

ForumStrategy

Collaborating to Address the Mental Health Challenges for Children & Young People in Education

**Children and Young People's Mental Health
Roundtable Event Report
May 2024**

In an era where the mental health of children and young people has become an increasingly pressing concern, a collective effort is imperative to address the complex challenges they face. On 18 April 2024, fourteen trust leaders, seven business leaders and three charity leaders came together for a Children and Young People's Mental Health Round Table event. This summary report provides an overview of the discussions and outcomes from the day.

Organised by Forum Strategy in collaboration with the MindForward Alliance, and chaired by Alice Gregson, CEO of Forum Strategy, the event aimed to foster dialogue among stakeholders from education, national charities, and the private sector to explore what further support and commitment can be offered towards improving the wellbeing of children and young people.

Throughout the day, the discussions revolved around three central themes:

1. **Clarity:** on the main issues and causes
2. **Outlining promising practice and future aspirations:** what colleagues feel is working well already and what more would we want to do if we could
3. **Identifying actionable steps:** what and how each individual, in their respective roles, could do more of and how

By the conclusion of the roundtable, the aim was to distil the collective wisdom and insights garnered from the diverse perspectives present, paving the way for some potential actionable next steps for academy trusts and others in education, in helping to address mental health challenges in children and young people.

The context

The scale of the challenge facing children and young people's mental health is significant, as evidenced by various research reports. According to the Children's Society, 10% of children aged 10 to 17 reported low wellbeing, with nearly a third expressing dissatisfaction with at least one specific area of their lives. Additionally, approximately 20% of children and young people aged 8 to 25 had a probable mental disorder in 2023, and a quarter sought some form of mental health support within the past year. Girls, in particular, are exhibiting lower wellbeing scores compared to boys (Edurio).

These mental health challenges are impacting education, with pupil wellbeing markedly deteriorating since 2020 (Edurio). Over a quarter of pupils require additional support for mental health and wellbeing, and the impact on academic attendance is also profound, with one-in-eight children with poor mental health missing more than 15 days of school in a term (*Resolution Foundation*). On top of this, around three-quarters of parents with children aged under 5 are anxious about their children's emotional and mental wellbeing, often uncertain about where to seek expert support. 47% of parents of children between 12 - 17 also expressed the same concern (*NSPCC*).

The causes are multifaceted, encompassing issues such as bullying, financial strain, and academic stress. Alarmingly, over a third of children aged 10 to 15 experienced in-person bullying (ONS), while pupil concerns about their safety in school are on the rise (Edurio). Financial pressures exacerbate mental health challenges, with children in households facing strain more likely to report low wellbeing (The Children's Society).

While solutions exist and are being explored, barriers such as stigma, under-resourcing, and policy limitations hinder effective implementation. However, despite these challenges, trust leaders, charities, community leaders, and organisations across the county remain committed to supporting children and young people's mental health, recognising its fundamental importance in their development, growth, aspirations, and outcomes.

The roundtable

Throughout the day, colleagues engaged in focused discussions within small groups, exploring key questions related to the challenges and support mechanisms for children and young people's mental health, before bringing back their main discussion points and conclusions to the roundtable as a whole.

Colleagues engaged in focused discussions within their small groups, deliberating on the following key questions:

- 1. Building on what we've already outlined, what do you think the main issues are linked to declining mental health for children and young people?**
- 2. What are you seeing work well in supporting children and young people's mental health AND what would you like to start or do more of, if you were able to?**
- 3. What more can you do going forwards within your respective roles/organisations? What are one or two things you might be able to explore or look into as a result of discussions today?**

Following the focused small group discussions, the roundtable event provided a comprehensive overview of the key insights and perspectives shared by participants. The following is a summary of the main points.

1. What do you think the main issues are linked to declining mental health for children and young people?

Financial constraints and withdrawn support from Local Authorities:

The decline in funding and support from local authorities has exacerbated the challenges faced by children and young people. With many local authorities facing financial strain and even bankruptcy, essential services and resources for mental health support are being reduced or withdrawn altogether. Without proper financing, schools and/or LAs cannot provide the support needed.

Lack of enough early intervention and developmental factors:

Reaching children and parents earlier in developmental stages is crucial for addressing mental health issues effectively. Physiological changes in children, particularly between the ages of 0 to 5 and during the teenage years, significantly impact their emotional and psychological well-being. Issues such as alexithymia, where children struggle to express their emotions, can go unnoticed without early intervention and support.

