



Place2Be Briefing – General Debate on Education and Opportunity

July 2024

Findings - Benefits of mental health support in education

There are clear connections between children’s mental health and their experience in education. Through giving every young person the right foundations, backed up with mental health support when they need it, we can enable everyone to reach their potential.

For thirty years, Place2Be has been supporting schools to deliver a ‘whole school approach’ to mental health and wellbeing. Through our expert child counsellors, training programmes and parenting work, we can make schools inclusive, welcoming and mentally healthy.

By embedding mental health within school cultures, we see a number of benefits to the education system. Place2Be research, based on our services in schools, shows that:

School based counselling can reduce school absence.¹

The University of Cambridge analysed data from 7,400 pupils supported by Place2Be with one-to-one counselling and found lower levels of persistent absence after attending counselling. Importantly, children with better mental health after counselling also had stronger engagement and enjoyment of school at follow up.

Mental health support is associated with reduced school suspensions.²

School exclusion disproportionately affects children with poor mental health.³ The University of Cambridge analysed data from 6,700 pupils supported by Place2Be with one-to-one counselling. The study found a significant reduction in school exclusions among those pupils in the academic year the counselling took place:

- 74% of the students who had a fixed period exclusion before counselling had fewer reported exclusions in the year they attended counselling.
- More than half (56%) did not have any subsequent exclusions.
- Students also had better mental health after counselling, measured by teachers in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.

Counselling could support academic progress and engagement at school.

Research has found that pupils with mental health difficulties are more likely to have lower academic attainment than their peers.⁴ However, Place2Be compared academic outcomes of primary school pupils who received one-to-one counselling, against a control group of pupils with similar characteristics. The

¹ Place2Be, Centre for Mental Health & Children and Young People’s Mental Health Coalition, [School for All: Solutions for School Attendance](#), 2024

² Toth, K., Golden, S., et al, [From a child who IS a problem to a child who HAS a problem: fixed period school exclusions and mental health outcomes from routine outcome monitoring among children and young people attending school counselling](#), 2022

³ Place2Be, [From a child who is a problem to a child who has a problem](#), 2023

⁴ UCL, [Study links poor mental health to educational outcomes](#), 2019 (accessed May 2024)



findings showed that children between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 who received counselling kept pace academically with their peers, despite being known to have mental health difficulties.⁵

Place2Be's support also consistently delivers improvement in pupils' attitude to learning: in 2023, teachers reported an improvement in classroom learning for 64% of children who had one-to-one counselling with Place2Be.⁶

Counselling also improves pupil behaviour: after Place2Be's support, 65% of pupils caused fewer problems to their teacher or class.⁷

Mental health support brings economic benefits to society.⁸

Independent experts at Pro Bono Economics found that Place2Be's one-to-one support in primary schools could generate an average of £8,700 in economic benefits over the lifetime of the individual child, through higher employment prospects and wages, decreased truancy, school exclusion, smoking and criminal behaviour. This represents a benefit of £8 for every £1 invested in the service.

Recommendations

Expert mental health services in schools

We welcome the commitments made by the Government to give every school access to a specialist mental health service. As a leading provider of school-based mental health services with thirty years' experience, Place2Be has extensive evidence and expertise in this space.

1. Place2Be recommends a joint strategy with the Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care, working collaboratively with the NHS and third sector providers to inform the delivery of this policy.
2. We recommend that every school has access to an embedded mental health service like Place2Be's: delivered by an expert child counsellor with access to clinical supervision, safeguarding and evaluation. These services should consistently record outcomes to ensure best practice.

Inclusion and a whole school approach to mental health

We welcome the proposed measures in the Children's Wellbeing Bill around introducing breakfast clubs in primary schools, reducing school uniform costs and extending oversight of independent schools and academies.

But to truly improve children's wellbeing, schools need to be inclusive, give children access to enrichment and focus on supporting every child (including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), mental health difficulties and additional needs) to fulfil their potential. To get there, we recommend schools follow a 'whole school approach' to mental health and wellbeing.

⁵ Place2Be, [25 years' learning from practice and evaluation](#), 2021

⁶ Place2Be, [Impact Report 2023](#), 2024

⁷ Place2Be, [Impact Report 2023](#), 2024

⁸ Pro Bono Economics, [Place2Be's one-to-one counselling service in UK primary schools: an updated cost-benefit analysis](#), 2022



1. School staff should be trained in mental health, neurodivergence and SEND, to lead the delivery of the whole school approach.⁹ This should be included within initial teacher training, continuous professional development and through training for senior leaders.
2. Academies can share positive practice relating to inclusion across their settings, however the Department for Education should introduce oversight and accountability to ensure best practice around inclusion.
3. Ofsted should place less emphasis on rigid academic targets, and include assessment of how schools positively support pupil wellbeing, development, and inclusion.
4. The Department for Education should work with Ofsted and use their influence to promote positive school cultures through:
 - a. introducing guidance and a framework on inclusion in education
 - b. implementing the programmes from the Transforming Children’s Mental Health green paper¹⁰
 - c. utilising NICE guidance on Social, emotional and mental wellbeing in primary and secondary education.¹¹
5. The Department for Education should allocate more funding towards programmes that bring enrichment, extra-curricular, and pastoral opportunities into school settings, in line with the Government’s manifesto commitment on arts and creativity in school.

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⁹ DfE, [Promoting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#), 2015

¹⁰ DfE, [Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper](#), 2017

¹¹ NICE, [Social, emotional and mental wellbeing in primary and secondary education](#), 2022