

Written evidence from Birmingham Education Partnership (CMH0141)

Written evidence submitted by Anna Robinson, Programme Lead at Birmingham Education Partnership on behalf of the Birmingham Education Wellbeing Strategy Group. The group comprises:

- Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) - a school membership organisation with 358 member schools, working to build a robust and ambitious system of continuous improvement, building on the strengths amongst Birmingham schools and school leadership
 - Birmingham City Council and leadership for the Virtual School
 - Birmingham South Central CCG on behalf of Birmingham Cross City and Sandwell West Birmingham
 - Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) - the partnership commissioned to deliver mental health services for 0-25 year olds
 - West Midlands Police
 - Public Health
 - Third Sector Children and Young People's work representatives
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1. Summary

- 1.1. It is our belief that education settings play a crucial role in promoting the emotional health and wellbeing (EHWB) of children and young people and preventing mental health problems across their life course. Children spend a large proportion of their time within the school environment meaning that schools are strongly placed to identify the EHWB needs of children and young people, however it is becoming increasingly apparent that more training and support is needed in order to do so effectively. In addition, schools need strong leadership to inspire an EHWB-promoting ethos across the school and curriculum.
- 1.2. They also need to be a key part of a wider partnership model so that they are able to effectively signpost children and families to support within their local communities. This would strengthen community-school relationships, decrease the isolation that can be experienced by schools and provide access to wider support for parents. This partnership working would enable schools to improve their knowledge and understanding of evidence based commissioning of mental and emotional health resources and support within the school setting with increased support from health commissioners to offer guidance on process and outcomes.
- 1.3. In Birmingham, partners are committed to a vision of EHWB in which a "proactive early identification approach to identifying, supporting and promoting emotional resilience and wellbeing....capacity building on the frontline...and delivery of a wide range of treatment options for those experiencing emotional and mental health problems".
- 1.4. We outline below work ongoing in Birmingham to support schools to improve children's EHWB, our learning and our recommendations to the committee. Birmingham is committed to ensuring schools are integral to commissioning intentions. The virtue of

Birmingham's size, the breadth of expertise offered within the Birmingham Education Wellbeing Strategy Group, the progressive work being undertaken not just directly in schools but in the VCS, strategic work and partnerships across the city make Birmingham an important place from which to gather evidence about what works.

2. Context

- 2.1. The mental health of children and young people in Birmingham is a top priority for the city. The recent city-wide Commission for Children – It takes a city to Raise a Child¹ – reported that young people themselves are very concerned about their mental health and the national health of their peers. The re-provision of NHS services has been a priority for the NHS commissioners over the last 3 years. Over 300 Birmingham Heads, when asked what their top priority for their school was outside of academic standards, unanimously said the mental and emotional health of their students.
- 2.2. Developed as a response to the increasing mental health needs of young people in the city and the knowledge through direct experience and evidence that schools are well placed to act as hubs for engagement for intervention², the remit of the Education Wellbeing Strategy Group is to understand current school-based mental health activity across the city, explore how data shapes priorities and work, make sense of the complexity of the systems for managing the mental health of children and young people and develop insight to inform future commissioning intentions and asset-mobilisation in order that young people across the city receive more appropriate and timely support.
- 2.3. Birmingham has over 430 schools including the largest pupil referral unit in the country which has over 1000 students on 10 sites.³ In Birmingham around 9% of young people self-report that they experience significant emotional problems compared to the national average of 5%. The prevalence of predisposing factors for poor mental health means that levels of need are higher than the national average.
- 2.4. 14% of Birmingham's young people self-report conduct disorders compared to a national average of 11%.
- 2.5. Accident and Emergency departments across the city have seen a rise of 40% in admissions of under-18s with symptoms of self-harm since 2009/10.⁴

3. Evidence

¹ It Takes a City to Raise a Child – Report of the Birmingham Commission for Children (2014)

² Education, Education, Mental Health – Supporting Secondary Schools to play a central role in early intervention in mental health services. IPPR 2016

³ Birmingham Education Partnership 2016

⁴ Birmingham CAMHS Transformation plan 2015 and It Takes a City to Raise a Child

Promoting emotional wellbeing, building resilience, and establishing and protecting good mental health