Inconsistent or incorrect application of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Privacy Concerns:

The inconsistent application of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), especially concerning older children, poses challenges in sharing vital information about their mental health status with parents. Privacy concerns and unclear guidelines often result in parents not being informed about their children's mental health issues, hindering timely intervention and support.

Lifestyle factors:

Lifestyle factors, including lack of physical activity, poor diet, and inadequate sleep habits, are contributing to declining mental health among children and young people.

Societal stigma and lack of awareness/understanding:

Persistent societal stigma surrounding mental health issues, coupled with poor awareness, further exacerbates the challenges faced by children and young people. Negative stereotypes, such as labelling individuals as "snowflakes" or dismissing concerns from adults as "being woke," can contribute to a culture of silence and shame surrounding mental health struggles.

Transitions and educational pressures:

The transition from primary to secondary education can be a particularly challenging period for children, with important information about their mental health often getting lost in the process. Moreover, the education system's intense focus on academic results may lead to off-rolling of pupils with mental health issues, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and diminishing their access to support.

Technology and social dynamics:

The rapid pace of technological advancement presents unique challenges for children and young people's mental health. Issues such as excessive screen time, exposure to harmful content on social media, and the addictive nature of technology contribute to declining mental well-being. Additionally, efforts to protect children from unfamiliar technologies, such as artificial intelligence, are hindered by adults' own lack of confidence and understanding in these areas.

Decline in community and family support:

Changes in societal dynamics, including a decline in community and family structures, have weakened traditional support systems for children and young people. The lack of cohesive support networks and community engagement exacerbates feelings of isolation and contributes to declining mental health outcomes.

Fragmented support services and training gaps:

Fragmentation within mental health support services and inadequate training on mental health issues for all professionals who work with children and young people further compounds the challenges faced by children and young people. The significant gaps in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) misses an opportunity to train educators early.

Cultural nuances and increased racism:

Cultural nuances, including issues related to gender identification, require nuanced approaches to address effectively. Additionally, the rise in racism, influenced by global events such as conflict in the Middle East, further exacerbates mental health challenges for marginalised communities.

2. What are you seeing work well in supporting children and young people's mental health AND what would you like to start or do more of, if you were able to?

a) What are colleagues seeing work well in supporting children and young people's mental health:

Having coaches and/or mentors for staff and pupils:

Providing coaches and/or mentors for both staff and pupils offers personalised support and guidance. Coaches and mentors offer tailored assistance to individuals dealing with various challenges. They provide a safe space for discussing concerns and help develop strategies for overcoming obstacles.

Having an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA):

Assigning Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) offers specialised emotional support and coping strategies for children and young people.

Empowering staff through Continuous Professional Development (CPD):

Empowering staff through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes enhances their skills in supporting mental health. CPD opportunities provide staff with training and resources to help them recognise mental health issues in children and young people. Workshops, seminars, and courses equip educators with strategies for promoting well-being and fostering a supportive learning environment.

Early intervention with children and families:

Implementing early intervention strategies, such as early help services and family liaison officers, enables timely support for children and families. Early intervention

initiatives identify and address mental health concerns at an early stage, preventing escalation and promoting positive outcomes. Family liaison officers facilitate communication between families and schools, ensuring access to appropriate support services.

Having 'Trauma-Informed' schools:

Creating trauma-informed schools involves training all staff, regardless of level, to recognise and respond to trauma-related issues. Trauma-informed practices prioritise understanding the impact of trauma on children's behaviour and well-being. Training equips staff with the knowledge and skills to create safe, supportive environments that promote healing and resilience.

Focusing on mental health first aid:

Providing mental health first aid ensures staff are equipped to respond effectively to mental health crises. Mental health first aid training teaches staff how to recognise and respond to signs of mental distress, providing initial support until professional help is available.

Adopting mental health at work standards:

Adopting mental health at work standards establishes a framework for promoting mental well-being in the workplace. These standards outline best practices for supporting staff mental health, including policies, procedures, and resources for prevention, intervention, and support. By adhering to these standards, organisations create inclusive and supportive environments for staff, who can then better support children and young people.

Tapping into other sectors for information/help/support:

Collaborating with other sectors, such as healthcare and social services, provides access to additional resources and support. Partnering with external organisations expands the range of services available to children and young people, addressing their diverse needs comprehensively. Sharing knowledge and resources fosters innovation and enhances the effectiveness of support initiatives.

