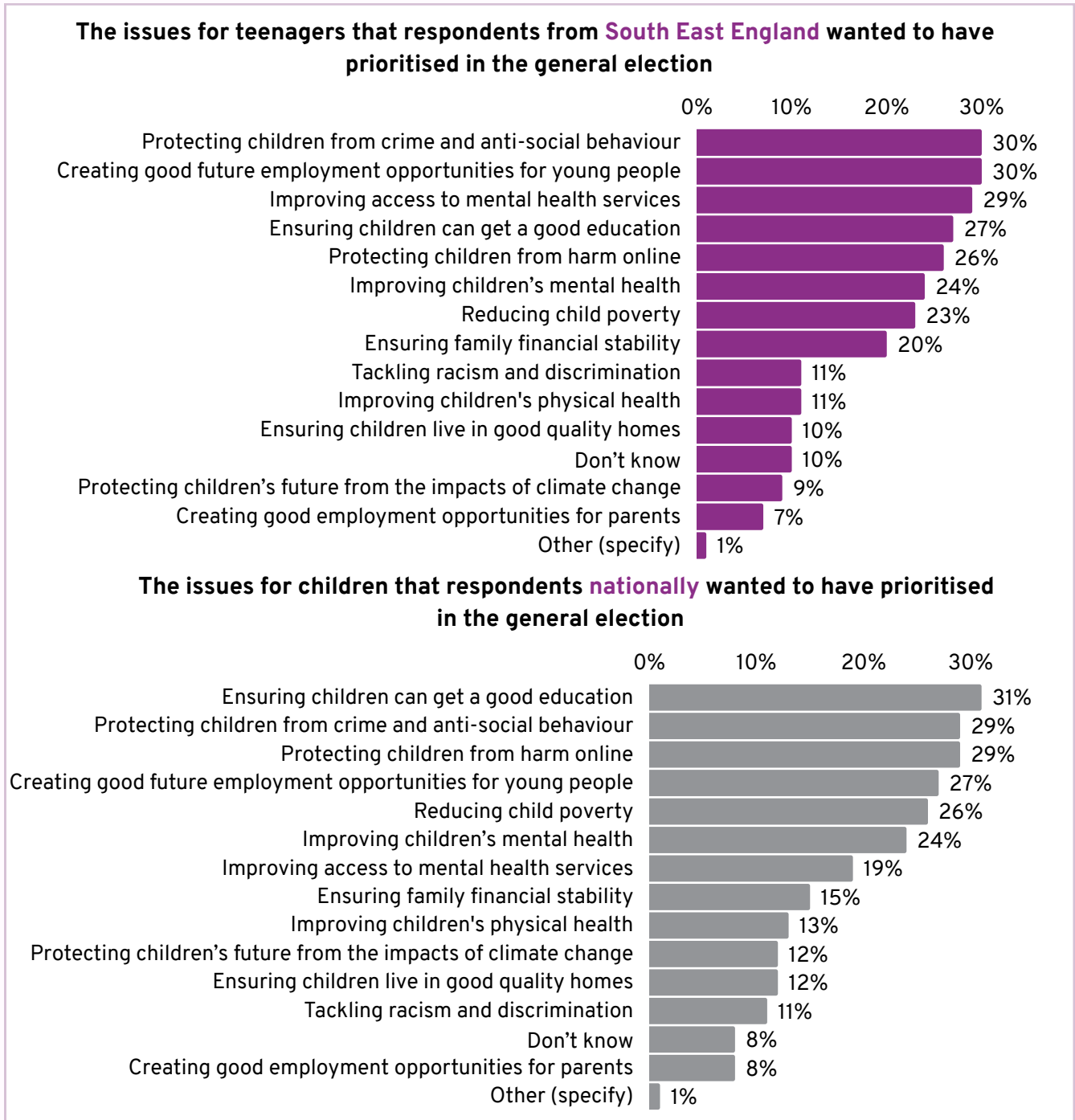


Protecting children from online harm and ensuring children can get a good education were consistently popular choices and were in the top two selections across all regions except for Greater London.

In London, protecting children from crime and anti-social behaviour was the most prioritised issue for children under 12, followed closely by reducing child poverty.

