



## **Place2Be Briefing - Schools (Mental Health Professionals) Bill**

Second Reading, Baroness Tyler – March 2024

*“A Bill to make provision to require every school to have access to a qualified mental health professional; and for connected purposes.”*

### **About Place2Be**

Place2Be is a children’s mental health charity, and the UK’s leading third sector provider of school-based mental health services. Since 1994 our expert teams have worked within school communities, supporting children and young people’s mental health and helping to normalise the importance of looking after your emotional wellbeing.

Place2Be’s whole-school approach means we can ensure that every child gets the right support that helps them to live well and thrive. We believe that every child across the country should be able to access this in their school.

### **Priority outcomes**

- Mental health support should be embedded in every school, accessible to every pupil, through a school-based counsellor or mental health practitioner.
- School based mental health services need to deliver both targeted and universal provision through a whole-school approach.

Having a mental health professional in school is a necessary measure to ensure that all young people can have easy access to support in a familiar, non-medical setting. Place2Be has been providing school-based mental health support for 30 years – and has significant evidence of the impact of a school-based service.

We believe school-based mental health practitioners have a number of roles to play; in

- providing mental health support to pupils
- supporting the school leadership and staff to build a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing
- working with wider agencies to assist in safeguarding, triaging and referrals, and liaising with external services around a child and family.

To deliver this holistic practice within schools, mental health practitioners need to have the appropriate level of training and experience, with access to regular clinical supervision to give service quality assurance.

### **Place2Be’s approach**

Early intervention and prevention are growing areas of focus for Government, with the expansion of Mental Health Support Teams and the recent Suicide Prevention Strategy. This is important, given around half of mental health issues develop by age 14. Place2Be’s approach to children’s and young people’s mental health is to intervene early and give support to young people, so that their worries do not grow with them.

We do this by:



- providing support early, spotting mental health problems before they develop and helping children and young people cope with challenges throughout their lives
- using an effective therapeutic approach backed by research that combines several ways of working
- offering a range of mental health support services, including advice and support for families and school staff, to build resilience and raise awareness of mental health across the whole school community.

In 2023 Place2Be worked with 520 schools across England, Wales and Scotland, to deliver a wide range of mental health support services under a whole-school approach. This model has proven to be effective, and we urge the Government to ensure that every school can access this level of support.

There are several factors or dependencies required, if every UK school is to be supported by a qualified mental health professional.

## 1. Workforce

The 2023 NHS Long Term Workforce Plan committed to growing the mental health workforce through increasing training places. Workforce expansion is clearly needed to meet the current level of need – in 2022 the Health Education England [census](#) found 2,900 vacancies in children’s mental health services.

We need to create a mental health workforce that is:

- expertly qualified to meet the severity of mental health needs
- appropriately skilled in children’s mental health
- diverse to reflect and represent the range of populations they support.

To achieve this, NHS and other training providers and employers should create accessible routes into counselling and psychotherapy such as apprenticeships. At present, the counselling profession is traditionally female, white, older and more affluent. We need a more diverse workforce representing a wider range of life-experiences.

Training mental health professionals to the level of skill needed to support young people takes time – this requires a long-term strategy and commitment. The investment in Mental Health Support Teams has been welcomed, but these practitioners are not counsellors, and are only part of the solution.

We need to ensure that school-based mental health professionals have access to regular supervision and oversight. This gives assurance to the counsellor in a clinical capacity, and also ensures a robust quality of service delivery. Place2Be’s practitioners are trained with the ethos that relationship-building is a key component in healing mental health issues. This framework, backed by their significant expertise, enables them with the flexibility to meet each individual child’s needs, without being restrained to a fixed process or protocol.

## 2. Schools

Every school would benefit from a mental health professional, embedded to relieve the strain from school staff in supporting pupil mental health; but there are many measures schools can take to create a culture that prioritises mental health and wellbeing. This is a key pillar of preventing mental



health issues from arising and escalating. Prevention through building positive relationships in childhood is key to building a mentally healthy nation.

