



2020-0054366VFPO

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP

By email: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

25 September 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 14 September, addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, enclosing correspondence you have received from several constituents about funding for counselling in schools. Your letter has recently been passed to this department and I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

May I begin by wishing you well in these challenging times.

We remain committed to promoting and supporting the mental health of children and young people, and access to mental health support is more important than ever during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

In February 2016, the department published counselling guidance which set out a strong expectation that, over time, all schools should make counselling services available to their pupils. However, the department has not made the provision of access to counselling in schools and colleges mandatory, as it is important for schools to have the freedom to decide what support to offer pupils based on their particular needs, and drawing on an evidence base of effective practice. The guidance sets out that counselling works best within a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, which considers issues such as promoting wellbeing; raising awareness of, and reducing stigma around, mental health issues; and providing an effective pastoral system.

Now that children and young people have returned to schools, settings should be devoting time to supporting wellbeing, which will play a fundamental part in supporting children and young people's mental health. The return to school allows social interaction with peers, carers and teachers, which benefits wellbeing. The department published detailed guidance for the full opening of schools, including a section on pupil wellbeing and support, and is available at: tinyurl.com/YxbYhnm.

We worked hard to ensure that all pupils and learners returned to a full high-quality education programme in September. Our £1 billion COVID catch-up package, with £650 million shared across schools over the 2020-21 academic year, supports education settings to put the right catch-up and pastoral support in place. Further information is available at: tinyurl.com/Y7vr3o8s.

Staff need to be equipped to understand that some children and young people may be experiencing feelings in such as anxiety, stress or low mood as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and that these are normal responses to an abnormal situation. Our Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools Advice includes information about what to look for in terms of underlying mental health issues, linked to the graduated response and the support that might be suitable. A copy of the guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/Q7d23dz.

The government is investing £8 million to launch the new Wellbeing for Education Return training programme, which will provide schools and colleges all over England with the knowledge and practical skills they need to support teachers, students and parents, to help improve how they respond to the emotional impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. This is additional to longer term work to improve support, including the new mental health support teams that we are rolling out across the country, linked to schools and colleges. Further information is available at: tinyurl.com/Y2m3roao. This support will help schools to decide what provision to make for their pupils.

Many schools already provide access to some counselling support. The government has produced guidance on how to put in place effective school-based counselling which schools can use where they decide further counselling support is appropriate for their pupils. A copy of this guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/P9coc22.

Outside of school, access to mental health support has been more important than ever during the COVID-19 outbreak. NHS services remain open. Leading mental health charities are being supported to deliver additional services through the £5 million Coronavirus Mental Health Response Fund. During Mental Health Awareness Week, the government also announced that a further £4.2 million will be awarded to mental health charities, including the Samaritans, Young Minds, and Bipolar UK.

Furthermore, all NHS mental health trusts have been asked to ensure that there are 24/7 open access telephone lines to support people of all ages. Public Health England and Health Education England have also developed advice and guidance for parents and professionals on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, which is available at: tinyurl.com/u46o5Pw.

Thank you for writing about this important matter. I hope this reply is useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families