

As schools prepare to reopen, Barnardo's has published a new [report](#) on the importance of putting mental health and wellbeing at the heart of education, based on a survey of more than 1,000 of our frontline staff and 100 school-based staff.

Summary:

- Covid-19 has exposed the nation's children to trauma, adversity and loss. It has caused significant harm to vulnerable children and young people, many of whom are isolated in unsafe homes away from the supportive environment of school.
- Barnardo's is concerned about children not previously known to services, but who are now at risk from poverty, domestic abuse or mental health issues.
- BAME children and young people are more likely to experience loss, to be caring for unwell relatives, to worry about contracting the virus, and to miss out on support.
- In addition to the well-understood 'attainment gap', there is now also a 'trauma gap'. As schools reopen, disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people will need additional support, not only with their education but also with mental health and wellbeing.
- In the longer term, the education system should be rebalanced so that children's mental health and wellbeing are given equal weight to reading, writing and exams.

Key recommendations for the Government:

- While schools remain closed - use the buildings to provide vital support for vulnerable children.
- Launch a national campaign to reassure children, young people and parents to get them back to school, but also to work with schools to identify what they need to keep pupils and staff safe.
- Urgently publish guidance for schools to support them with staff and pupils' mental health and wellbeing in the aftermath of Covid-19.
- Allow schools flexibility in the curriculum and a 'readjustment period' of at least a term to meet the emotional needs of staff and pupils.
- Introduce a 'catch up pupil premium' for vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, that schools can use flexibly to address emotional & mental health needs of pupils.
- Rebalance the education system so that it prioritises child welfare and wellbeing so that it is on a par with academic achievement.

Key findings:

- 88% of school staff surveyed by Barnardo's said that Covid-19 would have a negative impact on their pupils' mental health and wellbeing.
- 82% said Covid-19 had affected their ability to support pupils with mental health and wellbeing.

- Schools told us they are worried about addressing the impact of trauma, adversity and loss when their pupils return, and a lack of daily contact with some vulnerable children and families means that some children and families are 'hidden' from view.
- 26% of school staff told us that they were not confident their school had the tools, skills or resources to support pupils with their mental health and wellbeing when they return.
- Schools told us they need tools and resources to support their pupils with mental health and wellbeing, flexibility in the curriculum so they are not pressured to 'catch up' academically at the expense of staff/pupil welfare; and more funding to deal with the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health and wellbeing on their staff and pupils.
- Schools told us they want to be places where mental health is at the heart of the learning environment, but that this was not always possible due to the wider education system, including the curriculum, exams and inspection processes.

Suggested oral or written questions to table in Parliament:

- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to reassure pupils and staff about the safety of returning to school.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he will consider launching a national campaign to reassure children and parents about returning to school.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about when the Government will publish guidance for schools on how to support the mental health and wellbeing of pupils and staff when they return to school.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to provide schools with sufficient flexibility to meet the emotional and mental health needs of staff and pupils when they reopen.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to introduce a 'readjustment period' during which time they can adjust the curriculum to focus on wellbeing.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he will consider introducing a catch-up pupil premium for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people.
- To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to rebalance the education system so that it prioritises children's wellbeing.

About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. In 2018/19, we supported around 300,000 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 1,000 services. For more information please contact Claire Stewart, Senior Public Affairs Officer, on claire.stewart@barnardos.org.uk or 07584 347 308.