

Early evaluation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer programme: a rapid mixed-methods study

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer programme started in 2018 and is funding the creation of new mental health support teams to work in schools and further education colleges. Mental health support teams directly support children and young people with 'mild to moderate' mental health problems and help schools and colleges to promote well-being for all. The programme is also creating and training a new workforce of education mental health practitioners.

Our study looked at the experiences of setting up and running mental health support teams in the first 25 areas involved in the programme (called Trailblazers). We wanted to understand what the teams were doing day-to-day, who was working in them, what was going well, whether there were any challenges, and what progress they were making. To do this, we looked at documents and information provided by the national programme team and collected our own data using surveys, interviews and focus groups.

We found that the programme was making good progress, and that schools and colleges welcomed having additional mental health support. Children and young people told us how important it was to have somebody in their school or college who they could speak to about their mental health. Mental health support teams were generally spending more time supporting young people who had mental health difficulties than working with education settings to promote emotional well-being across the whole school or college community.

There were also challenges. Some children had mental health problems that were more serious than 'mild to moderate' but not serious enough to be accepted for specialist support. The type of support that mental health support teams were providing was not suitable for all children and young people. Once education mental health practitioners had been trained, some moved on from their role quite quickly, leaving teams short-staffed.

The findings have important implications for the design of a longer-term study to assess the impact of the programme, due to commence in summer 2023.

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