

[New Action Group to boost mental health education](#)

A new coalition of health and education experts has met for the first time today (Tuesday 9 March) to look at the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and education staff across England.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson was joined by ministers from across Government, as well as Youth Mental Health Ambassador Dr. Alex George, to discuss how best to respond to the mental health issues of greatest concern including the increase in eating disorders and self-harm among young people, and how to help education staff manage their mental wellbeing.

The coalition agreed to take forward more action across a range of areas, including boosting the support available to help children and young people move between schools and year groups, and looking at how schools and colleges can target funding and recovery support to ensure that support reaches pupils who need it the most.

Today's meeting builds on the Government's [commitment](#) to ensure millions more children and young people have access to specialist support, including significantly expanded mental health services, backed by an additional £79 million.

The number of Mental Health Support Teams – which provide early intervention on mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in schools and colleges – will grow from the 59 set up by last March to around 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly three million children and young people.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Getting young people back into schools and colleges has been a national priority, not just because of the significant benefits to their education but because of the benefit to their wellbeing as well. Across society the sacrifices we have all had to make to battle to pandemic has had an impact on wellbeing and mental health, and this is especially true for young people who have had to sacrifice so much over the last year.

The important work of this Mental Health Action Group will build on the significant investment we have already put into mental health in education, through training for teachers, our new health education curriculum and expert teams in schools and colleges. Today's meeting highlights the cross-government approach we are taking to make sure we continue to support staff and students.

Jointly chaired by the Education Secretary, Minister for Children and

Families Vicky Ford and Universities Minister Michelle Donelan, the first meeting of the action group comes as millions of children and young people reunite with friends, classmates and their teachers, returning to the classroom with mental health and wellbeing at the centre of Government plans to enable all pupils to settle back into their daily routines.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

While the pandemic continues to affect so many people in our country, our commitment to improving mental health support for all remains firm, especially through early intervention and specialist care for the young people who need it most.

Mental health challenges affect so many of us on a daily basis. That's why promoting wellbeing is at the heart of our recovery plans and why I'm proud to be jointly chairing this important new group.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said:

We know that this pandemic has taken a real toll on our students and protecting their mental health moving forward is non-negotiable.

It is vital that students get the help they need – for those struggling with their mental health, there is support out there through Public Health England's Every Mind Matters campaign, and students can also access targeted support through our Student Space platform.

This action group will allow us to look further at the evidence available to identify where we can expand and improve the existing support for all who need it.

Action group members also shared ways to improve training, where to focus investment and how to make wellbeing a core part of the school curriculum, as well as considering early years settings and development, university support, and sector-wide widespread mental health and wellbeing training opportunities.

Minister for Mental Health, Nadine Dorries, said:

I am acutely aware of how difficult this pandemic has been and this government is committed to supporting everyone's mental health, including children and young people. Today's meeting is a prime example of the steps we are taking to ensure we're supporting their wellbeing during this pandemic and beyond through early intervention.

The pandemic has disrupted children's routines – particularly with home schooling and the impact of this on their learning and seeing their friends – and although children are resilient, it's crucial we continue to support them as things get back to normal.

I encourage anyone who needs support to reach out to someone they trust or their GP – these services are here to help.

Youth Mental Health Ambassador Dr Alex George said:

Young people in this country have shown incredible resilience during the pandemic, but we need to recognise that many have struggled with their mental health.

Schools can play a vital role in a young person's development and wellbeing, and the extra investment for Mental Health Support Teams will make a huge difference.

I want every young person in this country to know that they can speak out and access support when they need it and I will continue working closely with the Government on this important work.

Education staff will be supported to respond to the emotional and mental health pressures some children and young people may be feeling as a result of COVID-19 as they return to school by the Wellbeing for Education Return [programme](#) backed by £8 million, and free online psychological training modules on how to provide practical and emotional support to children and young people affected by emergencies or crisis situations.

Catherine Roche, CEO of Place2Be said:

We know from our school-based mental health professionals that young people have been deeply affected by the pandemic.

It's therefore really positive to see the worlds of Education and Health come together at this crucial time. Schools are fantastic in providing easily accessible, destigmatised support for children and families, but teaching staff cannot do this alone. Expert support from mental health professionals will be crucial as we move forward and understand the true impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health.

The first meeting of the Mental Health in Education Action Group was chaired jointly by Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, Vicky Ford, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families and Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities. Other action group attendees from within the government include Nadine Dorries, Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health and policy officials from across

the Department for Education, the Department for Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England.

Attendees include Emma Thomas, Chief Executive of Young Minds; Paul Farmer CBE, Chief Executive of Mind; Catherine Roche, Chief Executive of Place2Be; Sir Norman Lamb, Chair of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition; Dame Christine Lenehan, Director of the National Children's Bureau; Matthew Purves, Chair of the Schools and Wellbeing Partnership; Steve West, Chair of the Mental Health in HE Advisory Group; Rosie Tressler OBE, Chief Executive of Student Minds; Dr Peter Fonagy, National Clinical Adviser on Children and Young People mental health at NHS England; Dr Alex George, Youth Mental Health Ambassador and a student representative from the Office for Students' student panel.