

Mental Health, Student Wellbeing and COVID-19

What is the Policy?

The government believes that getting children and young people back into education, with settings devoting time to supporting wellbeing, will play a fundamental part in supporting children and young people's mental health. Minister Vicky Ford has said that 'The return to school will allow social interaction with peers, carers and teachers, which benefits wellbeing.'

Guidance

The DfE has published detailed plans for all children and young people to return to full-time education from September. This guidance for schools for their safe return and opening is available here: [Guidance 28 August](#)

What is expected from teachers?

The Government has made it clear that it does not expect Teachers to be mental health experts. DfE states 'School, college and university staff cannot act as mental health experts, and they should not try to diagnose conditions. However, it is important that they are able to identify possible mental health problems, so they are able to put appropriate support in place. It is up to schools and colleges to decide what training to offer their staff, but we have put in place a range of training for them to draw on.'

Importance of Training

Training is seen as particularly important to give schools confidence to deal with issues that will have arisen during the COVID-19 outbreak. To ensure that staff are equipped to support wellbeing as children and young people returned to schools and colleges, DfE says it has made it a central part of its guidance both on remote education and on the return to school. DfE says 'We supported this with a range of training and materials, including webinars which have been accessed by thousands of education staff. We have also accelerated training on how to teach about mental health as part of the new relationships, sex and health curriculum, so that all pupils can benefit from this long-term requirement.'

Wellbeing for Education Return programme

The government has recently launched the Wellbeing for Education Return programme, which provides training and resources for teachers and staff in all state-funded schools to respond to the wellbeing and mental health needs of children and young people as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). The training provides practical examples to support staff, children and young people within a school.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/8m-programme-to-boost-pupil-and-teacher-wellbeing>

Catch Up

The government says it has been working hard to ensure that all pupils and learners returned to a full high-quality education programme in September. Its £1 billion Covid catch-up package, with £650 million shared across schools over the 2020-21 academic year, will support education settings to put the right catch-up and pastoral support in place. More information on this is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/billion-pound-covid-catch-up-plan-to-tackle-impact-of-lost-teaching-time>.

Mental Health and Behaviour Advice

As pupils return to school, staff need to be equipped to understand that some children and young people may be experiencing feelings such as anxiety, stress or low mood, as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and that these are normal responses to an abnormal situation. The governments *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools Advice* includes information about what to look for in terms of underlying mental health

issues, linked to the graduated response and the support that might be suitable. More information is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2>.

The DfE Guidance, issued 28 August, also includes detailed plans for all children and young people to return to full-time education from 1 September. The guidance **highlights the particular need to focus on pastoral support and mental wellbeing as a central part of what schools provide, in order to re-engage them and rebuild social interaction with their friends and teachers**. This will involve curriculum provision as well as extra-curricular and pastoral support, and the government's recently published *relationships, sex and health education training module* will support teachers with preparation to deliver content on mental health and wellbeing. More information is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing>.

Wellbeing for Education Return

To provide further support, during the autumn and spring terms, the department has worked with its partners, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Health Education England, Public Health England and key voluntary sector organisations, to launch **Wellbeing for Education Return**. This project, backed by £8 million, aims to train local experts to provide additional training, advice and resources to schools and colleges, to help support pupil and student wellbeing, resilience and recovery. It aims to give staff the confidence to support pupils and students, their parents, carers and their own colleagues and know how and where to access appropriate specialist support where needed. This specific support is building on the government's longer-term activity to help support teacher knowledge.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/8m-programme-to-boost-pupil-and-teacher-wellbeing>

Disadvantaged

The Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson said on 9 October 'We are taking unprecedented action to help schools support wellbeing, including wellbeing for education return training, and world-leading trials on ways to promote mental health wellbeing. Disadvantaged pupils will receive high-quality tuition through the **£350 million national tutoring programme**, and we continue to provide schools with the £2.4 billion pupil premium.

Senior mental health lead

The government has made a clear commitment to make available training to schools by 2025 to support them to put in place **senior mental health leads**. Around 80% of schools and colleges already have a dedicated staff lead in place. The training will support new and existing leads to put in place effective whole school approaches to mental health. The DfE says this is in addition to longer term support to schools on tackling bullying, where DfE is providing £750,000, this year, to three organisations to help address different factors. The government is also funding a large-scale programme of randomised control trials of different approaches to promoting wellbeing in schools to find out what works. To help embed knowledge and practice in schools, DfE is now in the process of developing a bespoke senior mental health lead training programme. The training will equip senior mental health leads with the knowledge to introduce or develop their whole school and college approach to mental health, implement effective processes for ensuring pupils and students with mental health problems receive appropriate support and to promote positive mental health within the school or college so that it becomes a key part of how schools and colleges operate. The knowledge requirements and expected outcomes for the training closely align to Public Health England's 'Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing. A whole school and college approach', which is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414908/Final_EHWP_draft_20_03_15.pdf

Counselling

The DfE has published guidance on how to put in place effective school-based counselling, which schools can use to identify where further counselling support is appropriate for their pupils.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counselling-in-schools>.