For teenagers, respondents living in South-East England highlighted the following issues:

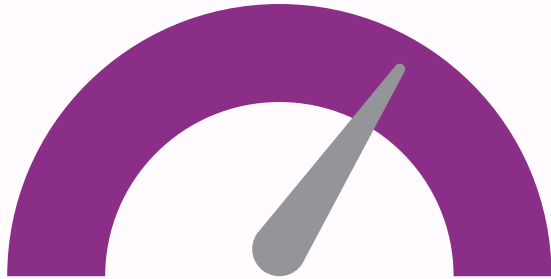
- Protecting children from **crime and anti-social behaviour (30%)**
- Creating good **future employment opportunities for young people (30%)**
- Improving **access to mental health services (29%)**



There was some regional variation in responses for teenagers. Getting a good education was the most important factor for Greater London and the North-East (both at 41%) – this was markedly more so than for other regions. However, respondents from London showed a huge departure from the figures for all respondents and across regions, with 24% prioritising racism and discrimination as an issue, as opposed to 3% of respondents from the East Midlands.

Political support for children and young people's mental health

Survey respondents were asked to reflect on how much they felt political leaders had done to support children and young people's mental health over the last decade.

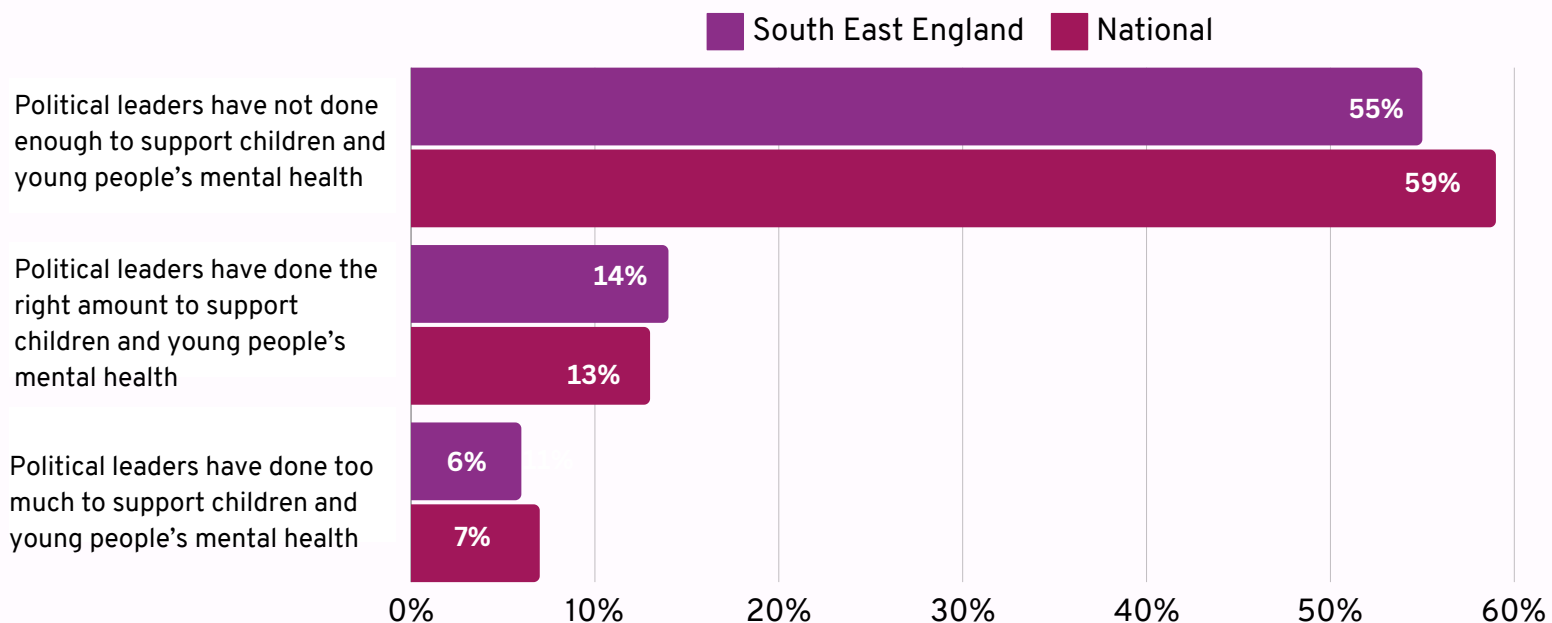


Nationally, **over 59%** of respondents agreed with the statement that political leaders **had not done enough** to support children and young people's mental health over the past decade. This compared with **13%** who felt leaders had done the right amount and just **7%** who felt leaders had done too much.

