

## Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision Joint Event - 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Co-Chairs: • Amanda Allard, National Children's Bureau  
• Clare Stafford, Charlie Waller Memorial Trust

### Policy priorities and horizon scanning

Attendees were split into groups and each group was asked to identify three priorities for the Partnership and Coalition to focus on for the next 6-12 months:

- **Behaviour and exclusions** - There was significant concern and discussion about the behaviour and exclusions agenda and its tension with the mental health and wellbeing agenda and this was raised as a top priority by 6 of the 7 tables. Priorities included:
  - the need to understand behaviour as a communicative tool;
  - the importance of understanding the causal factors of 'bad' behaviour;
  - ending exclusions and off-rolling;
  - the need to ensure the focus on MH and wellbeing is not replaced by this new focus on behaviour; and
  - a coordinated response to Tom Bennet's behaviour agenda, in particular ensuring the behaviour hubs consider how behaviour policy relates to mental health and wellbeing work
- **Need for a long-term strategy with one overarching vision** for mental health and wellbeing for 0-25 year olds which applies across government departments and agendas. Members recognised that there has been a lot of activity around mental health and wellbeing from different parts of government and saw this as broadly positive but emphasised that these agendas need to be aligned. In addition, there should be consistency in approaches and vision across different schools agendas, in particular consistency between SEND, SEMH, Behaviour and Attainments/Standards agendas. A long-term strategy and vision is needed so these messages are aligned, or at least not in contradiction to each other (4 of the 7 tables)
- **Prevention and early intervention**, including an understanding of attachment and of the importance the social determinants of poor mental health (3 of the 7 tables)
- **Academic pressure, exam culture and performance culture** – how can this fit alongside a whole school approach to wellbeing and mental health? (3 of the 7 tables)
- **Staff wellbeing** and clarity for staff on what they should be doing in the midst of competing demands (2 of the 7 tables)
- **Curriculum** – good quality teaching about wellbeing should be invested in. More broadly, the approach to the curriculum must take mental health and wellbeing into account (2 of the 7 tables)
- **Quality teacher training** which addresses mental health and wellbeing and trauma (1 of the 7 tables)

- **Understanding the links between SEND and mental health and wellbeing** and a recognition of the ways a neuro-typical education system can create feelings of inadequacy and anxiety for children and young people with SEND (1 of 7)
- **Ensuring trail blazer learning from schools with MHSTs is disseminated** (1 of 7)
- **Transitions** – understanding the impact of transitions on mental health and wellbeing and ensuring there is consistency of mental health provision at these times, including 16/18+ (1 of 7)

From these discussions, Kadra Abdinasir (Coalition) and Matthew Dodd (Partnership) pulled out 3 key priorities for the next 6-12 months. These are:

1. **Behaviour and mental health in schools** – possibly linking to concerns around academic pressure by exploring 'discipline and excellence'
2. Calling on the Government to develop **a clear and coherent long-term strategy on mental health and wellbeing in schools**, with a focus on early intervention and prevention. This must be adequately resourced and needs clear accountability.
3. **Workforce development and a workforce strategy** to include staff wellbeing, training, recruitment and retention

### Workshop session – discussion of key themes

Attendees at each table were asked to pick two or three themes to discuss and sought to identify one short-term and one long-term 'ask' to government for each theme.

#### 1. Long term, unified strategy for mental health and wellbeing in schools

This was the most commonly discussed theme. Attendees discussed what a unified strategy for mental health and wellbeing in schools should include and discussed opportunities and challenges to this strategy.

##### What should the strategy include

Each group highlighted different priorities for what a long term, unified strategy for mental health and wellbeing in schools should include, however there was broad agreement on some key components of this strategy:

- **Whole school approach** - the strategy must adopt a holistic, whole school approach to children's mental health and wellbeing. This should also be seen as a 'whole systems approach' in that it must include a focus on parents and families, and a recognition of the importance of provision outside of the school, including CAMHS, VCS and other community services
- **Alignment with the other schools' agendas and policies** - in particular, a mental health and wellbeing strategy should be linked to and consistent with an aligned behaviour agenda, and the performance and attainment agenda. Currently, these agendas are not only unaligned but are seen as in conflict with each other.
  - One group asked "Why is there a system where each government department has their own approach and agenda on the same issue, when it is one government? This must be much more aligned."
  - Two groups emphasised that having consistent policy will also help teachers know what to do and remove the stress and pressure that can come from receiving conflicting advice and guidance.

