

## Debate Pack

Number 178  
By Aaron Kulakiewicz,  
Nerys Roberts  
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# Provision of school-based counselling services

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Policy & legislation	2
	Other relevant legislation	4
1.2	Current provision: evidence	4
1.3	Commentary/ proposals for reform	5
<b>2</b>	<b>Parliamentary material</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1	Debates	8
2.2	Parliamentary Questions	8
<b>3</b>	<b>Press Material</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1	Press Articles	16
3.2	Press Releases	17
<b>4</b>	<b>Additional Reading</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1	Reports	18

# 1

## Background

### 1.1 Policy & legislation

There's no legal requirement on schools in England to provide counselling services in-school, although they are subject to other relevant duties.

The Department for Education (DfE) [published guidance on counselling in schools \(February 2016\)](#). As this document notes, there are various models for delivering counselling including:

- Counsellors employed directly by schools – either a single school or working across several.
- Arrangements with voluntary sector or local authority partners, where counsellors visit schools for a certain number of days per week, or just to counsel particular students.

The 2016 DfE guidance (linked above) identified a number of priorities for the development of school-based counselling services:

- increasing the extent to which practice is evidence-based
- greater use of outcome monitoring
- ensuring equity of access to young people who are currently under-represented, for example those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds
- ensuring services are equipped to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people, including looked after children and children and young people with SEND;
- increasing children and young people's involvement with development of services; and
- better integration with other mental health and wellbeing support within the school and beyond it, allowing for improved assessment and referral. Integration with local specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) is key to this.<sup>1</sup>

Looking more generally at mental health support in schools, Government policies have recently been focused on strengthening partnerships between education providers and mental health services through pilot schemes linking schools with single points of contact in child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The DfE published an [evaluation report](#) of pilot projects in 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education, [Counselling in schools](#), February 2016, p10

November 2017 saw the publication of a Green Paper for consultation: [Transforming children's and young people's mental health provision](#), and the Government subsequently confirmed it would go ahead with its three core proposals:

- To incentivise and support all schools and colleges to identify and train a Designated Senior Lead for mental health;
- To fund new Mental Health Support Teams, which will be supervised by NHS children and young people's mental health staff;
- To pilot a four week waiting time for access to specialist NHS children and young people's mental health services.

A March 2021 [DfE press release](#) provided details of “£79 million to boost mental health support for children and young people”. Part of this funding would help expand mental health teams in schools:

The number of mental health support teams in schools and colleges will grow from 59 to 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly 3 million children. Mental health support teams work in a variety of ways, including enabling children to text their local mental health support team, with a health professional responding within an hour during the school day offering them advice, or providing families with tips on how to spot that the children and young people are struggling with their mental health.

In May 2021, the Government [announced more than £17 million to improve mental health and wellbeing support in schools and colleges](#), to help them recover from the challenges of the pandemic:

Up to 7,800 schools and colleges in England will be offered funding worth £9.5 million to train a senior mental health lead, part of the Government's commitment to offer this training to all state schools and colleges by 2025. Funding also includes a new £7 million Wellbeing for Education Recovery programme, to provide training, support and resources for staff dealing with children and young people experiencing additional pressures from the last year – including trauma, anxiety, or grief.<sup>2</sup>

In response to a PQ on 12 July 2021 on school counselling, then-Health Minister, Nadine Dorries said the Government hadn't made it mandatory for schools to offer access to counselling “as it is important for schools and colleges to have the freedom to decide what support to offer to students.” On the roll-out of Mental Health Support Teams, she said:

There are over 280 mental health support teams in operation or in training, with a further 112 teams planned to be established in 2021/22.

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Education, [Schools and colleges to benefit from boost in expert mental health support](#), 10 May 2021

We are accelerating the roll-out of Mental health support teams will so that they support approximately 35% of pupils by 2023.<sup>3</sup>

## Other relevant legislation

Maintained schools and academies (including 16-19 academies) are required by section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014, as amended, to make arrangements to support pupils with health conditions, including mental ill health.

The Department for Education (DfE) has also published guidance on supporting students' mental health, as has Public Health England (PHE). These two documents are non-statutory, but settings are encouraged to follow them:

- DfE (2 June 2021), [Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges](#).
- PHE (3 February 2021), [Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing](#)

## 1.2 Current provision: evidence

The DfE doesn't routinely collect school workforce data that would allow us to identify the number of schools employing their own counsellors, or those that jointly commission such services with other schools/ their academy trust, but there is data from surveys.