Regular consultation - surveys for children, parents, staff:

Conducting regular surveys allows for ongoing feedback and assessment of mental health needs and support effectiveness. Surveys provide valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of children, parents, and staff regarding mental health support. Feedback from surveys can inform targeted interventions and improvements in mental health provision.

Promoting the importance of nature and the outdoors:

Increasing emphasis on nature and outdoor activities promotes well-being and productivity in schools. Incorporating outdoor activities and nature-based experiences into the curriculum enhances mental health and overall school climate. Exposure to nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance cognitive function, contributing to happier and more productive school environments.

b) What would colleagues like to start or do more of, if you were able to (and if funding/resourcing levels allowed)?

Better access to educational psychologists:

Ensuring access to educational psychologists enables comprehensive assessment and support for students with diverse learning and mental health needs. Educational psychologists can play a crucial role in identifying and addressing learning difficulties, behavioural challenges, and mental health concerns in children and young people. Increased access to these professionals facilitates early intervention and tailored interventions to support student well-being and academic success.

Better access to counselling:

Providing access to counselling services offers children and young people a confidential space to address personal, emotional, and mental health issues. Counselling services could support pupils in navigating challenges such as stress, anxiety, depression, and interpersonal conflicts. Access to trained counsellors could help promote emotional resilience, self-awareness, and coping skills essential for positive mental health outcomes.

Better access to therapeutic support in all schools:

Implementing therapeutic support services in all schools would help ensure holistic support for pupils' mental health and emotional well-being. Therapeutic interventions, such as art therapy, play therapy, and mindfulness practices, provide pupils with outlets for self-expression, emotional regulation, and stress reduction. Integrating therapeutic support into school environments would help create nurturing spaces where pupils feel valued, understood, and supported.

Extending the Quality of Education Framework to include PSHE:

Extending the Quality of Education framework to include Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) education emphasises the importance of mental health and well-being in the curriculum. Integrating mental health education into the PSHE curriculum equips students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for maintaining positive mental health. Topics such as emotional literacy, coping strategies, healthy relationships, and resilience empower students to navigate life's challenges

effectively.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology:

Harnessing AI and technology to address mental health concerns and promote positive behaviours. Leveraging AI-driven platforms and digital tools could enable personalised support, early intervention, and data-driven insights into students' mental health needs. Technology can facilitate access to resources, interventions, and peer support networks, enhancing mental health promotion and intervention efforts.

Mental health included in the national curriculum:

Integrating mental health education into the curriculum would help ensure all students receive comprehensive instruction on mental health awareness, coping skills, and help-seeking behaviours. Incorporating mental health topics into various subjects would equip students with the knowledge and skills to understand, manage, and advocate for mental well-being. Curriculum-based mental health education would promote destigmatisation, resilience-building, and early intervention.

Addressing mental health impacts of COVID-19:

Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on pupils' mental health and well-being, particularly for younger children. Implementing targeted interventions and support programmes to address COVID-related effects and trauma in students. Strategies may include counselling services, psychoeducation, peer support groups, and family involvement to mitigate the adverse effects the pandemic has had on mental health.

Understanding charities and the funding opportunities available:

Enhancing awareness and utilisation of available charities and funding opportunities to support mental health initiatives in schools. Collaborating with charitable organisations and exploring funding opportunities would help enable trusts and schools to expand mental health services, training, and resources. Understanding available resources could empower trusts and schools to access additional support and maximise impact on pupil well-being.

Parental support systems:

Strengthening parental support systems and engagement to promote holistic support for students' mental health. Establishing communication channels, workshops, and resources to support parents in understanding and addressing their children's mental health needs. Collaborating with families could help foster a supportive home environment and enhance the effectiveness of school-based mental health interventions.

Mental health leads:

Appointing a designated Mental Health Lead within each school to oversee mental health initiatives, coordination, and support. Mental Health Leads could provide strategic direction, coordination, and advocacy for mental health within the school community. They could liaise with stakeholders, implement policies, and ensure the integration of mental health into school practices and culture.

More time for music, art, sport, drama within the timetable:

Allocating additional time for creative and physical activities within the school timetable to promote well-being and holistic development. Increasing opportunities for artistic expression, physical exercise, and creative engagement could enhance pupils' mental health, emotional resilience, and overall well-being. Incorporating these activities into the curriculum would foster a balanced and enriching educational experience.