- One group felt the strategy should be led by Cabinet but go across all departments and teams like the suicide prevention strategy.
- **Behaviour** - A recognition of the links and feedback loop between mental health and wellbeing, trauma and behaviour was seen as a vital part of any long term strategy for mental health and wellbeing in schools.
- **Trauma informed** - strategy, teacher training and education settings should be trauma informed due to the significant link between trauma and mental health and wellbeing.
- **Independently evaluate what works** and evaluate the impact of mental health and wellbeing programmes
  - The strategy should be measureable to allow this.
  - Research should be brought together to help schools know what works for them – there is often too much information which is hard to sift through
- **Equip and support school staff**
  - The strategy should include a recognition of the **importance of staff's mental health and wellbeing**. This is intrinsically linked to their ability to have a good relationship with students and to support students' wellbeing.
  - **Workforce training** is crucial, not only for teachers but for wider support staff and further training for MHSTs.

Further priorities raised by different tables

- **Vulnerable children must be at the centre of the strategy** in its design and content, not just rhetoric.  
The strategy must be designed around what vulnerable children need, for example children who are looked after. These groups of young people often disproportionately experience mental health challenges and have more complicated needs whilst also often being overlooked and harder-to-reach, so a good strategy must work for them.
- The strategy should work towards a **no-exclusion culture** as a priority.
  - Education is a key protective factor for good mental health and wellbeing.
  - Exclusions reinforce the feedback loop between trauma, mental health and poor behaviour.
- The strategy must have a plan for **those who fall between the gaps** of support, in particular:
  - Those whose MH needs are too high for MHSTs to appropriately support but who do not reach the threshold of CAMHS
  - Those whose needs or behaviours are above the threshold of CAMHS because of risks of violence, oppositional behaviours, harmful sexual behaviours or others
- The key messages should be **led by children and young people**
- **Early intervention and prevention** should be recognised within the agenda
- **Social determinants of mental health and wellbeing**, including housing, social conditions and activities for young people, must also be included. The education system is one part of this.
- Greater **investment and funding** is needed for there to be coordination and joint working
- **Colleges and post-16 education settings** must be included in the agenda alongside schools

- **The strategy should be relevant and responsive to local contexts, and it should be possible to apply it whilst taking into account** local relationships, time, pressures, protocols etc. as well as local needs
- **One group felt that statutory and legal obligations** should underpin the strategy and claimed that joined up and integrated working only happens where there are legal obligations

### Opportunities to promote a unified strategy

- upcoming **spending review**
- **Prevention Green Paper**
- roll out of **social prescribing**
- **educational guidance updates**, and
- work on **behaviour hubs**

Adopting a public health approach to mental and wellbeing and adopting a trauma-informed approach were also raised as frameworks that would give consistency across the system and could facilitate a unified strategy.

### Tensions and challenges

- **Austerity and its impact** was seen as inherently in tension with the MH and wellbeing agenda – so many services have been cut or shut.
- **Government rhetoric** around **behaviour and exclusions** and the rhetoric around **crime and punishment** was seen as in tension with MH and wellbeing agenda
- **Capacity** to bring together the right people from different parts of the system at the local level which is necessary for effective joint working but often not possible
- **Funding**
  - Joined up, **long term approach to funding is needed.**
  - Too much silo funding – and these funding blocks affect care
- **Training and resources for teachers**
- **Individualisation of problems** i.e. 'try harder'
- **Gaps in services for 16-25 year olds**

### Priorities and asks

Each table were asked to identify one short-term ask or priority and one long-term ask or priority for this topic.

