

'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a Green Paper' **December 2017**

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Improving children's mental health is an urgent challenge for policy makers and professionals in the UK. Recent research suggests that at age 14, one in four girls and one in 10 boys have symptoms of depression.ⁱ There is evidence that the problem is intensifying, with a recent survey of school leaders reporting a dramatic increase in the number of students suffering from mental health and wellbeing issues.ⁱⁱ Meanwhile, specialist support is becoming increasingly difficult to access. The average maximum waiting time for a first appointment with children and young people's mental health services is 26 weeks (42 weeks until the start of treatment).ⁱⁱⁱ

The Prime Minister has described this as one of the *'burning injustices'* of our time, pledging to *'transform'* the way the country deals with mental health problems *'across society and at every stage of life'*.^{iv}

This briefing explores to what extent the Green Paper delivers on this commitment.

Key messages

The Green Paper contains welcome proposals, including:

- **Funding for a senior member of staff to lead on mental health work in schools.** This should help to promote a "whole school approach" to good mental health and wellbeing.
- **Mental Health Support Teams** to provide cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and other support to children who do not qualify for specialist NHS services, to improve early intervention; and
- **Four-week waiting time targets for specialist services.**

We particularly welcome the clear role for schools, and the emphasis on prevention and earlier access to support.

However, we are concerned that the timeframe and associated resource lack ambition and urgency whilst thousands of children across the country wait for the support they need.

Questions for the Government

- ***Will the Government consider implementing the reforms before 2019 so that children and young people can receive support sooner?***
- ***Will the Government use the existing evidence base for effective interventions, such as the Targeted Mental Health in Schools initiative, to inform the new Mental Health Support Teams?***
- ***Will the new School Leads and Mental Health Support Teams be equipped to support vulnerable groups such as Children in Need and Children in Care?***
- ***Will the School Leads' responsibilities include bullying prevention?***
- ***How will the Government ensure that the waiting time target does not result in perverse incentives, such as higher thresholds to access clinical support?***
- ***Will the Government indicate how the Green Paper will address the complex mental health needs of vulnerable young adults up to the age of 25, (including care leavers and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)) who often face a "cliff edge" when transitioning from children's services?***

1. Background

The Green Paper builds on the principles of *Future in Mind*^v and sets out further proposals aimed at ensuring that children and young people showing early signs of distress are always able to access *'the right help, in the right setting, when they need it'*.^{vi} Crucially, the Green Paper emphasises the role of schools in promoting good mental health and wellbeing and sets out the Government's ambition that every child 'no matter where they live' has access to high-quality mental health and wellbeing support linked to their school or college.^{vii}

'The green paper... sets out an ambition for earlier intervention and prevention, a boost in support for the role played by schools and colleges, and better, faster access to NHS services' –
The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP Secretary of State for Education and the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP Secretary of State for Health.^{viii}

2. Key proposals

i. Designated Senior Lead for mental health in all schools and colleges

- Incentives and support for schools to have a senior member of staff who leads on mental health.
- The Leads would be linked with local children and young people's mental health services which can provide rapid advice, consultation and signposting.

NCB, which hosts the partnership for Well-being and Mental Health in schools, has advocated for a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing for many years.^{ix} It is welcome that the Government has listened to the evidence and outlined plans for the new Leads to oversee the implementation of 'whole school approaches' in schools including through the design of behaviour policies, curriculum and pastoral support.

To ensure the Senior Leads are able to influence school policy effectively, and to embed a successful whole school approach, the Government should specify that the Senior Lead must be a member of the School's Senior Leadership Team.

As part of the whole school approach, the Green Paper reflects the role of Personal, Health, and Social Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in teaching every child about mental health and wellbeing and how this can support healthy relationships.

The Government should state explicitly how proposals in the Green Paper relate to forthcoming guidance on PSHE and RSE.

The Green Paper includes evidence that school-wide anti-bullying programmes are cost-effective and have the potential to reduce bullying levels. Evidence shows young people with mental health issues are particularly at risk of experiencing bullying, both face to face and online. Similarly, people who have been bullied are at significant risk of developing mental health issues both in childhood and in later life.

The Government should state explicitly that the Senior Leads will have responsibility for tackling bullying as part of a whole-school approach to mental health.

The Senior Lead has responsibility for identifying children at risk, and exhibiting signs, of mental ill health.

