Parentkind Policy Position
Mental Health

Introduction

Schools have a crucial role to play in preparing young people to be active citizens and for the workplace, but school life should also be an enjoyable and enriching experience that provides young people with the best possible start to adulthood. Mental health is a crucial area where a genuine partnership between schools and parents must be fostered because emotional wellbeing issues are high among parents' concerns about their child's schooling, and a high proportion of parents report that their child has experienced school-based problems. It is therefore important that the right level of support is available for parents and their child.

The challenge

One in ten young people has a diagnosable mental health condition such as depression, anxiety or stress. This statistic is reported in the English government's 'Mental health and behaviour in schools Departmental advice for school staff'[1] as well as by charities such as the Mental Health Foundation[2] and Time to Change[3]. Stressors such as exam pressure and bullying are generations old, but newer pressures have arisen such as cyber-bullying and online safety concerns that schools, parents and government need to understand and answer. The government intends to introduce a designated senior mental health lead to teaching staff in every school by 2020[4], but at the same time, there is rising demand for mental health services among young people but falling mental health budgets within the NHS, which may leave many vulnerable young people without adequate professional support.

Parentkind position

Parents are vital to a child's upbringing and education. Parents and schools working together in partnership is the best way to ensure a child needing support with their mental health is afforded a consistent approach at home and school and that they have the necessary understanding and help in both environments. As stated in the government's Green Paper[5], "*We recognise that parents and carers need support in caring for a young person with a mental illness or who is going through emotional difficulties. The evidence highlights the important role of the family in ensuring successful interventions, with parental involvement improving the outcomes of many interventions*." When it comes to issues of children's mental health at both school and home, parent voice must be heard and considered by school leaders and government.

What our research shows

Our Annual Parent Survey 2018 (n=1,500) shows that mental health issues are a major concern for parents when it comes to their child's schooling. It also supports the Education Policy Institute's findings[6] that, "*When a family's socioeconomic position worsens, the risk of maternal and child mental health difficulties increases*," leaving disadvantaged children more prone to experiencing a range of emotional and mental health challenges compared to those from more affluent backgrounds. Our results show that 32% of C2DE parents are very concerned about emotional wellbeing and mental health issues in their child's schooling compared to 28% of

[1] Department for Education, March 2016 - *'Mental health and behaviour in schools - Departmental advice for school staff'*
[2] https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/c/children-and-young-people
[3] https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/about-us/what-are-we-doing/children-and-young-people
[4] Department of Health and Department for Education, December 2017 - *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper*
[5] Ibid
[6] Education Policy Institute, January 2018 - EPI response to Joint Committee inquiry on mental health provision for young people

ABC1 parents. This is particularly true for bullying (reported by 42% of parents on benefits in contrast to 26% of parents who are not on benefits), anxiety (44% vs 33%) and depression (23% vs 11%).

Overall key findings included:

- 60% of all parents are concerned about their child's emotional well-being and mental health.
- 60% are concerned about cyber-bullying and 59% about bullying, both issues that, in turn, are likely to impact on children's mental health and well-being.
- 2/5 parents claims their children have experienced stress relating to homework (42%) and exams (41%) which reach their peak in older children, while a third have suffered from anxiety (38%) and bullying (33%). Anxiety also grows substantially with school phase and is significantly higher for pupils in secondary school (39%) and further education (49%); nevertheless, 27% of primary school parents still report that their child has experienced anxiety at school.
- More than half of all respondents are worried about the pressure of the school's high expectations on their child (53%), while a similar number feared that their child is not gaining the skills to succeed in the workplace (56%) and nearly three in five (58%) were concerned about the quality of their child's education.
- Around a fifth (17% overall compared to 23% of parents with children aged 16 or older) of parents said their child had suffered from depression. More than a quarter (27%) of these respondents said they were not satisfied with the way their child was helped by the school in this regard compared to a third (34%) who were not satisfied with how the school offered support for bullying, while one in ten said their school did not offer any support at all.
- The majority of parents think self-confidence is one of the key attributes with which children should leave primary (64%) and secondary (57%) school.
- 55% put children being happy in the top three traits of a successful school. Regionally, Welsh parents are more likely to nominate this as a measure of success (61% vs 55% of parents overall).
- Younger parents (40% of under 35s) are very concerned about their child's emotional well-being and mental health issues, compared to 30% of 'very concerned' parents overall.

Next steps

- Parentkind calls for a parent engagement strategy in every school that allows for parent voice to be heard on all issues relevant to parents. The impact of stress and anxiety and other mental health concerns in children that originate in school transcend the school gates, impacting on the child's home life and vice versa. It is therefore crucial that parents and schools work together to support children in addressing any issue early and putting the right professional support in place for that child. Great school/parent engagement is a crucial prerequisite. Schools should regularly gauge parental views and experience of mental health issues among their pupil population, which could be canvassed via the school's parent group. Parent councils, PTAs or parent focus groups are examples of parental bodies with a consultative role.
- We support the Department for Education's proposal to include parents in reforms to mental health provision in schools, and agree that a whole-school approach must recognise parents as partners. "*The identification and training of a Designated Senior Lead will be a vital part of a broader package of action to embed mental health in different aspects of school life, through*

changes to initial teacher training, what is taught to pupils in personal, social, health and economic education and relationships education and support to schools in engaging pupils, parents and carers."

- We call for a designated point of contact within the school staff for parents concerned about their child's mental health.
- Parents should be signposted to resources already available. Organisations such as MindEd and YoungMinds equip parents to recognise signs of mental ill health and provide support.

Parentkind is a charity which supports, enables and champions all the ways parents can participate in their child's school life and education. We are also the largest membership body for Parent Teacher Associations - our 13700 members are represented in over 50% of schools nationwide. We gather evidence through our annual parent survey, as well as other research projects throughout the year. We want to share these views with education policy and decision-makers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and invite them to engage with us in a joint effort to ensure every child is given the best opportunity to achieve their potential by parents taking an active role.

As a charity with a legacy of over 60 years' experience, we have consistently supported parents to get involved in their child's school life. In response to the fast-changing education landscape we have been expanding the ways in which we support parents to actively participate, whether that is through their school Parent Teacher Association, consultative parent council, or by promoting the value of engaging in a child's learning at home and school.

Further information is available at www.parentkind.org.uk