

National mental health programme between schools and NHS

Pupils struggling with mental health are to benefit from more joined up care and support across schools, colleges and specialist NHS services, in a national roll out of a £9.3 million training scheme.

Every school, college and alternative provision will be offered training through a series of workshops as part of the Link Programme, with the most appropriate member of staff from each put forward to take part alongside mental health specialists. This is designed to improve partnerships with professional NHS mental health services, raise awareness of mental health concerns and improve referrals to specialist help when needed.

The four-year scheme will be led by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, backed by the multi-million-pound government investment. It builds on 1,500 schools and colleges that have already taken up this training during the pilot stage of the programme, launched in 2015.

Starting in September, the training will be rolled out to schools and colleges in phases over four years, being offered to up to 22,000 schools and colleges, including alternative provision settings.

The Link Programme will deliver just under 1,000 training sessions across England involving two whole-day workshops for up to 20 schools at a time to cover all 22,000 schools, encouraging collaborative work so children do not fall between the cracks or experience poor transition between services.

One in nine young people aged 5 to 15 had a diagnosable mental health condition in 2017 and teenagers with a mental health disorder are more than twice as likely to have a mental disorder in adulthood. This package of measures is part of the Government's plan to improve mental health support for children and young people, including identifying mental health issues before they become more acute.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

School and college should be a place where young people feel valued, supported and listened to – and I know that this is the case for so many thanks to the dedication of their teachers and support staff. But there are limits to what can be asked or expected of teachers – they are not, and should not, be mental health professionals.

That's why this new training is important, by bringing school and college staff into the same room as NHS professionals and encouraging them to work together, sharing their expertise and making sure they have the information they need so that more pupils get the right help at the right time.

This builds on the significant measures we've already put in place to improve children's wellbeing, including our new mandatory health education curriculum and the mental health first aid training being offered to schools and colleges.

Training will be prioritised in areas where schools and colleges are already attached to Mental Health Support Teams, following the Government's announcement last December that these teams would be created in 25 'trailblazer' areas.

The Government also confirmed today that 124 new Mental Health Support Teams will be created in 48 areas across the country. Each designated team will support around 20 schools and colleges in their area, helping speed up access to specialist services and building on support already in place from school counsellors, nurses, educational psychologists and the voluntary sector, so that more children and young people get the help and support they need, when they need it.

This forms part of the Government's ambitious plans to transform children and young people's mental health through the NHS Long Term Plan.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We want to give our children and young people the best possible start in life, and providing them with mental health and wellbeing support is a vital component.

I'm delighted this programme will bring our health and education systems even closer together, building on the progress of our existing trailblazer sites and using the expertise of our NHS to ensure children have quicker access to mental health support when they need it.

Research highlights the important role the school environment plays in equipping children and young people with skills to support their own wellbeing. The Department for Education has this week also launched an exercise to recruit a specialist provider to deliver training for senior mental health leads in schools and colleges, so they have the skills and knowledge to promote positive mental health and wellbeing and implement effective processes for children and young people to receive appropriate support.

CEO of the Anna Freud Centre Professor Peter Fonagy said:

With half of all lifetime cases of mental health disorders beginning by the age of 14, there is no greater investment we can make from an economic or moral perspective than to promote the physical and mental health of children and young people. We need to give them the help they need when they need it and to think

differently about how to deliver support. The Link Programme does exactly that.

The Link Programme brings together mental health and education professionals to work together to promote mental health and alleviate children and young people's distress. This way we can identify their needs early and sign post them to the best support.

This is a transformative programme and one which we at the Anna Freud Centre are proud to lead. It's an indication of the groundswell of support that it is funded by the Department for Education, supported by NHS England and 13 partners from local authorities, health providers and the charity sector.

The second wave of Mental Health Support Team areas will benefit from early intervention support to young people with mild to moderate mental health needs. Teams will use the evidence available from research and other studies to strengthen the support that is available in schools and colleges, basing it on what they know is already working.

Claire Murdoch, NHS England's National Mental Health Director, said:

The NHS is treating more children and young people for mental health conditions than ever before, and by offering expert mental health training in schools and identifying illness earlier we can help thousands more families to get the help they need to take care of their children.

The announcements build on the Government's wider investment in children's mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges, including compulsory health education lessons from 2020, to ensure every young person is given the tools to thrive despite challenges they may face growing up.