- 3.1. In 2015/16, members of the Birmingham Education Wellbeing Strategy Group along with other partners created an ambitious strategic programme of whole school delivery under the Big lottery's Fulfilling Lives/HeadStart programme. The approach to achieving sustainable change within schools to promote emotional wellbeing and resilience was strong.⁵ Recommendations within this paper are based on this very thorough strategy written and owned by partners in Birmingham.
- 3.2. As a consequence of this work, and funded by the CCG, BEP are leading on the NewStart programme which is working with secondary schools across the city at a whole school level with senior leaders to explore how systems, processes, practices and assets can be mobilised to better support vulnerable pupils and in turn the whole school. Coached by highly experienced former education professionals with significant pastoral experience and expertise, Newstart aims to work at a universal and more targeted but not clinical level to:
 - 3.2.1. Mobilise existing resource within individual schools, reviewing systems and processes to ensure equity of access for pupils in a context of adversity
 - 3.2.2. Identify earlier vulnerable students and consider vulnerability in the widest sense, e.g. in Year 7 students write a letter to themselves.
 - 3.2.3. Establish processes of early intervention and review with pupils to prevent escalation of issues
 - 3.2.4. Train all staff on their role in supporting , developing and promoting the resilience of children.
 - 3.2.5. Audit and action plan with schools activity to impact on the whole school system and culture (supported by the Academic Resilience Approach from YoungMinds and Boing Boing)⁶
 - 3.2.6. Develop young people within schools as Young Wellbeing Leads and young leaders who work with staff to improve wellbeing.
 - 3.2.7. Create partnerships between schools to share practice, resource and become more connected and outward facing.
 - 3.2.8. Understand, along with partners in FTB, the spend within Education on EHWP within schools to inform future commissioning.
 - 3.2.9. Work with strategic partners to carefully explore how the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) awareness can be integrated in to this work for the future along with developing a whole school approach for primary schools. In particular this involves understanding an ACEs approach means for schools and the impact that identification and response to ACEs may have on already pressured resources.
- 3.3. Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust undertook a Delphi study on supporting children's transitions from primary to secondary education⁷. From this study, 71

⁵ http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/HeadStart_Strategy_Stage_3%20_xfinal.pdf

⁶ http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/academic_resilience

⁷ "Supporting Children's Transitions from Primary to Secondary Education" Second Round Delphi study led by P Patterson, G Ramos, M Spicer. Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust, 2015

recommendations for best practice were made which support a robust transition program aimed at preventing and managing the stressors associated with transition. Future research should focus on implementing the best practice guidelines in study and evaluate its efficiency in improving the transition experience and resilience of children and decreasing levels of maladaptation to secondary school.

Support for young people with mental health problems

- 4.5. The Schools Link Programme builds on a pilot funded by the DfE in 2015. Now part of FTB it aims to improve joint working between local schools and mental health services. Primary Mental Health Workers visit schools to provide support and advice to staff around general mental health, mental health training, undertake joint assessment and one-off interventions.
- 4.6. SEMH schools are conducting the Pathfinder project, working with early intervention services, school nursing, FTB and youth offending services. It takes a system change approach and involves assessing the complexities of the young they are working with, and their families, to identify the strategies that will then in turn inform the wider system response.
- 4.7. FTB have implemented a 24 hour access centre that is able to offer:
- 24/7 access to emergency crisis support
 - Referral point for professionals and individuals to refer both via phone and online
 - General referral advice and confidential advice and support to professionals, young people and parents
 - Access to specialist mental health treatments and local emotional health support services
 - A service directory giving access to a range of community-based specialist services
 - Direct links with mental health professionals across the city so that appointments can be booked quickly for counselling sessions, group sessions, specialist mental health and crisis assessments.
- 4.8. For education professionals, the access centre coupled with the primary mental health worker role increases their ability to make appropriate referrals for children to ensure the right service can be in place much sooner.
- 4.9. FTB additionally offer a community drop in service, 'Pause', located within Birmingham City Centre. Offering support and advice for 0-25s their parents teachers and carers, the service has staff trained in a range of clinical interventions that can offer both early help and access to more acute services.
- 4.10. Work is taking across the city to develop a range of opportunities to support those in education working with the most vulnerable pupils:
- 4.11. The Vulnerable Pupil's project works with looked after children via the Virtual school, Pupil Referral Unit and also foster carers. It offers a range of support particularly around behaviour and supporting professionals to identify the differences between behaviour and mental and emotional health. Training has been taken up around a range of

issues and professionals have also been supported to use screening tools to assess and identify mental health needs.

- 4.12. Attachment Aware Strand. Working as part of a national initiative primarily for looked after children but also applicable to all vulnerable groups. It includes training for staff on attachment and its impact across the life course and sharing of good practice with a long term aim being to reduce permanent exclusions.
- 4.13. The Educational Psychology team are also working with FTB to deliver a training programme for lead people in school settings so that they can deliver bite-sized approaches to all emotional areas required

Social media and the internet

- 4.14. A comprehensive and detailed digital proposal in relation to a whole school approach to preventing mental ill health was created for Birmingham as part of the Big Lottery's HeadStart strategy⁸. Whilst written as a business case for investment, the evidence within is important and of relevance to this committee to highlight the context for young people living as 'digital natives'. It offers key messages from research and evidence both nationally and locally that show the many fundamental gaps in the provision of consistent and appropriate advice regarding online safety for young people, staff and parents.
- 4.15. Other points include:
- How parents want support from schools to prevent and respond effectively to social media experiences and concerns
 - That teachers want standardised professional guidance to support them in responding effectively to parents and appropriate training to do so
 - That young people urgently need education on the pros and cons of social media, how to navigate effectively and identify inappropriate instances, how to know that resources they are accessing in relation to their own wellbeing are robust and trustworthy.