A four-day week for staff:

In an ideal world, implementing a four-day workweek for staff would help promote work-life balance, reduce stress, and enhance well-being. Offering staff a shorter workweek could mitigate burnout, improve morale, and increase job satisfaction. Enhanced work-life balance would enable staff to recharge, prioritise self-care, and maintain optimal mental health, ultimately benefiting student outcomes.

Increased funding for wider support services:

Advocating for adequate funding for wider support services to address mental health needs beyond the scope of schools. Adequate funding for community-based mental health services, social support programs, and specialised interventions would reduce the burden on schools and ensure comprehensive support for pupils with complex mental health needs. Investing in wider support services enhances collaboration and coordination across sectors, promoting holistic well-being for all individuals.

3. What more you can/will do going forwards within your respective roles/organisations? What are one or two things you might be able to explore or look into as a result of discussing this today?

Be more decisive over actions moving forward:

Recognising the critical importance of swift and decisive action in addressing mental health challenges, colleagues committed to enhancing their decision-making processes within their respective roles and organisations. This entails streamlining procedures and empowering stakeholders to take proactive steps to support mental health initiatives promptly.

Apply pressure to LAs, Government, and other organisations to prioritise mental health:

Recognising the systemic impact of policy decisions on mental health provision, colleagues suggested advocating for increased prioritisation of mental health by local authorities (LAs), government bodies, and other organisation across education and beyond it. By applying collective pressure, they aim to influence policy and resource allocation to better support mental health initiatives by:

1. Engaging in advocacy campaigns; aimed at raising awareness of the importance of mental health and pressuring decision-makers to prioritise mental health provision.
2. Collaborating with stakeholders; and other educational trusts, advocacy groups, and community organisations to amplify advocacy efforts and present a unified front in lobbying for mental health prioritisation.
3. Liaising with government representatives; engaging in dialogue with local government officials, MPs, and policymakers to articulate the need for increased investment in mental health support within the education sector.
4. Ensuring greater dialogue between CEOs and the DfE to advocate for mental health priorities
5. Utilising data and research; to demonstrate the impact of mental health initiatives and the potential benefits of increased investment in mental health provision.

Collaborating with other academy trusts and organisations:

Recognising the value of collective action and shared expertise, colleagues committed to fostering collaboration with other educational trusts and relevant organisations to address mental health challenges comprehensively. By pooling resources, sharing best practices, and coordinating efforts, academy trusts can enhance the effectiveness and reach of mental health initiatives.

Fundraising through PTAs:

Recognising the importance of securing additional funding for mental health initiatives, colleagues suggested leveraging the support of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to raise funds and resources. Through engaging parents and the wider school community, trusts can mobilise collective efforts to support mental health provision.

Creating a pool of volunteers:

Recognising the importance of community involvement and support in addressing mental health challenges, colleagues suggested establishing a national and/or local

pool of volunteers dedicated to supporting mental health initiatives within academy trust organisations. This could include utilising mental health practitioners within PTAs to volunteer their time and skills to support mental health initiatives. This would need some trust leaders to take an initial lead in order to get this off the ground.

Creating a mental health “parent toolkit”:

Recognising the vital role that parents play in supporting their children's mental health, it was suggested that academy trusts could develop a comprehensive "Parent Toolkit" designed to provide families with practical resources, information, and strategies to enhance their understanding of mental health issues and support their children's well-being. MindForward Alliance already have an excellent toolkit schools and trusts could make use of: <https://mindforwardalliance.uk/Resources/Parents-Toolkit> but the suggestion was that perhaps this could be tailored (if needed) to an education context.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA):

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to provide initial support to someone experiencing a mental health crisis or developing a mental health problem. By offering Mental Health First Aid training within our organisations, colleagues agreed we can empower staff to recognise the signs of mental distress, offer assistance, and connect individuals with appropriate support services.

Hiring a dedicated trust fundraising lead:

Recognising the imperative to secure sustainable funding for mental health initiatives (and indeed other aspects of criticality across education), colleagues proposed hiring a dedicated Trust Fundraising Lead within academy trust organisations. This role would be tasked with identifying funding opportunities, cultivating donor relationships, and strategically seeking financial support to bolster mental health programs and services. Many at the roundtable had taken this step and found that their fundraising lead was bringing in far beyond their salary (in some cases several times that amount).

