



Briefing paper:

Children and young people's mental health (CYPMH): Schools and colleges

This briefing provides headline details from the British Psychological Society (BPS) on child and young people's mental health in schools and colleges. The Society is campaigning for reform in a number of policy areas related to CYPMH and we would be delighted to meet to discuss this in more detail.

The state of children and young people's mental health

- Approximately one in ten children and young people have a diagnosable mental health condition.
- Around one in four children and young people show signs of a mental health difficulty, including anxiety and depression.
- This means up to three children in every classroom may have a treatable mental health issue.
- Around 50 per cent of lifelong mental health problems develop before age 14, with 75 per cent developing before age 25.
- Ten per cent of 5–16 year olds in the UK have a diagnosable mental health condition, with conduct and emotional disorders most prevalent.
- Only 25–40 per cent of these young people receive input from a mental health professional early enough, if at all.

Children and young people deserve better: Promoting mental health and wellbeing

Access to CAMHS provision – mental health support in schools

There is wide geographical variation in the provision and availability of CAMHS support, including through schools. This, alongside rising thresholds for access to CAMHS, means children and their families struggle to access services.

In light of this, and given the increased devolution of budgets to schools, some schools have chosen to prioritise targeted interventions to support the mental health of their students. Evidence shows that this can provide a timely approach to meeting pupils' needs and prevent the need for longer term care.

Therefore, improving mental health support in schools is crucial to ensuring mental health difficulties are tackled early and effectively. Applied psychologists are well-placed in this respect to work both directly and indirectly with schools to: increase staff knowledge of mental health issues; use systemic interventions to create environments where pupils are supported to be resilient and mentally healthy; and intervene directly when pupils are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Many children with mental health difficulties also have associated concerns in the areas of physical health or development/neurodevelopment. Therefore, it is important that mental health is not considered in isolation from children's wider developmental trajectories; a high level of expertise in typical and atypical child development is crucial to understanding the full picture for each individual.

The Society is calling for increased access to support from applied psychologists, to ensure that a fully rounded understanding of pupils' needs and required interventions is available to all schools.

Universal and selective approaches

Whole school, universal, approaches alongside selective psychological interventions are crucial to developing mentally healthy school environments.

Universal approaches involve all staff and include monitoring pupil wellbeing, teaching social and emotional skills, and using pastoral care to maximise the wellbeing of the whole school. These approaches can include mental health screens, evidence-based intervention groups, and sessions for parents and school staff.

Selective support is carried out by applied psychologists, but also those such as school nurses and family therapists, with individuals at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties. It can include screening/assessment for neurodevelopmental difficulties, preventative work with children and parents, and involvement at staff pastoral care meetings to enable them to provide support on a day-to-day basis. This is important as children and young people accessing traditional CAMHS services may otherwise only receive infrequent formal interventions.

The Society is calling for this combined approach to mental health support to be a focus for all schools – this should be a focus for the forthcoming children and young people’s mental health green paper.

Support for particularly vulnerable groups

As well as improving access to mental health support in schools more broadly, there are some particularly vulnerable groups who currently have limited access to CAMHS, despite high levels of need. These include:

- children and young people with special educational needs, who are more likely to experience mental health needs yet less likely than non-disabled peers to access CAMHS;
- young offenders, who have high levels of mental health difficulties including depression and self-harm, yet are often not in full time education and able to access CAMHS, negatively impacting reoffending rates;
- looked after children and care leavers, who are five times more likely to suffer mental health problems than their peers yet have limited access to suitable mental health support;
- LGBT young people;
- young people and intersectionality;
- BME and refugee children;
- victims of crime e.g. sexually exploited young people;
- children with chronic physical health problems and/or disability;
- young carers;
- children whose parents have mental health problems/ substance misuse problems.

The Society is calling for children and young people in these groups to be prioritised for improved access to CAMHS and identified for specific focus in the forthcoming green paper.

About the British Psychological Society (BPS)

The BPS is the representative body for psychology and psychologists in the UK. We are responsible for the promotion of excellence and ethical practice in the science, education, and practical applications of psychology. We have over 60,000 members across the UK, ranging from students to qualified psychologists. As a society we support and enhance the development and application of psychology for the greater public good. We set high standards for research, education and knowledge, and seek to disseminate these to increase wider public awareness of psychology and its importance. As part of this work we want to ensure that the value of psychology to society is recognised by policymakers and used to inform policy development across government.

For further information, please contact nigel.atter@bps.org.uk