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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

4 May 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 11 March, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in this country. I apologise for the delay in responding to you.

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

The government appreciates the concerns raised from the findings of the Good Childhood report. We believe that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is of fundamental importance and would like to assure you that the government is working to identify the individual needs of children early. It is crucial that children and young people are able to access the help and support they require to keep them healthy and safe.

We do look at the range of data that is available on children's wellbeing. On World Mental Health Day 2019, we published the first annual 'State of the Nation' report to highlight the trends and issues in young people's mental wellbeing. The report brought together existing data to improve understanding and help to inform the support we provide to children and young people. We published a second report in 2020, which focussed on the experiences of children and young people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. It is available at: tinyurl.com/Y5utxfYo.

The return to school for all pupils was prioritised due to the significant and proven impact caused by being out of school, including on wellbeing. The support schools provide to their pupils following the return to face-to-face education should include time devoted to supporting wellbeing, which will play a fundamental part in supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing recovery. The expectations for schools in this regard are set out clearly in the main department guidance to schools which also signposts further support. This guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/Jxbae6su.

The £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return scheme, a Department for Education led initiative alongside the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Health Education England, PHE and key voluntary sector organisations, has trained local experts to provide additional advice and resources for schools and colleges. This has helped support students, parents and carers, and staff wellbeing, resilience, and recovery in light of the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown.

Over 90% of local authority areas in England have told us how they have delivered additional training and support into local schools and further education providers because of the Wellbeing for Education Return funding.

We have also recently announced a £79 million boost to children and young people's mental health support, including through Mental Health Support Teams. The support teams – which provide early intervention on mental health and emotional wellbeing issues in schools and colleges – will grow from the 59 set up by last March to around 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly 3 million children. This increase means that millions of children and young people will have access to significantly expanded mental health services.

We will continue to prioritise mental health and wellbeing support for children, young people, and staff following the return to education settings on 8 March. Along with Universities Minister Michelle Donelan, I have convened a Mental Health in Education Action Group which will consider how to support children and young people's mental wellbeing following the return to education settings and with transitions between education settings in September 2021. The new Youth Mental Health Ambassador Dr Alex George, who has been appointed to advise government and raise the profile of mental health education and wellbeing in schools, colleges, and universities, will help to inform the work of the Group.

To further support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, we are working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England to deliver our joint green paper delivery programme. The three core commitments of the paper are to incentivise and support all schools and colleges to identify and train a senior mental health lead, to fund new Mental Health Support Teams supervised by NHS mental health staff, and to pilot a 4-week waiting time for accessing specialist NHS mental health services.

We are supplementing this with other support, including a randomised control trial of a range of different school approaches to promoting good mental wellbeing, which is one of the largest of its kind in the world. This sits alongside guidance on mental health and behaviour and offering effective school-based counselling.

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 COVID-19 outbreak. NHS mental health services remain open, and the government has provided over £10 million to leading mental health charities to help them expand and reach those most in need, including a number of programmes which specifically support the mental health of children and young people. The NHS has also set up 24-hour open access telephone lines for urgent mental health support for people of all ages.

More broadly, a £1 billion COVID-19 'catch-up' package, with £650 million shared across early years, schools and 16-19 providers over the 2020 to 2021 academic year, is also helping education settings to put the right academic and pastoral support in place. The Education Endowment Foundation have published a COVID-19 support guide to support schools to direct this funding, which includes further information about interventions to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing. A copy of the guide is available at: tinyurl.com/Y6sxc4ka.

In addition to this, the return to school for all pupils from 8 March will be supported with a new £700 million package, which includes a new one-off Recovery Premium for state primary, secondary and special schools to use as they see best to support disadvantaged students. This will help schools to provide their disadvantaged pupils with a one-off boost to the support, both academic and pastoral, that has been proved most effective in helping them recover from the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Public Health England (PHE) has provided advice and guidance for parents and professionals on looking after children and young people's mental wellbeing and further information is available at: tinyurl.com/u46o5Pw. PHE has also adapted its Every Mind Matters and Rise Above platforms in the context of the outbreak (these platforms can be found at: tinyurl.com/Y2894eez and tinyurl.com/wsm9fem) and the new launched e-learning tinyurl.com/39YPwz4r to help parents and carers, front line workers and volunteers support children and young people in emergency or crisis situations.

Furthermore, the department has published guidance for the education sector on GOV.UK, available at: tinyurl.com/YddlQobk, including actions for schools during the COVID-19 outbreak, available at: tinyurl.com/YatQfxQm, actions for early years and childcare providers, available at: tinyurl.com/srPYJ7J, and actions for further education colleges and providers, available at: tinyurl.com/Y9skbc79, which includes a section on mental health and signposting to relevant resources.

We have also published a mental wellbeing teacher training module to support all schools in their preparations to deliver relationships, sex and health education. This is available at: tinyurl.com/Y9cezhwQ.

Thank you for writing on this important matter, and I hope this response assures you that we are committed to providing mental health and wellbeing support for all children and young people.

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