The percentage of respondents who believed that political leaders have not done enough to support children and young people's mental health was markedly higher among 18–24-year-olds, at **69%** compared to **59%** for all respondents.

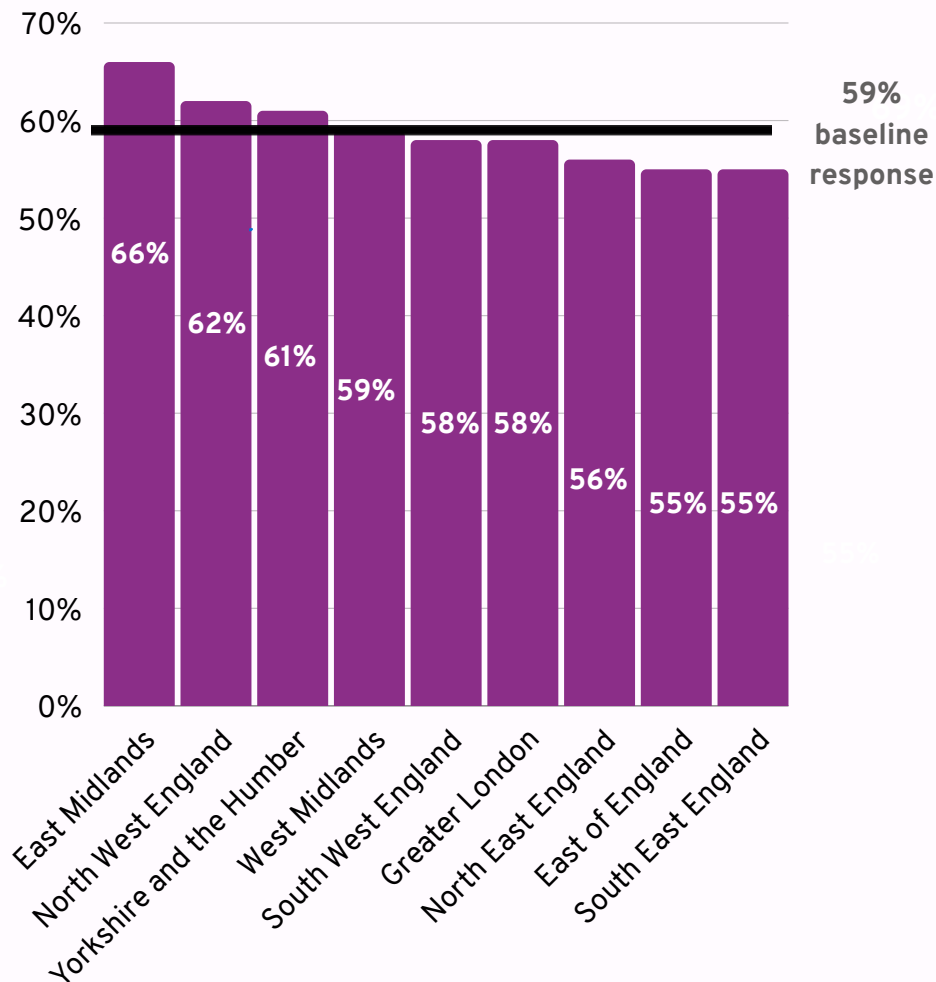
Regionally, **55% of respondents** in South East England believe that political leaders have not done enough to support children and young people's mental health.

Thinking about the mental health of children and young people over the last decade, which of the following comes closest to your view?



There were also variations in responses across regions, with 66% of East Midlands respondents saying political leaders have not done enough, compared to 55% of East of England and South-East England respondents.