The DfE's most recent survey took place in 2017, and data collected was weighted to reflect non-response. This estimated:

- 61% of schools and colleges overall reported offering access to counselling services for their pupils;
- Secondary schools were more likely to offer access – 84% of secondary schools did so, compared to 56% of primary schools.<sup>4</sup>

The report also looked at whether school-based counsellors were qualified and/ or registered with a professional association. Of schools offering counselling:

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<sup>3</sup> [PQ 27108, 12 July 2021](#).

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education/ NatCen, [Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges](#), August 2017, p29

- 47% said their counsellors were registered with a professional body such as the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) or the UK Council for Psychotherapy;
- 44% said their counsellor(s) held a diploma in counselling;
- 40% said their counsellor(s) held other professional qualifications or registrations.

However, one in seven (15%) of institutions offering counselling services said their counsellor(s) didn't hold any professional qualifications or registrations.<sup>5</sup>

A [joint survey of school leaders](#) by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and mental health charity, Place2be, undertaken at the end of 2019, estimated:

- In 2016, just over a third (36 per cent) of schools in England provided school-based support for students' emotional and mental wellbeing;
- By 2019, this had almost doubled to 66 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.3 Commentary/ proposals for reform

The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) [reported the results of a weighted survey](#) of adults in 2019. They estimated:

- 72% of people believed that schools should offer counselling services;
- This increased to 79% among parents with children under the age of 18;
- 16-24-year-olds were the most likely to advocate school-based counselling (83%).<sup>7</sup>

BACP continues to campaign for the expansion of school-based counselling services to every school and FE college in England. They argue that the country is behind other UK nations in terms of Government financial support:

Speaking to a school counsellor can be a transformative experience for children and young people. It can help them cope with the difficult circumstances they face in their lives - and to go on and flourish in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> As above, ps 29-30

<sup>6</sup> Place2Be/ NAHT, '[Huge rise in number of school-based counsellors over past three years](#)', 3 February 2020.

<sup>7</sup> British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy news story, '[Three quarters of people believe schools should offer counselling](#)', 13 June 2019.

But England is lagging behind in its provision of counselling in schools. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have government funded school counselling services. England does not.

As children face increased change and uncertainty in their lives because of the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever before that they have access to this vital support.

[...]

We believe that a paid counsellor should be available in every secondary school, academy and further education college in England.

This is a message we continually stress to politicians, commissioners, funders and education leaders.

We campaign to complement existing investment by providing a cost-effective and universal, non-stigmatising early intervention.

School counselling reaches the 'missing middle' of young people, those who do not meet the threshold for support for CAMHS but need more help than can be offered by mental health support teams.

Funded school counselling provision will also help the 65% of pupils not supported under the MHST [Mental Health Support Team] model, as well as being able to work with more complex issues with a bespoke focus on what that particular child or young person needs from counselling.<sup>8</sup>

The Local Government Association has also recently urged the Government to fully fund counselling services in all state-funded secondary schools. It called for at least £100 million per year, which it said would "ensure access to a school counsellor for at least two days a week for more than 90 per cent of schools".<sup>9</sup>

A [Welsh Government toolkit](#) on school- and community-based counselling sets out the legal and policy background for Wales. This was updated in 2020 and contains guidance on employing suitably-qualified counsellors and working with other health services. Similar guidance exists [for Scotland](#), and [Northern Ireland](#).

Former Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, also called for NHS-funded counsellors to be available in every school. In her annual report

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<sup>8</sup> British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, '[School counselling in England campaign](#)', 9 September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Local Government Association news story, '[LGA: Make school-based counselling available to all children to tackle rising child mental health issues](#)', 15 October 2021.

on children and young people's mental health services for 2020/21 (January 2021) she said:

The Government's current plan – to roll out NHS-led counselling in schools to 20-25% of areas by 2023 – was never ambitious enough. This was my response to the original Green Paper, and a view shared by the joint inquiry of the Education and Health Select Committees. At the time I called for more collaboration with existing voluntary sector provision to help roll this out faster. This would have provided greater capacity and flexibility – something which has been needed more this year than ever. It is vital that these counselling services are available for every school as quickly as possible. When we see what the NHS has achieved within the last year, it shows what can be done with the right level of ambition and determination. It should not have to take another decade to create a decent mental health service for all children.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Children's Commissioner for England, [The state of children's mental health services 2020/21](#), 28 January 2021.

