Meeting: Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee

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Title: An overview of Children and Young People's Mental health

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Service: Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

Wards affected: All

1.   Purpose of Report

To provide members of the committee an update of the impact of COVID 19 on children and young peoples' mental health.

2.   Introduction

Prior to the outbreak of coronavirus, the Local Authority experienced an increase in the proportion of children and young people presenting with social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) issues. Between 2017/18 and 2019/20 there was a 45% increase in the proportion of EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plans) issued with SEMH as a primary need, alongside an increase in the proportion of children and young people presenting with emerging SEMH needs. As below:

SEND population	CYP with SEMH as primary need (both EHCP and SEND Support)	CYP with SEMH as primary need (just as a % of EHCP)	CYP with SEMH as primary need (just as a % of SEND Support)
%	23.5% (1155/4911)	20.8% (233/1119)	24% (922/3792)
Number	1155	233	922

Full CYP population	CYP with SEMH as primary need
%	3.7% (1155/30963)
Number	1155

We recognise that these statistics predate COVID 19 and do not reflect any impact of the pressures that national lock down and restrictions have placed on our children and young people.

The government are committed to significantly expand mental health support for children and young people, recognising that young people have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic. To this end they have allocated £79 million towards this. Several research studies have informed this decision.

NHS research suggests 1 in 6 young people may now have a mental health problem, up from 1 in 9 in 2017. It is anticipated that the number of mental health support teams in schools and colleges will grow from 59 to 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly 3 million children. The ambition is that mental health support teams will work in a variety of ways, including enabling children to text their local mental health support team, with a health professional responding within an hour during the school day offering them advice, or providing families with tips on how to spot that the children and young people are struggling with their mental health.

Nationally, several studies indicate that returning to school is not enough to restore children's mental health. A new study has found that nationally there was a significant rise in emotional and behavioural issues among primary school pupils, following the first lockdown. Academics at Essex, Surrey and Birmingham universities found that when children returned to school in September, their wellbeing levels were slightly higher than they had been in July but were "still much lower than pre-pandemic levels". Dr Birgitta Rabe, reader in economics at Essex University's Institute for Social and Economic Research and one of the paper's authors, said the research shows that "going back to school does not appear to be sufficient for children to 'bounce back'. The study, published by the Institute for Social and Economics Research, tracked children's mental health and how it changed over the past three years using data from household longitudinal study Understanding Society and its linked Covid-19 survey.

The chief inspector of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, said remote learning had been a slog for many and that issues like self-harm and eating disorders were on the rise. Ms Spielman warned schools and parents they had to be alert to the fact that serious mental health difficulties would persist even after face-to-face classes resume. She said pupils had endured "boredom, loneliness, misery and anxiety" over the last two months. "There is a minority – and let's hope it is not too large a minority – whose problems have increased, and it is really important that we are good at recognising where problems are arising," she said. "Things like eating disorders, things like self-harm, and mental health services are very aware of the kinds of problems that have been increasing and whether they can expect more cases coming through, so everybody needs to be alert to these,"

More locally, we know that of the 114 Fair Access Referrals since September 2020 (accurate up to Friday 29th January 2021).

- **85** students have been identified as having mental health which has **deteriorated** since lockdown 2020 or identified as their mental health being the **same**, which was poor.
- **29** students **did not** have a Covid mental health question completed.
- There were no students with improved mental health.

This equates to just over half of students considered as part of Fair Access protocols, having experienced a decline in their mental health.

We also recognise that although many studies and commentary, focus on the detrimental impact of the pandemic on children and young people's mental health, we know that anecdotally, some pupils have thrived from more time at home and from accessing smaller class groups.

3.   Details

During the pandemic, Local Authority officers and school leaders have maintained a focus on monitoring pupils' mental health and wellbeing, recognising that many families have experienced raised levels of anxiety.

We are mindful that none of us truly understand the longer-term impact of COVID 19 on the mental health and wellbeing of our children and young people, but to try to capture some emerging issues we completed a staff survey in February 2021. The outcomes are a snapshot of the views of staff in school at that point. We received responses from 60% of our 79 schools. From this sample, 77% of responses were from Primary and First Schools so this has influenced the data. We recognise, that this was before the wider re-opening of schools on March 8th, so more issues may arise as pupils return to school.

Findings are as follows:

- 96% of schools felt COVID 19 had a detrimental impact on the mental health of children and young people. It was also felt that our children and young people are resilient and will overcome the issues they may be experiencing with the right nurturing and support,
- Anxiety, loneliness, relationship issues and poor sleep rank the highest in terms of negative impact.
- Free text responses suggested that the first national lockdown and period of school closure had less of a negative impact than ongoing periods of isolation due to positive cases and contact tracing
- Some positive impact included:
  - increased awareness and discussion about mental health and wellbeing
  - increased family time has had benefits on behaviour
  - greater time to focus on vulnerable pupils
  - strengthened relationships between home and school

We understand the strong link between physical and mental health. Restrictions placed upon schools and clubs to prevent the spread of the infection has meant that children and young people have had:
- no access to community clubs and sports facilities
- no after school clubs and activity groups
- no access to competition
- limitations on team sports and PE activities in school

Actions to mitigate

At the start of this academic year, Local Authority officers, working alongside staff from Moorgate, established a Covid recovery programme for a cohort of Year 11 pupils all displaying mental health issues and with poor school attendance in the previous academic year. Of the original 33 students identified, 31 remain on the programme and are in receipt of mental health support. These pupils are not included in the Fair Access figures.

Wellbeing for Education Return is a national initiative funded by Dfe and Department of Health and Social Care to provide tools to enable schools staff to protect and strengthen the whole school's resilience to wellbeing and mental health impacts of COVID 19. All schools in North Tyneside have accessed training for delivery of these materials.

In addition, Local Authority officers began the first phase of a pilot project to achieve an ambition to train all staff and pupils from North Tyneside schools in mental health awareness, with two staff trained as mental health first aiders. The intention behind this universal offer, is to

ensure there is a shared language and understanding of the impact of poor mental ill-health. Thus, enabling all staff to provide appropriate responses to all pupils at the point of need. This is intended to underpin more specialist support from 'Thrive' practitioners. (Please see associated briefing paper)

There remains ongoing access to: 'Kooth', an online counselling support for young people with mental health issues, Educational Psychology team and Thrive practitioners.

4.   Background Information

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report and may be inspected at the offices of the author.

- NHS reports on Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Wellbeing Return for Education materials
- Ofsted: commentary from HMCI

5.   Appendices

Associated briefing paper: Embedding the Whole School Approach through a universal Mental Health First Aid programme