Views on political leaders support for children and young people's mental health by region



What needs to change?

It is clear that urgent action is needed to improve mental health outcomes for babies, children and young people and to address enduring issues within the mental health system. For too long, political leaders from across parties have failed to take the action needed to turn the tide on children's mental health.

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition have previously set out a series of steps the Government can take to ensure all babies, children, and young people grow up in a society that prioritises their mental health. We found broad support for these asks across South East England.

The Spending Review should commit at least an additional £1.7bn per year for Integrated Care Systems to deliver a comprehensive mental health pathway for all babies, children and young people aged 0-25.

- Of those who responded in South East England, **64%** felt that funding mental health services help improve children and young people's mental health by quite a lot or by a great deal.

With the recent Darzi review highlighting the dire state of children and young people's mental services, it is crucial that the upcoming Spending Review commits to investing additional resource to Integrated Care Systems to deliver a comprehensive mental health pathway, so all babies, children and young people can access timely support for their mental health. Babies, children and young people's mental health should also form an integral part of the new 10-year health plan.

Embed whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing across all education settings.

- Of those who responded in South East England, **65%** agreed that ensuring all educational settings provide mental health support would improve children and young people's mental health by quite a lot or a great deal.

The commitment by the Government to introduce a mental health professional in every primary and secondary school is a positive step, but this must be accompanied by whole-scale culture change in schools and colleges. Whole education approaches are crucial in making every pupil feel valued and in supporting positive mental health and wellbeing in educational settings. However, while many schools are working to implement such approaches, this work is often underfunded, comes from core budgets, and remains optional. The upcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill provides the opportunity for the Government to put mental health and wellbeing at the heart of the education system by committing to embed whole education approaches to mental health and wellbeing across all education settings.

Increase the provision of early intervention support in the community through the national roll-out of early support hubs in every local area.

- Of those who responded in South East England, **64%** agreed that establishing early support hubs in every local area would make a difference to children and young people's mental health quite a lot or by a great deal.

At the first sign of emerging mental health needs, it is important that babies, children and young people get help to ensure that problems do not escalate. We have long been calling for the full national roll out of early support hubs in every local area, to provide easy to access, drop-in mental health support for young people in community settings. The commitment to provide this support through new Young Future's hubs is welcome, but this must be backed by sufficient and sustainable resources and be centered on supporting mental health and wellbeing.

Bring forward reform of the Mental Health Act 1983, to ensure that children and young people's rights are protected and promoted, and that they receive high quality and compassionate care.

- Of those who responded in South East England, **51%** agreed that reforming mental health legislation, such as the Mental Health Act, would help protect the rights of children and young people.

The King's Speech introduced a new Mental Health Bill to reform the Mental Health Act 1983. It is imperative that children and young people's rights are explicitly protected and promoted in the new Mental Health Bill, and careful consideration must be given to how the reforms apply to this group. We believe that reforms must centre on two key areas: ensuring parity of esteem in rights between adults and children and strengthening safeguards for children and young people in mental health hospitals to ensure they receive high quality and compassionate care.

What can you do to support?

- Meet with us to discuss our findings in further detail.
- Table questions on children and young people's mental health to ensure it is a topic on the political agenda.
- Meet with our members to discuss the work they do in your region.
- Raise children and young people's mental health in debates.
- Access our previous policy briefings to equip you with information on a range of policy topics related to children and young people's mental health.
- Follow us on social media:



@cypmhc



@cypmhc



Children and Young
People's Mental
Health Coalition
(CYPMHC)



@CYPMentalH
ealth



info@cypmhc.
org.uk

About us

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition is a collaborative network of over 300 organisations 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.

If you would like more information, please contact Charlotte Rainer, Coalition Manager, on charlotte.rainer@cypmhc.org.uk

References

Darzi A. (2024) Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England. Available from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e1b49e3b0c9e88544a0049/Lord-Darzi-Independent-Investigation-of-the-National-Health-Service-in-England.pdf>

Local Government Association (2023) Children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health – facts and figures. Available from: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-andadolescent-mental-health-and>

NHS Digital (2023) Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 - wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-andinformation/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-inengland/2023-wave-4-follow-up#>