## 2 Parliamentary material

### 2.1 Debates

#### [Coronavirus: Education Setting Attendance and Support for Pupils](#)

23 Sep 2021 | House of Commons | House of Commons chamber | 701 cc425-434

#### [Children and Young People's Mental Health](#)

16 Jun 2021 | House of Commons | Westminster Hall | 697 cc129-153WH

### 2.2 Parliamentary Questions

#### [Schools: Mental Health Services](#)

02 Nov 2021 | 58363

**Asked by: Caroline Lucas**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to help ensure that every child in full time education has access through their place of education to an appropriately-qualified and professionally registered counsellor with experience of working with young people; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member: Will Quince | Department: Department for Education (DfE)**

Schools and colleges have an important role to play in supporting the resilience and mental health of their pupils and students. The department recognises that counselling, by well-qualified practitioners, can play a particularly effective role as part of a whole school or college approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing, guidance for which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing>.

Many schools and colleges already provide their pupils access to counselling support, and we have set out a strong expectation in guidance that, over time, all schools should make counselling services available to their pupils. However, the provision of access to counselling in schools and colleges is not mandatory. It is up to schools and colleges to decide what level of counselling

to provide, working with other organisations including local authorities and the NHS who may fund counselling locally. It is also important there is freedom for each school or college to decide what support to offer to children and young people and staff based on their particular needs and drawing on an evidence base of effective practice. This support can come from a number of sources, including counselling.

The department has published a blueprint for school counselling services, focusing on supporting the provision of counselling in schools with practical, evidence-based advice, informed by schools and counselling experts, on how to deliver high-quality school-based counselling. It sets out that counselling works best within a whole school or college 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. It also offers information on how to ensure that vulnerable children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, looked after children, and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, who have a higher prevalence of mental illness, can access counselling provision, details of which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counselling-in-schools>.

### **Schools: Mental Health Services**

**22 Sep 2021 | HL2461**

**Asked by: Lord Taylor of Warwick**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to provide mental health support for students and staff returning to school.

**Answering member: Baroness Barran | Department: DfE**

Mental health and wellbeing are a priority for the government. Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, we have prioritised keeping schools open above all else because they are vital for young people's wellbeing, as well as their education.

We are investing £3 billion to boost learning, including £950 million in additional funding for schools which they can use to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

In May, as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, we announced more than £17 million of mental health funding to improve mental health and wellbeing support in schools and colleges. This includes £7 million additional funding for local authorities to deliver the Wellbeing for Education Recovery programme. This builds on our £8 million Wellbeing for Education Return programme in 2020/21, which provided free expert training, support and resources for staff dealing with children and young people experiencing additional pressures from the last year. Wellbeing for Education Return has been used by more than 90% of councils since its launch last

summer: [https://www.minded.org.uk/Catalogue/Index?HierarchyId=0\\_48943\\_49165&programmId=48943](https://www.minded.org.uk/Catalogue/Index?HierarchyId=0_48943_49165&programmId=48943).

Up to 7,800 schools and colleges in England will be offered funding worth £9.5 million to train a senior mental health lead from their staff in the next academic year, which is part of the government's commitment to offering this training to all state schools and colleges by 2025.

Training will provide senior leads with the knowledge and skills to develop or introduce a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing in their setting. It will encourage staff to develop their own understanding of issues affecting their pupils, giving young people a voice in how their school or college addresses wellbeing and working with parents and monitoring pupils where appropriate.

This support for practice in schools is in addition to the £79 million boost to children and young people's mental health support we announced in March, which will include increasing the number of 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.

The department has brought together all its sources of advice for schools and colleges into a single site, which includes signposting to external sources of mental health and wellbeing support: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges#mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>.

In May, we published the first ever Education Staff Wellbeing Charter: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter>. The charter sets out the actions that government and other organisations, including Ofsted, will take to improve wellbeing of staff in schools and colleges.

Since June 2020, we have funded peer-support and one-to-one telephone supervision from experts, which has supported over 300 school leaders. This June, we launched an invitation to tender seeking a contractor to provide peer support and one-to-one counselling to at least 2,000 school leaders, starting in the autumn 2021.

We know flexible working opportunities can promote staff wellbeing and have appointed the training provider 'Timewise' to train school leaders to implement flexible working practices in schools.

### **Schools: Mental Health Services**

**22 Jul 2021 | 35829**

**Asked by: Dr Rosena Allin-Khan**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many (a) in-school mental health counsellors and (b) mental health workers there were in schools in each year from 2010 to 2021.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Department: DfE**

Information on the number of in-school mental health counsellors and mental health workers is not collected centrally.

