

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you as membership organisations representing the views of over 200 of the leading charities, professional and provider associations from across the education, health and social care sectors, and the voluntary and community sector.

We welcome the cross-governmental engagement with our sector, and recent attendance from Public Health England and Department for Education at our joint Transforming Children's Mental Health event on 5th March 2020. We are grateful to the Government's ongoing commitment to having an open and honest two-way dialogue with our members, and utilise the collective expertise and extensive evidence of our members when developing policy.

We believe now, more than ever, children and young people's mental health and wellbeing must be addressed as a priority. The Coronavirus pandemic impacts significantly on children and young people and is likely to have negative and long-term consequences for generations to come.

Our extensive engagement with our members has highlighted the following priorities that we would like the government to consider and respond to when planning a response to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during and beyond Covid-19.

Covid-19 response

Our members report a confusing picture emerging for schools and returning pupils. It is vital that wellbeing is embedded across the Covid-19 response strategy in order for children and young people and schools to recover, to address inequalities and to secure good long term outcomes for children and young people.

We welcome the focus in recent guidance on staff wellbeing. With specific regard to the wellbeing of children and young people, comparative data from countries who are further ahead with schools returns highlight the importance of a focus on play, social-interaction, extra-curricular activities, targeted individual support, and looking at challenging behaviour in the context of trauma. Engagement with parents, carers, and children and young people themselves is key to understanding priorities and practicalities.

We are calling on a commitment from government to cross-departmental working on this agenda to develop a systems-wide response; and on DfE to provide much clearer guidance for schools on recovery planning with wellbeing as a primary focus.

Adopting an approach that is Whole School focussed and is trauma-informed will to support their recovery would give consistency across the system and could facilitate a unified strategy.

Transformation of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing

Beyond the immediate response planning to Covid-19, and to support the Government's pre-existing aim to transform children and young people's mental health provision, we are further calling for a comprehensive cross-government strategy on mental health and wellbeing in education, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. The strategy must be long-term, adequately resourced and include clear accountability measures.

Our members are clear that this strategy should be developed with the aim of aligning the wide range of school policies that underpin wellbeing; and must include workforce development as a key component. You will find enclosed a copy of our meeting summary for your information, which gives further detail on key aspects of our consultation.

We would welcome a further update from DfE and Public Health England on how current and existing initiatives are being evaluated and used as a first step towards supporting schools in their response to Covid-19, and ensuring schools have access to wider services and provision to support with different phases of recovery.

We would also very much welcome the opportunity to meet with you further to discuss the detail of our recommendations, how the government is positioning mental health and wellbeing in light of the current Covid-19 crisis, and how we can best support you in the implementation of the new framework.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Stafford, Vice-Chair, Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition



Amanda Allard, Schools Wellbeing Partnership



cc.

Vicky Ford, Minister for Children, Young People and Families

Simone Bayes, Deputy Director on Mental Health, DfE

Matthew Hopkinson, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Mental Health and Anti-Bullying, DfE

Daniela D'urso, Children and Young People's Mental Health team leader at Department for Education

cc.

Nadine Dorries, Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety, Department of Health and Social Care

Kathy Smethurst, Deputy Director of Mental Health, Department of Health and Social Care