

Children and young people's mental health – the role of education

Introduction and background

The inquiry on which this report is based follows on from 2 recent reports on children and young people's mental health by the Health and Education Committees, *Mental Health and Well-being of Looked-after Children (2016)* and *Children and Adolescent's Mental Health and CAMHS (2014)*.

Late in 2016, the Education and Health Committees decided to hold a joint inquiry to look at the area in greater depth. Although the unexpected early election means that the report is shorter than hoped, both committees hope that the government will return to the issue in the new Parliament and that it will take account of the recommendations made in this report when it publishes its Green Paper on children and young people's mental health. In the course of this inquiry, oral and written evidence was received from both the education and mental health sectors. The committees met teachers and mental health professionals from Camden and representatives of Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. YoungMinds conducted a survey of children and young people to inform the inquiry and the Times Educational Supplement (TES) held a web forum with teachers.

Key findings

Well-being in schools and colleges

- Much of the written evidence acknowledged the need for schools and colleges to have some responsibility for promoting the well-being of their pupils, and there were a number of calls for Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE) to be made compulsory, a measure which was in fact implemented in March 2017. However, evidence presented suggested that such provision can be patchy and that it can at times become a box-ticking exercise.
- The committees heard about the need for well-being to be based on a whole school approach and underpinned by appropriate values and an overarching culture at every phase of education. It was also emphasised that well-being should not be confined just to the area of PHSE, and that subjects like music and art have a contribution to make.
- The committees heard that Ofsted has the greatest potential to change approaches to well-being across the sector. Efforts to promote well-being will need to be recognised in inspection reports if they are to succeed. Emily Frith of the Education Policy Institute stated that 'the benefit of having Ofsted look at well-being is that it is a signal to schools that it is part of their role along with accountability measures and the academic side. Although Ofsted's inspection framework was revised in 2015 to include a target relating to 'personal development, behaviour and well-being', it was noted by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) that only one third of inspection reports made explicit reference to pupils' health and well-being.
- Many witnesses regretted the 'false dichotomy' of a choice between academic achievement and well-being. They pointed out that well-being improves pupils' capacity to learn. The Association of Directors of Public Health told the committees that 'children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural and social well-being have, on average, higher levels of academic achievement'.

- There were concerns that a rigid focus on academic attainment was squeezing out subjects such as music as well as time for physical activity.

Mental health support in education provision

- In order to provide children and young people with quality care, strong partnerships between education provision and mental health services are essential. Schools and colleges need to be able to provide support on site and to make referrals where necessary, as they are often the first professionals to be approached for help.
- The committees welcome the fact that the government's recent review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) includes a recommendation that providers should 'equip trainees to analyse the strengths and needs of all pupils effectively, ensuring that they have an understanding of cognitive, social, emotional, physical and mental health factors which can inhibit or enhance pupils' education'. The Education Committee has made similar recommendations on ITE; it supported the recommendation made by the Youth Select Committee on the inclusion of mental health training in the core content of ITE. The Health Committee's inquiry on *Children's and Adolescent's Mental Health and CAMHS (2014)* also recommended that the DfE should include a mandatory module on mental health in ITE.
- The government's 2015 report, *Futures in Mind*, highlighted the need for education and mental health services to work together in order to develop a whole system approach. It also recommended that schools should have a mental health lead. The inquiry heard evidence of moves towards such an integrated approach. The committees visited Regent High School, where the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust have been commissioned to run CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services) by the Camden Clinical Commissioning Group and Camden

local authority. The partnership between education and health services and the local authority in this area was a good example of inter-agency co-ordination. A whole system approach to mental health care has been adopted, with senior staff members from the Trust placed in local schools.