The department collects information on staff working in state funded schools via the annual School Workforce Census but does not directly identify in-school mental health counsellors and mental health workers. The results are published in the 'School Workforce in England' statistical publication: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

Our most recent survey of mental health provision in schools and colleges published in 2017 found that 61% of schools and colleges (56% of primary schools, 84% of secondary schools and 93% of colleges) reported offering access to counselling service for their pupils.

School and college-based counselling is valuable provision which can play a particularly effective role as part of a whole-school or college approach, within which support can come from several sources. In that context, it is important that schools and colleges have the freedom to decide what support to offer to students and staff based on their needs, drawing on an evidence base of effective practice. Our 'Counselling in schools' guidance offers support and advice to schools on setting up and improving counselling services and how they can work together to best support pupils: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counselling-in-schools>.

We are also committed to delivering our joint green paper delivery programme with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England, which includes introducing new Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) into schools and colleges. These teams are intended to provide early intervention on mild to moderate issues, as well as helping staff within a school or college setting to provide a 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing.

The £79 million boost to children and young people's mental health support that we announced in March will include accelerating the rollout of MHSTs. There are now over 280 MHSTs set up or in training, and this will grow to around 400 by April 2023, supporting nearly 3 million children across the country. This increase means that millions of children and young people will have access to significantly expanded mental health services. High level MHST breakdowns by year, region and area can be found here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/trailblazers/mh-support-teams/>.

**[Schools: Counselling](#)**

**12 Jul 2021 | 27108**

**Asked by: Barbara Keeley**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps, published July 2018, what steps he is taking to support high-quality counselling services in schools.

**Answering member: Ms Nadine Dorries | Department: Department of Health and Social Care**

We have not made a formal assessment.

The guidance sets out a strong expectation that, over time, all schools should make counselling services available to their pupils. However, the Government has not made the provision of access to counselling in schools and colleges mandatory, as it is important for schools and colleges to have the freedom to decide what support to offer to students.

We are implementing the proposals of the children and young people's mental health Green Paper, including mental health support teams, which will support the mental health needs of children and young people in primary, secondary and further education and use an evidence-based approach to provide early intervention on some mental health and emotional wellbeing issues, such as mild to moderate anxiety. There are over 280 mental health support teams in operation or in training, with a further 112 teams planned to be established in 2021/22. We are accelerating the roll-out of Mental health support teams will so that they support approximately 35% of pupils by 2023.

### **Pupils and Students: Mental Health**

**23 Jun 2021 | 16026**

**Asked by: Mr Andrew Mitchell**

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans his Department has to invest in improving the mental health of (a) primary school pupils, (b) secondary school pupils and (c) 18-25 year olds in further or higher education.

**Answering member: Vicky Ford | Department: DfE**

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is a priority for this government. While education settings cannot provide specialist clinical care, the support that schools and colleges are providing to their pupils, following the return to face-to-face education, should include time devoted to supporting mental health and wellbeing, which will play a fundamental part in supporting recovery. We want schools to have the freedom to decide which

wider pastoral and extra-curricular activity to put in place, based on the needs of their pupils and drawing on evidence of effective practice.

We are supporting recovery action with significant additional funding. In June 2021, we announced £1.4 billion of additional funding for education recovery. This is in addition to the £1.7 billion already committed, bringing total investment announced for education recovery over the past year to over £3 billion. The package provides support to children aged 2 to 19 in schools, 16-19 providers and early years. It will expand our reforms in 2 areas where the evidence is clear that our investment will have significant impact: high-quality tutoring targeted at those that need it most and high-quality training for teachers.

The one-off Recovery Premium for state-funded schools will help schools to provide their disadvantaged pupils with a 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. This is in addition to the £650 million catch-up premium shared across state-funded schools over the 2020 to 2021 academic year, which is also supporting education settings to put the right catch-up and pastoral support in place. The Education Endowment Foundation have published a COVID-19 support guide to support schools, which includes further information about interventions to support pupils' mental health and wellbeing: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/eef-support-for-schools/covid-19-resources/national-tutoring-programme/covid-19-support-guide-for-schools/>.

Our Mental Health in Education Action Group has been looking further at what more can be done to help education settings support mental wellbeing as part of recovery. The department has recently brought together all its sources of advice for schools and colleges into a single site, which includes signposting to external sources of mental health and wellbeing support for teachers, school staff and school leaders: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-wellbeing-support-in-schools-and-colleges#mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>. It also includes guidance to support relationships, sex and health education curriculum planning, covering the key issues children and young people have been concerned about throughout the COVID-19 outbreak: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-mental-wellbeing>.

