

Huge rise in number of school-based counsellors over past three years

3 February 2020 – A survey of school leaders published today by school leaders' union [NAHT](#) and children's mental health charity [Place2Be](#) reveals that the number of schools commissioning professional help for children's mental health issues has increased significantly since 2016.

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.

The findings are released on the first day of [Children's Mental Health Week](#) (3-9 February 2020).

The latest survey was completed by 653 school leaders at the end of 2019, and the results can be compared to similar joint surveys in 2016 and 2017*.

The latest findings show an improved understanding and recognition of children's mental health in schools; but access to external NHS help has not and more schools are now buying in their own support.

- 74 per cent of school leaders said the majority of their staff are **confident at recognising the signs** of mental health problems among children and young people (versus 61 per cent in 2017).
- Just 4 per cent of school leaders agreed that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) **responds quickly** to requests for support. Just 5 per cent agreed that children referred to CAMHS **get help when they need it**.
- 66 per cent of school leaders said their school **commissioned external professional support** for children and young people's mental health issues in school (versus 36 per cent in 2016).

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said: "We know that early intervention is absolutely key when it comes to mental health and wellbeing. We can see that schools are responding to an increasing need and a lack of capacity in specialist services by commissioning their own support such as counsellors. Although to be applauded, this is another area where schools are being forced to use scant resources for urgent provision that is not provided for in their budgets".

"There is still concern that when children do have more serious mental health needs professional help is not easily available. Teachers are on the frontline for children's mental health, but they are not qualified medical specialists. Where schools consider that a pupil's needs go beyond their experience and expertise, their role is to refer those pupils to other professionals to address those needs, and they should be able to expect timely and effective support."

Catherine Roche, Chief Executive of children's mental health charity Place2Be, said: "Three children in every classroom now has a mental health issue, so it is positive to see these results which show that more school leaders are responding to this need by providing professional support for children and young people within school.

"In this, Children's Mental Health Week, we want to highlight that school staff need support to deal with the many and often complex emotional issues of their pupils. At Place2Be, we work with schools leaders to help them better understand mental health and to develop a 'whole school approach' to improving mental health, so that pupils can focus on their learning. But schools cannot

tackle this problem alone. They need expert help in school, backed up by NHS services that can step in when more specialist support is required.”

The survey also revealed an improved picture of mental health understanding and support in schools overall. School leaders said the majority of their staff would be confident **understanding the issues** that may underlie children’s and young people’s behaviour (74 per cent in 2019 compared to 68 per cent in 2017) and understanding how children and young people’s mental health impacts on their **engagement with learning** (81 per cent compared to 77 per cent).

However only 54 per cent of school leaders think their staff would be confident in **knowing how to respond** when mental health is negatively affecting pupils (compared to 47 per cent in 2017), and only 44 per cent in knowing how to respond if a pupil had a **mental health crisis** (compared to 39 per cent in 2017).

- Other findings from the school leaders surveyed included:
 - 79 percent agreed their school has a **whole school approach** to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing
 - 78 per cent said there is a **designated member of staff** responsible for mental wellbeing in their school or college
 - 67 per cent said staff have undertaken **training** to help them identify pupils with mental health needs or problems
 - 66 per cent agreed that pupils feel **confident to talk** to staff and peers about their mental wellbeing

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Notes to Editors:

*In 2016, the survey was completed by 1,455 primary school leaders across England

In 2017, the survey was completed by 1,115 primary and secondary school leaders from across England and Wales

In 2019, the survey was completed by 653 primary and secondary school leaders across England

About NAHT

NAHT represents more than 30,000 school leaders in early years, primary, secondary and special schools, making us the largest association for school leaders in the UK. We represent, advise and train school leaders in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We use our voice at the highest levels of government to influence policy for the benefit of leaders and learners everywhere. Our NAHT Edge section supports, develops and represents middle leaders in schools.

About Place2Be

Place2Be is a children's mental health charity providing school-based support and in-depth training programmes to improve the emotional wellbeing of pupils, families, teachers and school staff.

- Working in partnership with schools, teams of mental health professionals help to create a culture of openness and promote positive mental health, ensuring that potential problems can be identified at an early stage and that children can access support in a safe and familiar environment.
- Place2Be takes an evidence-based approach – gathering, analysing and using data to challenge and improve services.
- The charity's Mental Health Champions programmes for School Leaders and Class Teachers combine expert consultation, advice and training to help build understanding, skills and knowledge of mental health in schools.
- Place2Be is also a leading provider of specialist training and university-validated child counselling qualifications, from introductory level to Postgraduate Diploma and Masters.
- HRH The Duchess of Cambridge became Patron of Place2Be in 2013, reflecting her personal interest in and commitment to improving the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children.
- Early intervention can help prevent mental health problems in adulthood, which cost the UK over £100 billion each year.

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