- In 2015-16, the DfE worked with NHS England on a £3 million pilot to provide joint training to schools and CAMHS staff. It explored the extent to which having single points of contact in schools and CAMHS can improve referrals to specialist services. An evaluation of the pilot in 2017 concluded that the scheme improved schools' knowledge and awareness of mental health issues as well as the understanding of referral routes. It also raised the confidence of staff in supporting children and young people. An evaluation of the pilot underlined the lack of resources available to develop this offer universally, but there will be an extension of the pilot to cover 1,200 more schools to which funding has been allocated.
- There is evidence that an increasing number of schools are cutting back on mental health services such as in-school counsellors because of funding pressures. In January 2017, a survey conducted by the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and Place2Be found that around 64 per cent of primary schools do not have access to a school-based counsellor and 78 per cent of respondents cited financial pressures as a barrier to the provision of mental health services. One headteacher who reported to the inquiry said that she was aware of many colleagues who were seriously cutting pastoral provision, seeing it as 'the first thing to go'. Dr Brownlie, Clinical Psychologist for Sheffield CAMHS pointed out the reason why these cuts are a false economy 'if we invest in young people and support their emotional resilience, lifelong health and well-being, it will save money further down the line'.

Social media

- Sixty-six per cent of respondents to a survey run for the inquiry by YoungMinds said that they were concerned about the effect of social media on young people's mental health, compared to 14 per cent who stated that they were not concerned.
- Evidence shows one of the key problems around social media to be the prevalence of cyberbullying. For example, the second wave of the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England 2 found that 11 per cent of young people had experienced cyberbullying. The NSPCC reported in written evidence to the inquiry that in 2015-16, there were more than 11,000 Childline counselling sessions related to online sexual abuse, cyberbullying and internet safety. Further concerns were expressed by stakeholders about the links between social media and sleep deprivation.
- Some benefits of social media were reported. These included easier access to services such as Childline and young people being able to support each other through social media, particularly if they have a rare condition.

Recommendations

- The incoming government should follow up its intention to publish a Green Paper on children and young people's mental health.
- The committees welcome the government's commitment to making PSHE a compulsory part of the curriculum and recommend that the next government upholds that commitment. Successor committees should explore in more detail how this is best implemented.

- In order to achieve a whole school approach, senior leadership must embed well-being throughout their provision and culture. This will have implications for staffing and training and for the balance and delivery of subjects across the curriculum. More time should be allowed for a focus on well-being and resilience.
- Mental health and well-being should be given appropriate prominence in inspections and should contribute to the overall grade given to the school or college. The recently appointed Chief Inspector should consider ways in which the inspection regime promotes well-being. If successor committees conduct further inquiries, they should hear evidence about the steps that they is taking in order to do this.
- Government and schools should strive to achieve a balance between academic attainment and pupils' well-being; they need to remember that greater well-being promotes better achievement. They must also be conscious of the stress and anxiety that is being placed on pupils and ensure that sufficient time is allowed for activities which develop life-long skills for well-being.
- Training school and college staff to recognise the warning signs of mental health and ill health in their students is crucial. The committees therefore encourage the government to build on the inclusion of mental health training in initial teacher training and ensure that current teachers also receive training as part of an entitlement to continuing professional development.
- A structured approach to referrals from education providers to CAMHS must be developed across the country. Some strong partnerships between mental health services and education providers have been seen by the committees, but such links do not exist in many local areas. The committees recommend that the government should follow the advice of the CAMHS link pilot evaluation recommendations and commit funding to establish partnerships with mental health services across all schools and colleges.
- The inquiry heard about the adverse effect of budget cuts on pupils' mental health and well-being, and it is aware that most mental health issues first manifest themselves before the age of 15. The committees therefore strongly urge the next government to review the effect of budget reductions on the in-school provision of services related to well-being and mental health.
- Schools should include education on social media as part of PSHE, including educating children on how to assess and manage the risks and make informed choices.
- The government should encourage schools to share information with parents, in order to increase awareness of what their children will be taught at school about social media. This should include guidance on the effects of sleep deprivation on children and young people's well-being and mental health. Parents have a key role to play in limiting screen time.
- The government should continue the work that is being done by the United Kingdom Council for Child Internet Safety and to take steps to ensure that social media organisations and internet providers prioritise child internet safety and dealing with cyber-bullying. These organisations and providers must not be allowed to forgo their own responsibility for preventing harm to children and young people.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhealth/849/849.pdf>

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