Learning

- 4.16. Primary schools have reported high levels of need in terms of emotional health and well-being, particularly for school years 5 and 6.
- 4.17. Engaging schools at a senior level and sustaining that engagement is crucial to embedding any work around emotional health and wellbeing within a school.
- 4.18. Schools are unclear about what is available in the market to support their work at both a universal and more targeted level, find it difficult to judge the quality of the provision and evidence the impact on outcomes for students.
- 4.19. Transition from primary to secondary school is a highly complex and variable process (some schools in Birmingham have 60+ feeder primaries) and even more so for children already experiencing mental distress e.g. attachment disorders. Year 7 can be a challenging year for students, parents and schools but an opportunity for a fresh start for students. A standardised best practice approach, including the transferring of accurate information

about the child, is needed to enable schools to better support their students and prevent poor emotional well-being.

- 4.20. Implementing curriculum-based delivery can be a challenge. Applying a one size fits all 'product' to all schools and maintaining fidelity to that is difficult as schools are run in a wide variety of ways. A consistent, whole school approach that can respond to the individual school context and be embedded throughout the school from senior leadership to support staff, is needed.
- 4.21. Someone to support parents in engaging with schools about their child; parents felt that current relationships with schools are not strong enough.
- 4.22. Young people told us:
- 4.23. They want to be a part of the solutions and have an impactful voice in their school system
- 4.24. About concerns they have for the 'invisible kids' who do not show as an immediate concern via overt behaviours.
- 4.25. They value the role of mentors for other young people and want to have a voice in co-creating responses.

Recommendations:

- 5. Much work is currently being undertaken across the city which recognises and seeks to build on the transformative role of education and learning within young people's lives. Our recommendations to this committee based on experience and evidence in this city would include:
 - 5.5. Every school has an identified member of the senior leadership team who will take a lead on the co-ordination of emotional wellbeing within the school, ensure it is a priority and who is able to influence the school system and processes. Additionally, these school leaders should come together to support each other, be firmly linked in with all health offers both locally to their school and across areas to enable a consistent understanding of mental and emotional health.
 - 5.6. That there is a commitment to sharing learning across areas to develop seamless support pathways for young people both in person and online.
 - 5.7. That high quality staff supervision becomes a priority for pastoral teams. This will build confidence and also allow more bespoke interventions for children and help manage the emotional pressures that working with vulnerable children brings
 - 5.8. That schools have strong links with mental health services through primary mental health workers linked to schools to upskill key staff members on assessment and referral. This will support early and robust identification of children with emerging needs and allow earlier intervention.
 - 5.9. That schools are better equipped to commission or purchase services that will meet the needs of their pupils through commissioning guidance and an understanding of quality assurance.
 - 5.10. That schools are supported to develop a clear understanding of how they can support children and young people at universal, universal+ and targeted levels of support within their school. It involves the ability to better identify pupils who are vulnerable to

poor emotional health, communicate this to staff who need to know, make appropriate use of pathways, make low level interventions and work with VCS and statutory services to ensure the right support for children at the right time.

- 5.11. That there is further work to plan a systematic approach to evaluation and embed research findings into best practice for supporting transition for children throughout school and in particular from primary to secondary and the transfer of information about pupils between primary and secondary
- 5.12. Careful consideration is given to what ACEs and ACEs awareness means for schools in practice. Learning from work already underway with vulnerable pupils and from colleagues across the country will be important to ensure a robust and thoughtful approach.
- 5.13. Close consideration of the implications for schools of the work of the Attachment Research Community(ARC) and the emphasis on relational frameworks as part of a whole school approach
- 5.14. That young people are involved within schools as part of designing solutions that are pertinent to their own school's context and culture.
- 5.15. That trusted digital educational resources appropriate to age range and focused on wellbeing resilience and positive mental health are made available to all school-age young people parents and school staff
- 5.16. That recent guidance and resources on cyberbullying in schools developed by Childnet International are considered as part of a whole school approach to children's mental health
- 5.17. That appropriate e-safety policies and training in online safety is systematically applied across all schools in line with recent Ofsted guidance
- 5.18. Online offers must develop a range of appropriate and targeted resources for BAME and other vulnerable groups and be designed in co-participation with young people from these groups and relevant organisations.
- 5.19. That funding from the national transformation plans for children and young people health budget should be considered to support schools in developing best practice in early intervention mental health provision in schools in line with recommendations from the Institute for Public Policy Research report (May 2016)

Supporting schools enables them to be part of a sustainable, wider system pathway for emotional well-being and mental health support in the future.

We would welcome the inquiry committee to Birmingham to discuss further the innovative work currently taking place in relation to children and young people, mental health and education settings.