



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Education Committee
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15 April 2021

Thank you for your letter dated 31st March, which highlights the key issues raised during your Education Select Committee evidence session on 16th March.

We know that the pandemic and the associated measures and restrictions, such as social distancing and school closures, will be impacting on the mental wellbeing of some children and young people. That is why the government has put children and young people's mental health and wellbeing at the centre of our response to the pandemic. I have provided further details in the responses to the points raised in your letter below.

Lack of Data

I can confirm that the government already collects national data on the mental health of children and young people. In response to the pandemic, we asked NHS Digital to increase the frequency of this data collection and in October 2020, they published a follow up to the Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey conducted in 2017. Another follow up survey is currently underway, with data collected during March 2021. A third wave of data will be collected later this year.

Public Health England, supported by DfE, are monitoring academic research and research run by charitable and third sector organisations on the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, which is routinely published as part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Surveillance report found [here](#).

There is also work currently underway with No10, to work out how we will monitor and track some headline indicators on Mental Health and Wellbeing and specifically the school role.

We currently have no plans for new data collection in DfE. Instead we will be looking to make best use of existing data and vehicles, for example, continuing

follow-ups of the [Mental Health of Children and Young People survey](#), and ensuring the next full survey happens as committed to in 2024.

Funding

The Department of Health and Social Care is committed to supporting children and young people's mental health, particularly in light of the pandemic. As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, the government has committed to spending £2.3bn on mental health services by 2023/24 and to supporting an additional 345,000 children and young people, per year.

In addition to the existing funding as part of the NHS Long Term Plan, the government recently announced a further £79m boost to funding for children and young people's mental health support, which will be spent on increasing the number of Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools and colleges, improving access to community mental health support, continuing crisis care for those who need it and improving access to eating disorder services.

I have also been very encouraged by the take-up of our £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return programme, which DfE worked closely with DHSC, HEE, PHE, NHSE and voluntary sector organisations to deliver. Over 90% of Local Authorities have told us how they delivered additional support as a result of the Wellbeing for Education Return resources and funding.

The purpose of the programme was to help education staff respond to the immediate pressures of the pandemic, and as such the programme and funding ended on 31 March. My Department is currently considering how we can build on the support provided through 2020/21 funding, including how we can enable schools and colleges to use our £1 billion investment in catch-up funding and further £700 million Covid recovery package on effective wellbeing and mental health provision.

The webinars developed for Wellbeing for Education Return to help teachers and local systems to further support children and young people's mental health as they return to school remain freely available and include a webinar and guidance aimed directly at school and college staff. Alongside this, the DfE-funded, four-year Link Programme, delivered by the Anna Freud Centre, also forms part of our Green Paper commitments. It was developed in response to Future in Mind recommendations and aims to improve communication and facilitate joined-up partnership working between education and mental health services, to help children and young people get the right support in the right place.

Catch-up plans

Funding to support education recovery

As I mentioned above, we have made available £1.7bn in funding to support education recovery. In June 2020 we announced a £1bn catch-up package including a National Tutoring Programme and a Catch-up Premium for this academic year, and in February 2021 we committed to further funding of £700m

to fund summer schools, expansion of our tutoring programmes and a Recovery Premium for next academic year. Funding will support pupils across early years settings, schools, and colleges.

The Government is committed to supporting children's and young people's Mental health and wellbeing during this period. Schools can use their additional funding from the Covid "catch-up" package for pastoral support for mental wellbeing where pupils need it.

Schools should use their catch-up premium funding as a single total from which to prioritise support for all pupils, guided by the level of individual need. This will often focus on pupils from deprived backgrounds but will include other pupils – especially those facing other challenges such as those in touch with a social worker, young carers and those with mental health needs.

Summer Schools

As part of the education recovery package, £200 million will be made available to secondary schools to deliver face-to-face summer schools this year. The aim of the programme is to deliver a summer school over one or two weeks, offering a blend of academic learning and enrichment activity to support pupils in recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. We are recommending a focus on incoming year 7 pupils, but schools have the flexibility to target provision towards those pupils they feel would benefit the most.

Summer school has the potential to help pupils to make up for some of the face-to-face education that they have missed, and the inclusion of enrichment elements, such as team games, music, drama and sports activities, provides an opportunity to support their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The DfE published guidance to schools on [summer schools](#) on 30 March. When planning a summer school, schools are encouraged to create an environment that supports pupils' mental health and wellbeing, and to be particularly aware and supportive of the greater mental health and wellbeing needs of vulnerable children. Following consultation with the DCMS and the DHSC, references to resources were included to enable schools to supplement their programme with support for mental health and wellbeing, enrichment and sports activities.

