

Document Highlights

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Tackling the mental health crisis in secondary schools

Nowhere is the crisis in young people's mental health felt more acutely than in our secondary schools, which increasingly find themselves on the front line. A recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has argued for government to make early intervention an urgent priority and also suggested Ofsted inspect schools' mental health provision more thoroughly and more frequently.

The report, 'Education, education, mental health', identifies four barriers to improvement, which – in addition to Ofsted's inadequate inspections – include a lack of funding and schools' mental health commissioning expertise, and the quality of school counselling services.

More specifically, it says secondary schools should receive one day per week of on-site mental health support from NHS specialists, rising to two days per week by 2022/23, which the government has said they agree with in principle.

However, the IPPR identifies cuts to mental health services as a problem, saying the value of the 'early intervention' allocation received by local authorities fell from £3.2 billion per year in 2010/11 to £1.4 billion in 2015/16.

Key findings

- Demand for access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has accelerated since 2010. The number of hospital admissions of children under 18 who had self-harmed increased by more than 50 per cent between 2009/10 and 2014/15.
- At the same time, mental health services have faced growing financial pressures. In 2012/13, just six per cent of the total NHS spend on mental health went to services for children and young people.
- The erosion of NHS and local authority early intervention services means that local CAMHS systems have become trapped in a vicious cycle that is reducing their ability to meet the growing level of need. The value of the 'early intervention' allocation received by local authorities fell from £3.2 billion per year in 2010/11 to £1.4 billion in 2015/16, a reduction of 55 per cent.

- A consequence of cuts to services combined with a rising tide of mental ill-health is that secondary schools are being forced to pick up the pieces. In 2016, 90 per cent of secondary school headteachers reported an increase in rates of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression among their pupils over the previous five years.



The report highlights four barriers to improvement for schools:

1. Schools lack funding for mental health provision
2. Schools often lack internal expertise to commission mental health support effectively
3. Inconsistent quality of mental health support (particularly school counselling) available to schools
4. Ofsted isn't adequately monitoring schools' mental health provision

Key recommendations

1. More funding for mental health provision in schools:
 - ❑ All secondary schools should receive one day per week of on-site mental health support from NHS specialists, rising to two days per week by 2022/23. This should be funded by the health service but delivered in schools. Headteachers should top this up from their own budgets, based on pupil need.
2. Improved communication between local health service and schools:
 - ❑ All Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) should be required to convene a regular headteachers' mental health forum for the local area, so secondary schools can influence funding decisions in a more systematic and meaningful way.
 - ❑ All CCGs should be required to identify 'beacon schools', selected according to their pupils' ability to access high-quality mental health provision. These schools should be used as a means of spreading best practice within local areas.
3. Better school counselling services:
 - ❑ Counselling should become a regulated profession, with a clear 'specialist' route for working with children and young people in school settings.
 - ❑ There should be a new 'school-ready' kite mark that demonstrates counsellors' specific knowledge on, and experience of, working with children, young people and families in a school setting.
4. Ofsted to inspect mental health provision more regularly:
 - New criteria added to the Ofsted inspection framework in 2015 requires inspectors take schools' mental health provision into account. But just one third of inspection reports make reference to the mental health and wellbeing of pupils. Therefore, Ofsted must ensure that inspectors actually assess schools' mental health provision according to the changes to the framework that were introduced in 2015/16, and inspect for:
 - ❑ processes for monitoring pupils' mental health and identifying at-risk pupils
 - ❑ an internal triage system, conducted by professionals with mental health expertise
 - ❑ arrangements for clinical supervision of mental health specialists
 - ❑ strength of referral pathways to specialist services
 - ❑ evidence of the effectiveness of school-based interventions
 - ❑ the strength of schools' links to CCGs
 - Ofsted should also work with the Care Quality Commission to undertake 'joint targeted area inspections' for children and young people's mental health.

More information

- › [Read the full report: 'Education, education, mental health: Support secondary schools to play a central role in early intervention mental health services'.](#)