#### Short -Term Asks

1. **Aligned messages** on mental health and wellbeing and its importance across government
2. **Clarify the relationship between Designated Safeguarding Lead and Senior Lead for Mental Health** and ensure they are trauma-informed
3. **Influence the Spending Review**
4. Commitment to an **early intervention** based approach from cabinet
5. **Evaluate effectiveness of existing initiatives in schools** before flooding schools with new ones

#### Long-Term Asks

1. **A trauma-informed, whole systems approach that works towards a no-exclusion culture**

2. **What comes next?** What comes after the Green Paper to help the 75% of schools who don't have support teams?
3. **Cross-departmental work and an inclusive, system-wide approach**
4. Focus on **wider determinants** of children and young people's wellbeing
5. **Implementing the whole school approach through *additional staff*** - training new specialists in schools instead of overloading pre-existing teachers with training

## 2. Joint working between statutory and voluntary sector

Four groups discussed joint working between statutory and voluntary sector partners. The key points are below:

- **Joint working must happen at a local level** rather than government being top-down or overly prescriptive
  - Need for system-redesign at a local level – local areas redesigning services around the needs of children and young people as part of a multi-agency approach
  - National services should encourage and support local areas to do this by providing funding for the re-design process, incentives for joint working, and guidance and best practice.
- **Difficulties in knowing what is available locally**
  - One table suggested having a **directory**: a list of all the organisations in the area and what they do.
  - This could be useful for education professionals as schools were seen as 'switched off' to other support that is available to them.
  - However, schools would still have to do proactive work to access a directory and senior leadership often have too much information already. There needs to be some kind of filtering (would previously have happened through local educational authorities)
  - Important to ensure this fits in with (and doesn't reinvent) the Local Offer
- **Longer term funding needed**
  - VCS collaboration can support mental health and wellbeing provision in schools but VCS is often focused on their own sustainability rather than working with others. **Longer-term funding, rather than needing to constantly chase short term funding, will help this.**
  - Funding and grants could also provide incentives for joint working – could be a tool rather than a barrier
- Requires a **cultural shift**
- **Language** - different teams, departments and services use different language. Service-specific jargon hampers collaboration
- **Data protection** – there is a need for clarity around data protection and what it means as this is not clearly understood by many partners. People are scared to talk to others or collaborate in case of 'breach' e.g. CAMHS passport
- **Best practice** examples should be identified and disseminated

## Priorities and asks

### Short-Term Asks

1. **Aligned language** across teams and departments so that everyone is talking in the same way e.g. as with Every Child Matters
3. **Listen more to schools.** Be clearer about joint working in upcoming guidance change.

4. **Directory of services** so that there is more understanding of what support is available, where there is overlapping aims and any gaps
6. **Funding bids should be required to be joint ventures** between VCS and government to ensure collaboration at the planning and bidding stage, and embed collaboration in successfully funded projects

#### Long-Term Asks

1. **Services should be designed locally** with all different partners involved, starting with young people. The national level should encourage and support local areas to do this.
3. **Cultural and attitude change across statutory services**
4. **Culture of signposting and collaboration between VCS**
6. Set up working groups, focused on single issues, to liaise with DfE and teacher union officials.

### 3. Engagement of Children, Young People and Families

#### *Engaging children and young people:*

- **Designing engagement that works for marginalised children and those with complex needs should be the starting point**  
The main focus was on ensuring that engagement is **truly inclusive** and captures the thoughts of **marginalised children** and young people too; not just middle-class, academic children and families who have social capital as can happen e.g. in school councils. It must be an equitable process that ensures **genuine diversity**.
  - What about children and families for whom English is not their first language?
  - Children and young people in youth justice settings
  - Children and young people with SEND
- **Engagement should be genuine, with work to towards coproduction**
  - Engagement of children and young people should be **embedded throughout the design and implementation** of programmes and services
  - Children and young people should be seen as **equal partners**. There should be work towards genuine coproduction, rather than occasional, superficial or tokenistic conversations with young people.
  - In order for this engagement to be genuine, different approaches to participation may need to be sort and initial upskilling may be necessary
  - Invest time in working out how best to achieve coproduction
- Suggestions included:
  - Local symposiums with children and family representatives to discuss changes e.g. to discuss the roll out of MHSTs.
  - Youth Councils
  - Student Governors
  - Aside from creating new opportunities for engagement, it is important to ensure that existing systems of youth voice are diversified and made inclusive and accessible

#### *Engaging parents and families:*

Parent and family engagement is often very low. All tables discussed how best to include parent and family views but there were differing opinions.