Exploring funding links with local businesses:

Acknowledging the potential benefits of engaging local businesses in supporting mental health initiatives, colleagues expressed interest in exploring funding links with businesses in the community. By forging strategic partnerships and securing financial (and/or resource and equipment) contributions from local businesses, academy trusts can enhance their capacity to deliver impactful mental health programs and services.

Introducing an apprenticeship for a school-based counsellor:

In response to the growing demand for mental health support in educational settings, colleagues discussed the potential for a future apprenticeship programme for aspiring school-based counsellors. This initiative would aim to provide aspiring mental health professionals with valuable hands-on experience and mentorship, ultimately addressing the shortage of qualified counsellors in schools and trusts and with the added benefit of making use of the apprenticeship levy to support the cost of the opportunities.

Leading by example:

Recognising the influential role of collective leadership in promoting mental health and well-being, colleagues emphasised the importance of leading by example. By demonstrating a commitment to prioritising mental health within our organisations and communities, we can inspire others to follow suit and create a culture of openness, acceptance, and support for mental health.

Final reflections

The roundtable discussion on children and young people's mental health underscored the intricate and complex nature of the challenges we face. It is evident that there is no singular solution to address these issues comprehensively and the responsibility for taking work forward must rest across multiple agencies and sectors. However, through collaborative efforts such as this, we can navigate this complex landscape effectively. While it may seem daunting to tackle all aspects at once, there is value in starting small and focusing on actionable steps within our reach to take forward.

Creativity is a crucial element in our approach. Despite severe financial constraints, innovative solutions and cross agency partnerships hold the potential to make significant strides in improving mental health support for young people. Never a truer word spoken than the saying that “Many hands make light work” - we must continue to bring different minds and perspectives to the table if we want to move the dial on children’s mental health.

Moreover, it is imperative that academy trust leaders and wider sector leaders utilise their influence and reach to drive the necessary changes from the top down. By resisting a culture of competition and instead choosing to foster a culture of collaboration, we can harness collective strengths to better serve the needs of children and young people facing mental health challenges. In essence, the journey ahead requires a blend of pragmatism, creativity, and a shared commitment to collaboration in order to effect meaningful change.

Useful resources

MindForward Alliance Parent Toolkit: <https://mindforwardalliance.uk/Resources/Parents-Toolkit>

Interactive online training for school staff from Place2Be: <https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-in-schools/mental-health-champions-foundation-programme/>

Free online resource and guidance for parents (particularly primary schools):
<https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk>

Mentally healthy schools website run by the Anna Freud Centre - free quality assured resources on a host of topics (may be a useful source for your school's Senior Mental Health Lead):
<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk>

Training for Senior Mental Health Leads (for which schools draw down funding from DfE):
<https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-in-schools/senior-mental-health-leads-training-programme/>

How teenagers' brains change: <https://vimeo.com/250809215>

Reports and research drawn on from Forum Strategy:

<https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/schools-warn-pupils-are-being-let-down-by-delays-to-accessing-mental-health-services-2.html>

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7196/CBP-7196.pdf>

<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/mental-health-360>

<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/weve-only-just-begun/>

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2024/03/08/violence-and-abuse-are-driving-mental-illness-in-women-and-girls--psychiatrists-warn>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people-a-framework-of-modifiable-factors>

<https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/news-and-blogs/2024/february/55-percent-of-young-people-face-barriers-in-accessing-mental-health-support/>

<https://cypmhc.org.uk/publications/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-an-independent-review-in-policy-success-and-challenges-over-the-last-decade/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2022-children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing>

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/>

<https://www.diverseacademies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2019/05/Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-Principles.pdf>

<https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/teen-depression>

<https://cypmhc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Behaviour-and-Mental-Health-in-Schools-Full-Report.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/mar/24/the-anxious-generation-jonathan-haidt-book-extract-instagram-tiktok-smartphones-social-media-screens>

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/campaigning-for-better-mental-health-policy/college-reports/2020-college-reports/Technology-use-and-the-mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-cr225>

ForumStrategy

**This report is published by Forum Education Limited 2024.
© Copyright Forum Education Limited 2024**

Please note that this report reflects the views and opinions of those attending the roundtable. This document is shared in good faith (May 2024) and no liability is accepted for decisions made as a result of accessing and using this document. The document is a starting point for discussion and should be considered alongside other key sources of advice, guidance and sector recognised information.

Forum Education Limited cannot be responsible for external websites and encourages users to undertake relevant virus and security checks before accessing these.