2022-0006228WQPO

Will Quince MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Wera Hobhouse MP
By email: wera.hobhouse.mp@parliament.uk

Your ref: P/WH35929

28 March 2022

Dear Wera,

Thank you for your letter of 16 February, on behalf of the Child Mental Health Charter Campaign, about the mental wellbeing of young people and the quality of services available to them. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The mental health of all children and young people is a priority for this government. We remain committed to our ambitions in the NHS Long Term Plan to expand and transform mental health services in England and to investing an additional £2.3 billion a year by 2023 to 2024. This will allow an additional 345,000 children and young people to be supported by NHS-funded services by 2023 to 2024. More information on the NHS Long-Term Plan is available at: tinyurl.com/4zmwhn3v.

We also announced a £79 million investment to significantly expand children's mental health services in 2021 to 2022. This will allow around 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services, 2,000 more children and young people to access eating disorder services, and a faster increase in the coverage of mental health support teams in schools and colleges over this financial year.

In addition, NHS England and NHS Improvement announced a further £40 million in 2021 to 2022 to address the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on children and young people's mental health, including on those with eating disorders. This additional funding is in recognition of the rising demand of support for children's mental health and our continued commitment to provide the best care to children and young people as early as possible.

The government is committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing support that is available to schools and we recognise that school-based counselling, by well-qualified practitioners, can be an effective source of support for many children and young people. To further support schools who have decided that counselling support is appropriate for their pupils, we have produced guidance on how to deliver high-quality, school-based counselling. A copy of this guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/P9coc22. In light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have committed to updating this guidance to make sure it reflects the current context.

As mentioned in the Children's Mental Health debate on 8 February, our School Provisions survey in 2017 found that 84% of secondary schools already offer school-based counselling as a part of their pastoral support. More recently, our School Snapshot Survey in July 2021 found that 96% of schools were providing support in school for pupils identified as having mental health needs.

The department has set out a strong expectation that, over time, all schools should make counselling services available to their pupils. However, the department has not made the provision of access to counselling in schools and colleges mandatory, as it is important for schools to have the freedom to decide what support to offer pupils based on their needs and drawing on an evidence base of effective practice.

In terms of school curriculum, mental wellbeing is now a statutory part of health education in all state-funded schools. Pupils need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their academic, personal, and social lives in a positive way. The knowledge pupils gain will support their own and others' wellbeing and help them to become successful and happy adults. This knowledge will help pupils in returning to school and spending time with their friends.

The aim of teaching pupils about physical health and mental wellbeing is to give them the information they need to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing, recognise issues in themselves and others, and, when issues arise, seek support as early as possible from appropriate sources.

At primary school, pupils will learn simple self-care techniques, including the importance of rest, time spent with friends and family and the benefits of hobbies and interests. At secondary school, teaching will include the benefits of community participation and voluntary and service-based activities on mental wellbeing and happiness.

Through the health education curriculum, pupils will also be taught how to recognise the early signs of mental wellbeing concerns, including common types of mental health conditions for example, anxiety and depression. Pupils will be taught where and how to seek support (including recognising the signs that suggest they may need support), and they will learn about who to speak to in school if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions. This includes pupils who are concerned about something they have seen or witnessed online. These subjects will also support the development of pupils' self-control and their ability to self-regulate, as well as providing strategies for doing so.

The department recognises the need for our teaching workforce to be skilled in the subject of mental health too. We are offering a £1,200 grant for a senior member of school or college staff to access quality-assured training to implement an effective whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing in their education setting. This is part of the government's commitment to offer this training to all eligible schools and colleges by 2025.

The training will equip senior mental health leads with the knowledge to introduce or develop their whole school or college approach to mental health. They will also be able to implement effective processes for ensuring that pupils and students receive appropriate support and they will be able to promote positive mental health within the school or college so that it becomes a key part of how their education setting operates.

The government is making good progress on its commitment. Since applications opened in October 2021, over 8,000 eligible schools and colleges have applied for a senior mental health training grant.

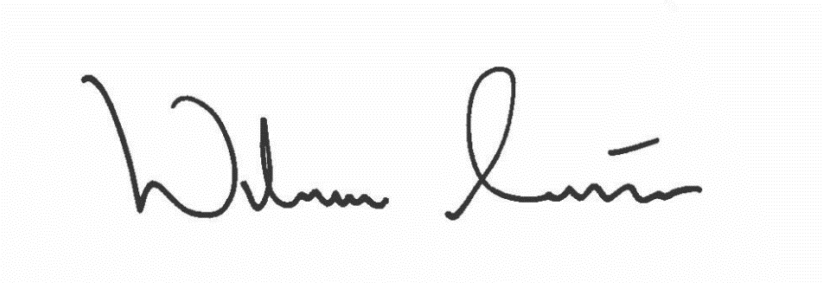
The Department of Health and Social Care plans to launch a public discussion paper this year to inform the development of a new longer-term mental health strategy. This will involve a wide-ranging and ambitious conversation about potential solutions to improve mental health and wellbeing, both within and beyond the government and the NHS. The aim is also to challenge businesses, local authorities, and other sectors to bring commitments to the table.

Providing support at the earliest point in a child's life helps them build solid foundations from which to grow. At the 2021 Spending Review, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced an investment of £500 million over three years to transform Start for Life and family help services. This includes funding towards supporting families, establishing Family Hub networks, and parent-infant mental health support services. Further information on the focus of the funding will be available in due course.

This funding will help parents or carers to establish nurturing and positive relationships with their baby. The parent-infant relationship is critical to a child's early mental health. We expect that parents and carers will also benefit from support with their wellbeing and lower-level mental health needs.

May I take this opportunity to thank you and those involved with the Child Mental Health Charter Campaign for writing about this important matter. I hope this reply assures you of our commitment to the mental wellbeing of young people in this country.

Kind regards,



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