Ofsted

Ofsted introduced a new Education Inspection Framework (EIF) in September 2019 which recognises the impact emotional wellbeing and poor mental health can have on a pupil's ability to engage in their education. The framework was also built around the factors that have the greatest protective effect for all pupils: good education, good pastoral care and a culture that promotes connection between pupils and their community. Ofsted's personal development judgement underlines the importance of high-quality pastoral support in developing resilience and in helping children know how to keep physically and mentally healthy. Its behaviours and attitudes judgement emphasises the importance of creating a safe and positive learning environment, which is further reinforced by the leadership and management judgement focussing on leaders need to

engage with pupils and parents, act with integrity, create an inclusive culture and support all pupils to complete their education.

In the summer term, Ofsted will restart its inspections under the EIF and it is intended that the full programme of routine inspections will resume in September 2021. We are continuing to engage with Ofsted in relation to the contribution it can make to recovery as we emerge from the pandemic including in relation to the wellbeing of pupils.

A Whole-Schools Approach to Mental Health

As set out in the department's [Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools Advice](#), schools are in a unique position, as they are able to help prevent mental health problems by promoting resilience as part of an integrated, whole school approach that is tailored to the needs of their pupils. A whole school approach is one that goes beyond the teaching in the classroom to pervade all aspects of school life, including culture, ethos and environment; teaching; and partnerships with families and the wider community. As part of this, we would expect schools to proactively engage with families, outside agencies, and the wider community, in order to promote consistent support for children's health and wellbeing. We are putting in place a range of support to help schools to develop and implement whole school approaches.

Senior Mental Health Leads/Mental Health Support Teams

The Government has committed to provide training for senior mental health leads in all state-funded schools and colleges in England. The training will equip senior mental health leads with the knowledge to introduce or develop their whole school/college approach to positive mental health and implement effective processes for ensuring pupils and students with mental health problems are identified and receive appropriate support. Senior mental health leads are being introduced alongside the government's commitment to roll out Mental Health Support Teams and will work alongside the mental health and wellbeing support that already exists, such as counselling, educational psychologists, school nurses, pastoral care, educational welfare officers, VCSEs, the local authority provision and NHS CYPMH services.

Now that schools and colleges are returning to face-to-face education, they have multiple priorities to consider, not least the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in their care. With additional safety measures in place on the road to recovery, teacher workload is a growing concern and while the proportion of schools and colleges reporting they have a mental health lead has gone up, (82% of schools, 91% of FE colleges) from under half of schools in 2016 (49% of schools, 69% of colleges), not every school and college will be ready to identify and train a senior mental health lead immediately. Having reviewed how training needs have changed in light of the pandemic, my Department is currently engaging potential training providers so that training can start in the next academic year 2021-22, with more education settings being offered training in subsequent years, subject to funding decisions.

In the meantime, support for existing mental health leads is also available from MHSTs in areas where they are established, and as coverage of MHSTs expands, we anticipate that even more senior mental health leads will be supported to develop their whole school or college approach.

Prevention and early intervention services, including MHSTs, remain a crucial part of ensuring children and young people can access the right support at the right time. Indeed, a core function of MHSTs is to provide timely advice to school and college staff, and liaise with specialist services, to help children and young people get the right support and stay in education.

Throughout the pandemic, MHSTs have adapted to continue providing support and interventions remotely, and schools and colleges have praised their effectiveness in supporting pupils, students, staff and parents and carers. I fully recognise the need to balance MHST expansion against the need to do so safely and sustainably, given the time it takes to recruit and train new Education Mental Health Support Practitioners. NHS funding calculations and allocations therefore account for both the rapid and safe expansion of MHSTs.

Over 180 MHSTs have been established or are in development across the country and once fully operational they will cover 15% of pupils. A further 104 teams are in the process of being established in 2020/21, which will bring the total number of MHSTs to over 280. A further 112 teams will be established in 21/22 and the total will reach around 400, covering an estimated 3 million children and young people (around 35% of pupils in England), by 2023.

The core proposals from the CYP Green Paper are delivered through a joint and collaborative programme led by the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education and NHS England with support from Health Education England and Public Health England.

School and College Based Counselling

At present, the department does not require the provision of counselling services in every school. However, in February 2016, the department published [counselling guidance](#), which set out a strong expectation that, over time, all schools should make counselling services available to their pupils.

The guidance sets out that counselling works best within a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, which considers issues such as promoting wellbeing; raising awareness of, and reducing stigma around, mental health issues; and providing an effective pastoral system.

Mental Health in Education Action Group

As you may already be aware we have convened a Mental Health in Education Action Group. We are working with other government agencies, mental health organisations and the voluntary and community sector, to look at the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and staff in nurseries, schools, colleges, and

universities, and will consider how to support children's and young people's mental wellbeing following the return to education settings on 8 March, with transitions between education settings in September 2021, and in the longer term.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education