This should explicitly include providing support for specific groups including:

- **Vulnerable children such as children in care, children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), and children in need^x; and**
- **Children needing specific support, for example after a bereavement.**

ii. Mental Health Support Teams

- Funding for new teams to provide extra capacity for early intervention and ongoing support.
- Linked to groups of schools and colleges to provide interventions to support those with '*mild to moderate needs*'.

Research by NCB and Natcen on behalf of the Department for Education showed that children and young people with mental health needs who required more support than their school could provide, but who did not reach the threshold for specialist services, may be falling through the net.^{xi} We recommended additional funding so that all children could access the right support at the right time.^{xii} The new Mental Health Support Teams should improve early intervention and help reduce pressure on specialist services.

The new Mental Health Support Teams must be accessible to vulnerable groups, including children in care, to ensure their needs are assessed and addressed. The Government should make clear how this new school support links to the assessment pilots for children in care.

The Green Paper does not specify the range of interventions to be delivered by Mental Health Support Teams, or whether this will be informed by evidence from previous Government-commissioned programmes, such as the Targeted Mental Health in Schools initiative, which piloted local models to provide early intervention and targeted support for children aged 5-13 who were at risk of developing mental health problems.^{xiii}

Proposals for the new Mental Health Support Teams should build on existing evidence of what works, allowing changes to be implemented sooner than 2019.

iii. Trial four week waiting time for specialist children and young people's mental health services.

- Initial rollout to 'trailblazer' areas from 2019.
- Evaluation to consider the impact the new Mental Health Support Teams and Designated Senior Leads for mental health have on referrals to specialist services.

The targets should send the important message that mental health is as important as physical health, in line with the 'parity of esteem' principle. However, as NHS England recently made clear, the health system is struggling to meet existing targets.^{xiv}

The Government must outline how it will ensure the waiting time target does not result in perverse incentives, such as higher thresholds to access clinical support.

3. Funding and timeline for implementation

The Green Paper commits to £300 million to improve mental health services in schools and colleges. Funding for mental health support in schools is set to start in 2019 and the changes including Designated Senior Leads, Mental Health Support Teams and reducing waiting times, are to be rolled out to 20-25% of England by the end of 2022/23 – five years from now.

Whilst we support the Government's emphasis on trialling new approaches, and learning from evidence, the current timeframe risks leaving thousands of children waiting too long for the change they need.

4. Principles for transformative change

NCB has developed a set of eight core principles that we believe must be reflected in the Green Paper, in order for it to deliver meaningful and transformative change for children and young people.

Principle	How the Green Paper addresses this
Universality and inclusivity	We welcome the inclusive approach outlined in the Green Paper, including the recognition that mental health difficulties could affect anyone. It also mentions vulnerable groups, including children in need, LGBT young people, children with SEND, and young offenders. However, there are outstanding questions about the extent to which the proposals will address all children's needs, and how changes will work alongside existing systems of support.
Whole systems approach	We welcome the Green Paper's recognition that schools play a key role in addressing mental health and wellbeing issues in partnership with specialist services. New Mental Health Support Teams that will act as a link between schools, specialist mental health services and other community groups are particularly welcome as they will facilitate cross community working.
Additional funding is required	The Green Paper provides funding for the proposals from 2019. However, <i>'precise rollout will be determined by the success of the trailblazers, and securing funding after 2020/21'</i> . ^{xv} This timeline puts full funding after the Government's current spending period. Reforms will not be delivered until the end of 2022/23 – five years from now and it is unclear how funding will be affected if the Government's priorities shift in the interim.
Pre-birth to 25	<p>The primary focus of the Green Paper is on school aged children. However, it also makes some limited consideration of the needs of children and young people from before birth (through reforms to perinatal mental health services) through to age 25 (with proposals for a new 'national strategic partnership' focusing on supporting the transition from youth to adult services and the needs of young people aged 16-25).</p> <p>However, there are a lack of concrete proposals to address the needs of vulnerable groups such as care leavers and young people with SEND who often reach a 'cliff edge' at the transition from children's services.</p> <p>The Government should also set out how a 'whole organisation approach' applies to early years settings.</p>
Build on what has already been achieved	While the Green Paper reflects progress following <i>Future in Mind</i> and the 2014 SEND reforms, in many areas it does not explicitly build upon this.