Employing a school counsellor goes some of the way to ensuring every child has a supportive, inclusive school journey – this is the goal of a whole school approach. But to embed a whole-school approach, we need to ensure every individual working with a child or young person has appropriate understanding of their mental health and confidence to know how to support them.

Place2Be works in partnership with teacher training settings to provide training in children's mental health, helping to build the expertise needed throughout a teaching pathway. Mental health training should also form part of ongoing CPD for school staff.

We also need to see a continuity and expansion of the Senior Mental Health Leads training to ensure 100% education settings have taken up the offer. A key enabler to deliver this is through giving schools both the resources and incentive to prioritise staff training and development.

### **3. Collaboration and commissioning**

Integrated Care Boards have a duty to commission services that support the mental health of people – including those under 25 – in their community. We believe that ICBs have a role to play in ensuring that every school can access an expert mental health service: in Place2Be's experience, our services are primarily commissioned by education settings directly, not health. We believe this should come under ICB responsibilities.

To enforce this proposed legislation, there needs to be cross-governmental alignment. As a mental health service in education settings, both the DfE and DHSC must collaborate. This collaboration must come with clear accountability, oversight and regulation, to ensure equity of support across the country.

### **4. Investment**

The 2019 NHS Long Term Plan committed funding to mental health services by an additional £2.3 billion per year by 2023/24. However, only 8% of ICB spend on mental health services is allocated to child and adolescent provision. Furthermore, only 1% of all NHS funding is given to children's mental health services. This demonstrates that investment in dedicated children's mental health provision is not meeting the level of demand for support.

Place2Be has estimated that delivering a whole-school approach to state schools across England would cost approximately £530 million. This would deliver 1.5 days a week of a mental health practitioner in primary schools, 5 days a week for secondary schools, alongside training for school staff, and family interventions, aiming to support early intervention and a whole-school approach. This is a small fraction of the £16.8 billion the NHS forecasts to spend on mental health services in 2023/24.

#### **The impact of school-based mental health services.**

##### **1. Benefit to pupil wellbeing**



In the past year, 42,321 children and young people accessed a support service from Place2Be. Children and young people we work with are often from more marginalised backgrounds, who are at higher risk of developing poor mental health. For example, 40% were eligible for Pupil Premium, 5% were the subject of a child protection plan, 9% were reported to be on a CAMHS waiting list, 4% were looked after children.

Our mental health services have proven to be effective, and beneficial. After children have Place2Be support: 65% caused fewer problems for their teacher or class, 68% found it easier to have friends, 75% of those with severe difficulties showed an improvement in wellbeing, and 63% had an improved home life.

## **2. Benefit to the school community**

Benefits of school-based mental health services go beyond the individual pupil. Place2Be carried out a [study](#) with the University of Cambridge which highlights the link between mental health support and reduced rates of school [exclusions](#). The report found that when students with experience of school exclusions were given counselling by Place2Be, 74% experienced fewer school exclusions and 56% had no further exclusions that year. Not only this, teachers reported that the student's mental health also improved. This suggests a link between behaviour and mental health.

Place2Be's counselling is also associated with reduced odds of persistent absence – something that is a key government priority in tackling. We found that consistently poor mental health over time was associated with higher levels of persistent absence. To tackle this, our [research suggests](#) that strengthening engagement and enjoyment of school plays a key role. Additionally, one-to-one counselling was associated with reduced odds of persistent absence, especially in primary-aged pupils.

## **3. Benefit to the broader economy**

[Pro Bono Economics](#)' cost-benefit analysis found that Place2Be's one-to-one counselling has even wider societal benefits, through the impact on reduced exclusions, improved school attainment and employment prospects, and tackling the negative physical health traits that are associated with poor mental health, such as smoking. They found that:

- Place2Be's support could generate an average of £8,700 in economic benefits over the lifetime of the child
- given the programme costs on average £1,100 per child, Pro Bono Economics estimate it generates around £8 in benefits for every £1 spent
- this means Place2Be's counselling service in the UK could generate as much as £36 million of lifetime benefits from each academic year of support.

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