The department does not ask schools to provide details of support, nor does it make estimates of the level of support. However, a DfE survey of mental health provision in schools and colleges in 2016 and 2017 found that 61% of schools and colleges (56% of primary schools, 84% of secondary schools and 93% of colleges) reported offering access to a counselling service for their pupils.

Looked After Children

The Department of Health and Social Care is working with the Department for Education to develop and trial 'new high-quality mental health assessments for looked after children'. These pilots ensure that young people are assessed at the right time, with a focus on their individual needs as they enter care. The Department for Education has awarded £240,000 to a group of organisations, led by the Anna Freud Centre, (see links below) to deliver up to nine local pilots over two years.

Behaviour

Guidance has been issued on Mental health and behaviour in schools (How schools can support pupils whose mental health problems manifest themselves in Behaviour)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2>

Green Paper

The government says it remains committed to a major joint green paper delivery programme with DHSC and NHS England, including introducing new mental health support teams linked to schools and colleges, and testing approaches to faster access to NHS specialist support.

Teachers Mental Health

DfE also, it says, recognises 'the importance of supporting staff with their own mental health and wellbeing. This is why we are funding a £95,000 pilot project with the Education Support Partnership, to focus on leaders' mental health, providing online peer support and telephone supervision from experts to around 250 school leaders. This is in addition to funding of £45,000 DfE provided to Timewise, to provide practical support and resources on flexible working, in light of new arrangements for schools responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Teacher Training Module-Well Being

DfE has designed this module to help subject leads to train teachers who will be teaching mental wellbeing. The module contains key knowledge and facts to help teachers understand what they must teach. These slides should be adapted to suit individual school context. This can include adding your own videos and resources to make your teaching training sessions more visual and interactive.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing>

NHS and Social Care

The government says that it also remains 'committed to our joint green paper delivery programme with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England, including introducing new mental health support teams and testing approaches to deliver four week waiting times for access to NHS support. Access to mental health support is more important than ever during the COVID-19 outbreak. NHS services remain open. Leading mental health charities are being supported to deliver additional services through the £5 million Coronavirus Mental Health Response Fund. During Mental Health Awareness Week, the government also announced that a further £4.2 million will be awarded to mental health charities, including the **Samaritans, Young Minds, and Bipolar UK.**

The department, in collaboration with Public Health England and NHS England, delivered two webinars in July to provide further mental health support. All NHS mental health trusts have been asked to ensure that there are 24/7 open access telephone lines to support people of all ages. Public Health England and Health

Education England have also developed advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>.

CAMHS

CAMHS are specialist NHS mental health services for children and young people. They offer assessment, diagnosis, treatment and support for young people who are experiencing problems with their emotions, behaviour or mental health. They are multidisciplinary teams including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, psychological therapists and mental health link workers. CAMHS takes referrals of children up to 18 years of age, although in certain places it may be up to 16. CAMHS is designed to treat children and young people with the most severe and/or complex mental health difficulties, which accounts for 2% of children in your area.

What senior leaders can do:

According to the **Anna Freud Centre** leaders should establish a protocol with CAMHS in their area to clarify referral and joint working procedures. This may include, for example, agreeing how you might access advice and consultation. Many specialist CAMHS teams are happy to offer school staff and other professionals advice about potential referrals, which can save time and simplify the process. It is sensible to find out and document who can refer to specialist CAMHS. Some areas have an 'open' system of referral (which means that family members, children and young people, teachers, counsellors, social workers etc. can refer). While others have a system where only certain professionals can make a referral (e.g. schools nurses, GPs etc.)

Mental Health and Curriculum Reforms

Alongside changes to Relationships and Sex Education, the Government announced the introduction of statutory health education in July 2018. The DfE published final statutory guidance in June 2019. The statutory guidance came into force in September 2020, with schools able to implement the changes from September 2019 if they wish. Relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

The guidance sets out proposed requirements for health education. The requirements cover physical health and mental wellbeing, and it makes clear that the two are interlinked.

At primary level, pupils are expected to learn:

- that mental wellbeing is a normal part of daily life; that mental ill health is common and can often be addressed effectively.
- that there is a normal range of emotions.
- how to recognise and talk about their emotions, judge their own feelings, and where and how to seek support.
- the benefits of things like physical exercise, time outdoors, and how to use simple self-care techniques.
- that bullying has a negative and often lasting impact on mental wellbeing.

At secondary level, pupils should be taught:

- how to talk about their emotions.
- that happiness is linked to being connected to others.
- how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing concerns.
- common types of mental ill health (e.g. anxiety and depression).
- how to critically evaluate when something they do or are involved in has a positive or negative effect on their own or others' mental health.
- the benefits and importance of things like physical exercise, time outdoors & community participation.

Useful Sources

Anna Freud Centre

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/camhs/>

Young Minds

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Place 2 Be

<https://www.place2be.org.uk/coronavirus>

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