- Table 1 felt it was problematic to see parent/family views as a proxy for children's views. Mental health and wellbeing is an area where there is a lot of



stigma so it is better to engage with young people directly.

They also highlighted that there are Safeguarding issues at stake.

- Tables 2 and 5 believed engaging with parents and families was vital. Schools should welcome parents and families and create more transparent communication avenues between schools and families. This should happen as early as possible.
  - Table 4 explained that there isn't sufficient evidence about what meaningful parental engagement looks like and wrote "we do not want superficial engagement of parents if it is not actually beneficial"
- They also mentioned that mental health is a difficult topic for many families that must be discussed sensitively; use of the word 'parenting' in interventions makes it instantly accusatory
- They highlighted that parental engagement should come from having meaningful relationships with parents and families and an understanding of the issues they are facing. This can be done through ongoing outreach. Smaller class sizes also help develop relationships between parents and teachers.
- Table 5 felt engagement with families should be embedded as part of the norm or expectation for the school rather than happening through targeted activities. They 5 emphasised that engagement with parents is often easier in early years and primary settings but can become more difficult in secondary schools. Transition points can become good opportunities for developing this engagement.

## Priorities and asks

### Short-Term Asks

1. Engagement **is inclusive and accessible for vulnerable children** – Need to put measures in place to ensure young people who are marginalised and vulnerable, such as children in youth justice settings or children looked after are genuinely included and part of the process
2. Children and young people should have the **opportunity to meaningfully engage with Government departments to co-design services.**
3. **Understand the barriers to engagement**
5. **Include children and young people and families in appointment processes**

### Long-Term Asks

1. **Genuine coproduction, and young people's views as the starting point**
3. Demonstrate the benefits of engaging with parents and give guidance for how to do this.
5. **Develop a portfolio of schools that have adopted a community-hub approach** to better understand their impact on wellbeing

## 4. Accountability – What would improve cross-government cooperation?

One table discussed accountability and what would help to improve cross-governmental cooperation on wellbeing and mental in schools. Key points were:

- Need for transparency of funding
- Accountability of academies
- Using PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) data – international comparisons

- Looking at place-based practice and performance
- Thinking about incentives and setting these out from the outset
- Incorporation of UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and involvement of Children's Commissioner
- Being realistic about limitations
- Acknowledge different starting points for different settings

#### Short-Term Ask

**A children's minister** to allow direct consultation from government with the sector, and to lead on cross-government work.

#### Long-Term Ask

**Cross-government strategy on children and young people's health** which acknowledges wider factors and social determinants e.g. home, community, inequalities, and the corresponding government departments

## 5. Resources and workforce

One table discussed issues around workforce and resources and their key points were:

- The mental health and wellbeing of staff should be an important part of a schools mental health and wellbeing strategy
- Supervisions should be brought in to embed support for teachers, similar to a clinical supervision role which would provide emotional support to teachers
- Using inset days to focus on staff wellbeing
- Staff to include a target around wellbeing into their appraisals
- Ethos created by senior leaders is crucial for embedding the approach within a school, so we must focus on leadership first, in terms of training, ongoing support, induction etc.
- Ofsted framework now has a different focus which is welcome. However, DfE demands seem to oppose this
- Tension around this and wider agenda – often workforce receive mixed messages and therefore have varying focuses
  - Curriculum
  - Testing
  - Class sizes

#### Short-Term Ask

**Supervision and support** - Training more people in a supervisory capacity to support teachers in schools and look at different models that best provide emotional support to teachers.

#### Long-Term Ask

**Training** - initial teacher training and ongoing learning and development should include wellbeing and mental health