

Mental Health Services and Schools Link Programme – Information for schools/colleges.

The aim of this programme is for schools, colleges and mental health professionals to make changes in the way they support children and young people with their mental health.

This programme is a ground-breaking initiative to help CCGs and Local Authorities work together with schools and colleges to provide timely mental health support to children and young people. It works to empower staff by brokering contact, sharing expertise and developing a joint vision for CYP mental health and wellbeing in each locality.

The programme has already been successfully piloted in 255 schools and CYPMHS, across 27 CCGs in England (2015-2016), when it was known as the Mental Health Services and Schools Link Pilot, and independently evaluated. The pilot was developed in response to recommendations set out in *Future in Mind* to improve access to mental health support for children and young people, by bringing together schools and CYPMHS professionals to two free, joint workshops. Using a bespoke AFNCCF framework (CASCADE) and facilitated by two experts, the workshops enable professionals to improve local knowledge and identification of mental health issues amongst CYP, develop effective local referral routes to specialist services and improve joint-working.

Why should areas and schools be involved?

“Mental health and education is a two-way street; mental health professionals can be very helpful to teachers and school staff but they also have a great deal to learn from them. This is a huge opportunity to break down barriers and work together to improve the mental health support offered to children and young people in England.”

– *Jaime Smith, Director of Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools and Programme Manager*

Schools are increasingly expected to have a key role in supporting CYP with a range of MH problems but staff are not MH professionals and do not always feel confident in this area. By joining up services through this programme, expertise can be shared and true partnership working to best meet the needs of CYP can begin.

The evaluation of the pilot found that the programme made significant improvements for schools and NHS CYPMHS, including:

- Strengthened communication and joint-working between schools and NHS CYPMHS.
- Increased satisfaction with working relationships.
- Better understanding of mental health services and referral routes.
- Improved knowledge and awareness of mental health issues among school lead contacts.
- Improved timeliness and appropriateness of referrals.

The full evaluation report can be read here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-services-and-schools-link-pilot-evaluation.

Through these changes, not only will schools, colleges and mental health professionals see improvements in their practice, but children and young people will therefore be better supported to be mentally healthy and build resilience, and services will become more accessible.

What commitment of time and resources is needed during the programme?

The programme will be delivered as two, day-long, face-to-face workshops (9.00am -3.30pm), held six to eight weeks apart facilitated by Anna Freud clinicians

The workshops involve individual and group work, case studies and small and large group discussions. The training days cover understanding the strengths, limitations and capabilities and capacities of education and mental health professionals and developing knowledge of what's available to support children and young people's mental health and how to make more effective use of resources.

What are the roles and responsibilities for schools and colleges?

Schools and colleges need to nominate a lead person (Mental Health Lead) who has an overview of mental health issues within their setting and who will be able to fully participate in both workshops. This might be a member of the leadership team but could also be someone in a mental health or wellbeing role, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) or a pastoral lead. The Mental Health Lead should:

- Attend both workshops (9.00am -3.30pm)
- Commit to working with CYPMHS professionals to agree join-working and develop shared protocols.
- Invite colleagues working in schools that also have a remit to support the emotional and psychological wellbeing of pupils (e.g., school counsellors, educational psychologists, school nurses) to take part.
- Participate in the process and impact evaluations of the programme, for example, completing the baseline and follow-up surveys, and supporting wider evaluation, such as case studies, interviews and surveys of all staff.