	<p>For example, there are outstanding questions about how the new Senior Leads will work with the school SENCO to ensure the mental health and wellbeing needs of children with SEND are appropriately reflected in their EHC plan.</p> <p>Similarly, it is unclear from the Green Paper how Designated Senior Leads will contribute to care planning to ensure children in care get the right mental health support. Linked to this, it is unclear how new Mental Health Support Teams will feed into wider initiatives such as the mental health assessment pilots for children in care.</p>
Whole organisation approach	<p>The Green Paper promotes a whole organisational approach to mental health as recommended by NCB and others over many years.^{xvi} It is welcome that the Government has considered the wealth of evidence showing the benefits of whole organisational approaches^{xvii} and the Green Paper clearly identifies the new Designated Senior Lead as the individual with specific responsibility for oversight of the whole school approach (including how it links to behaviour policies, curriculum and pastoral support).</p> <p>As above, the Government should set out how this applies to early years settings.</p>
Meaningful consultation	<p>We welcome the 13 week public consultation. However, while there are options for children and young people to contribute via the standard consultation survey on the DfE website, the Government has not announced any specific plans to make the Green Paper consultation more accessible to young people. We look forward to seeing in more detail how the Department plans to engage with children, young people, parents and carers throughout the consultation and implementation process.</p>
Policy and practice	<p>Proposals in the Green Paper have a clear implementation and evaluation plan with a timeline that starts with a number of trailblazer projects in 2019 and a rollout to 20-25% of the country by the end of 2022/23.</p>

About NCB

NCB is a leading children's charity working to build a better childhood for every child. We listen to children and young people and work with those supporting them to develop evidence on what needs to be done to enable children to enjoy their right to be safe, secure and supported so they can flourish and fulfil their potential.

NCB's work on children and young people's mental health

NCB hosts the Partnership for Well-being and Mental Health in Schools. The Partnership is a national network of more than 50 leading organisations from the education, health and children's sectors that supports schools and services to improve the well-being and mental health of all children in education. We also recently launched a new Wellbeing Award for schools with Optimus Education Ltd (part of Prospects Services Group).

NCB's work on mental health also extends to the wider NCB family through the work of the Anti-Bullying Alliance (a coalition of organisations and individuals united against bullying), the Childhood Bereavement Network (the hub for organisations and individuals working with bereaved children, young people and their families in the UK) and the Sex Education Forum (a thriving membership organisation working together for quality Relationships and Sex Education).

i NCB and the UCL Institute of Education (September 2017) 'Mental ill-health among children of the new century, trends across childhood with a focus at age 14' <https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Mental%20ill-health%20among%20children%20of%20the%20new%20century.pdf>.

ii National Children's Bureau and ASCL (2016) Keeping young people in mind

https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/news/ascl_and_ncb_findings_from_survey_briefing_final_footnotes.pdf

iii Frith, E. (2016) CentreForum Commission on Children and Young People's Mental Health: State of the Nation.

iv 'The shared society: Prime Ministers Speech at the Charity Commission annual meeting' (January 2017) <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-shared-society-prime-ministers-speech-at-the-charity-commission-annual-meeting>.

v 'Future in Mind Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing' was published in 2015. It outlines the findings of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce and set out the Government's plans to help children, young people and families access the services and support they need.

vi Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a Green Paper', p.3.

vii Ibid., p.4.

viii Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a Green Paper', p.2.

ix 'Whole school' refers to a multi-component approach, which encompasses and mobilises the totality of the school experience to promote well-being and address mental health issues. Weare, K. (2015) 'What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools'.

x Children defined as 'in need' under the Children Act 1989 are children who are 'unlikely to achieve or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health and development will be significantly impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled'. These children often have complex needs which can overlap with mental health needs. See Section 17, Children Act 1989 for further information.

xi NCB and Natcen, on behalf of the Department for Education (August 2017) 'Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges'.

xii NCB, 'Mental Health Provision in Schools and Colleges – Briefing for MPs', September 2017

<https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Supporting%20Mental%20Health%20in%20Schools%20and%20Colleges.pdf>.

xiii Department for Education, 'Me and My School: Findings from the National Evaluation of Targeted Mental Health in Schools 2008-2011'.

xiv <https://nhsproviders.org/resource-library/reports/the-state-of-the-nhs-provider-sector>

xv Transforming children and young people's mental health provision: a Green Paper', p.24.

xvi See work of the partnership for well-being and mental health in schools since 2014: <https://www.ncb.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities/health-and-well-being/projects-and-programmes/partnership-well-being-and>.

xvii NCB and Natcen, on behalf of the Department for Education (August 2017) 'Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges'.