

Speech

Sam Gyimah: mental health pilots - where next?

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Education and Childcare Minister Sam Gyimah speaks about single point of contact pilots and the importance of early intervention in schools.



Thank you Miranda [Wolpert, Reader in Evidence-Based Practice and Research at University College London, and Director of the Evidence-Based Practice Unit] for inviting me to join you at this event today. I am really pleased to be here with so many of you who have had first-hand experience of the pilot, and from so many of the areas involved.

As the first Department for Education minister with specific responsibility for mental health, I am always delighted to have the opportunity to speak at events like today.

The situation before the pilots

I would first like to take a moment to think about what prompted us to do these [pilots](#).

Eighteen months ago, the picture for local mental health provision for children and young people was not great.

There were difficulties in making 'good' referrals. There were long waiting times before an initial assessment could be made, and, then, there was sometimes yet another wait for young people before specialist support was available.

This all resulted in added worry and anxiety for young people and their families, who were already in a stressful situation coping with a mental health problem.

The work of the cross-government task force focused on how we could improve the experiences of these young people and their families.

Through the taskforce, we heard that there were many frustrations experienced between schools and specialist services when a child needed treatment. CAMHS felt schools did not understand them. And sometimes schools would refer children for treatment, even where it wasn't right for the child. Schools felt that their pupils weren't always getting the help that they needed. In short, the link between schools and CAMHS was not working.

I am sure the picture I have painted is one you can all recognise. It is certainly one that those involved in the taskforce, particularly the children and young people who spoke about their experiences of the system, would recognise.

We know all too well that when schools and CAMHS are not working effectively together, it is young people who suffer. And even one child suffering as a result of a struggling system is one too many.

That is why I am working closely with Alastair Burt to integrate the 2 systems. And we have realised that this is a whole different

ball game. But we know the past situation needed to change.

And you and your colleagues have begun to make this crucial change through the single point of contact pilot.

The pilot

So what do we mean by a single point of contact? This is one contact point in CAMHS working with a number of schools in their area and acting as the 'go to' person for these schools. Each school nominates a named staff member who will interact with this 'go to' CAMHS contact.

Schools and CAMHS work together and maintain an open channel of communication, acting as the 'bridge' between school and CAMHS. They receive the same training to provide consistency across the system.

In the pilot CAMHS contacts have worked with groups of 10 schools.

Teachers in each school can contact their named staff member whenever they need to. This makes it easier for teachers to voice their concerns with someone they know and trust, so they don't feel out of their depth.

Because teachers aren't mental health professionals, nor should we expect them to be. Yet we can't escape the fact that young people do spend lots of their time in school and so teachers do spot things. Often parents come to teachers to voice concerns about their child too. So it is vital we make it as easy as possible for teachers to interact with CAMHS.

I know that being involved in this pilot hasn't been easy but it wouldn't have been needed if it were.

For some, attending the first workshop was the first time health and education colleagues had been in the same room together and this led to some very difficult conversations about why you were there and what you were supposed to be doing.

However, as a result of your perseverance and hard work you have all reached a much better understanding of the part you play, day in and day out, in supporting children and young people with mental health issues.

These pilots have started us on the road to more collaborative working, improved conversations and better relationships, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for children and their families.

Funding

But we know relationships and communication aren't everything. These must, of course, be complimented by funding. We know this better than anyone and we have invested significantly in mental health.

This government has made available £1.4 billion additional funding for mental health. The collaborative approach of the pilots is a key way people can - and have - come together to make best use of this. The NHS-England-led transformation planning process also plays a key role, and I know that Jackie [Cornish, National Clinical Director for Children, Young People and Transition to Adulthood for NHS England] will want to say more on this shortly.

Where next?

So, where do we go from here?

I am looking forward to hearing the full results of the evaluation in the autumn but, in the meantime, we would like to do more to build on your experiences and continue the momentum.

You will hear more later about what we have learned from these pilots and the evaluation process you all took part in.

Over the coming months we will be working with NHS England, the Anna Freud Centre, and our evaluators to scale up this

approach in your areas. This means working with more schools, including those that are harder to reach.

This will involve a lot of work. But, I know there is strong local endorsement for this, and that we are pushing at an open door.

Wider work in the Department for Education (DfE)

Of course, coming at this from a DfE perspective, we have a focus on early intervention, rather than clinical problems. And it is increased understanding, awareness, and the confidence to speak out that are key to accessing early intervention.

So we have funded: [PSHE lesson plans for teachers](#); [MindEd resources for parents](#); and set up a [£1.5 million fund for young people to provide peer support to each other]<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/15-million-to-help-young-people-spot-signs-of-mental-illness>). We also updated our [advice on mental health and behaviour](#) and published an updated [school counselling blueprint](#).

Crucially, these sorts of resources and investments will help young people, teachers, and parents alike to identify mental health problems. This will allow them to make effective referrals to CAMHS at the right moment.

Through our joint work with NHS England on the pilots, we hope that in the future the system these young people are referred into will be operating at its peak.

Because when a young person develops a mental health problem this is stressful for them, their parents, their teachers, and all those close to them.

Concluding remarks

We know that the system is not working effectively.

And we know that we cannot change the system overnight.

But I do hope that through these pilots we have started the journey towards a better, more coherent system between schools and CAMHS, so that people can navigate this landscape more easily.

It is never easy dealing with a mental health problem, and whilst the stigma around this exists, there is an added level of complexity and pressure.

Imagine being a suffering young person or a worried parent or teacher in this situation. As a parent myself, I can only begin to imagine how difficult this must be.

And that is why we are working closely with NHS England and the Department of Health to try to improve this system and improve the experiences of children, young people and families.

Thank you again for having me here today and I wish you every success as we continue on this journey together.

I know we are only part of the way there, and that it will be an uphill climb. But I hope that the good relationships built from these pilots can be a strong first foot forward as we progress into the future.

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