On 10 May, as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, we announced more than £17 million of mental health funding to improve mental health and wellbeing support in schools and colleges. This includes £9.5 million for up to 7,800 schools to train a senior mental health lead in the next academic year, and £7 million in additional funding for local authorities to deliver the Wellbeing for Education Recovery programme. This builds on Wellbeing for Education Return in the 2020/21 academic year, which offered schools in every local authority and reached up to 15,000 schools with free expert training, support and resources for staff dealing with children and young

people experiencing additional pressures from the last year, including trauma, anxiety, or grief.

For further education, the College Collaboration Fund (CCF), a £5.4 million national programme of competitive grant funding delivered in the 2020/21 financial year, is helping to support learner and staff mental health and wellbeing through online programmes and remote support. One of the funded projects was Weston College's 'Let's Chat' programme, which delivered a number of wellbeing support packages accessible at any time to keep staff, students and their families safe and well during lockdown. We are now assessing bids for the CCF 2 for the 2021/22 financial year.

With regards to higher education, student mental health and suicide prevention are key priorities for this government. We continue to work closely with the HE sector to promote good practice. Universities are not only experts in their student population, but also best placed to identify the needs of their student body. The Department of Health and Social Care has overall policy responsibility for young people's mental health. We continue to work closely with them to take steps to develop mental health and wellbeing support.

We have also increased funding to specialist services. In March, we announced a £79 million boost to children and young people's mental health support, which will include increasing the number of 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. In total, £13 million will be used to accelerate progress to support young adults aged 18 to 25. This group includes university students and those not in education or training, who have reported the worst mental health outcomes during the COVID-19 outbreak, and who sometimes fall through the gap between children and adult services.

While it is for HE providers to determine what welfare and counselling services they need to provide to their students to offer that support, the government is proactive in promoting good practice in this area. We continue to work closely with Universities UK on embedding the Stepchange programme within the sector. Stepchange calls on HE leaders to adopt mental health as a strategic priority and to take a whole-institution approach, embedding it across all policies, cultures, curricula, and practice. The Stepchange programme relaunched in March 2020 as the Mentally Healthy Universities programme. Further information on the programme is available here: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/stepchange>.

The University Mental Health Charter, announced in June 2018, is backed by the government and led by the HE sector. The Charter, developed in collaboration with students, staff and partner organisations, aims to drive up standards of practice, including leadership, early intervention, and data

collection. Further information on the Charter is available here: <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/charter.html>.

The department has also worked with the Office for Students (OfS) to provide Student Space, a dedicated mental health and wellbeing platform for students. Student Space has been funded by up to £3 million from the OfS in the 2020/21 academic year. We have asked the OfS to allocate £15 million towards student mental health in the 2021/22 academic year through proposed reforms to Strategic Priorities grant funding, to help address the challenges to student mental health posed by the transition to university, given the increasing demand for mental health services. This will target students in greatest need of such services, including vulnerable and hard to reach groups.

## 3 Press Material

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

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### 3.1 Press Articles

[Warning mental health crisis will block school catch-up](#)

Tes

30 October 2021

[Councils call for £100m investment in school counselling](#)

Local Gov

15 October 2021

[LGA: Make school-based counselling available to all children to tackle rising child mental health issues](#)

Local Government Association

15 October 2021

[Mental health: Call for sanctuaries for young in crisis](#)

BBC Wales

5 October 2021

[Heads report 'surge' in pupils' Covid-related anxiety](#)

Tes

14 July 2021

['Our children are coming to terms with a different life'](#)

Financial Times [Subscription Required]

17 June 2021

[About 400 secondary pupils waiting for counselling](#)

BBC

19 May 2021

[No on-site counselling in half of schools, research says](#)

BBC NI

9 October 2020

[Three quarters of people believe schools should offer counselling](#)

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

13 June 2019

## 3.2

## Press Releases

[Training launched for mental health leads in schools and colleges](#)

Department for Education

21 September 2021

[Schools and colleges to benefit from boost in expert mental health support](#)

Department for Education

10 May 2021

[£79 million to boost mental health support for children and young people](#)

Department of Health and Social Care

5 March 2021

## 4 Additional Reading

### 4.1 Reports

Department of Health and Social Care & Department for Education, [Government Response to the Consultation on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper and Next Steps](#), July 2018

Department of Health and Social Care & Department for Education, [Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper](#), December 2017

NatCen Social Research, [Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges](#), August 2017

Department for Education, [Mental Health Services and Schools Link Pilots: Evaluation report](#), February 2017

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