Charities call for manifesto commitments to tackling the “mental health crisis in our classrooms”

In a letter to the Daily Telegraph today [Monday 24 April], a group of mental health and children’s charities have called for all parties to make manifesto commitments to tackling the “mental health crisis in our classrooms”.

The letter – which has been signed by YoungMinds, Rethink Mental Illness, the Mental Health Foundation, the National Children’s Bureau and the British Youth Council among others – describes the education system as “fundamentally unbalanced”. It calls on political parties to ensure that the wellbeing of students is as important as academic performance in schools.

The charities have also written to the Prime Minister about the issue, in a letter that was also signed by more than 2,500 teachers, 1,000 mental health professionals, 4,500 parents and 1,200 young people, urging her to rebalance the education system.

The letters come as YoungMinds releases a new report [attached] and survey results showing that:

- 92% of young people aged 11-18 think that schools should be accountable for the wellbeing of students
- 87% of young people aged 11-18 think that all teachers should have basic training in mental health.
- 67% of young people aged 11-18 think that their school should place more importance on mental health [1]

Sarah Brennan, Chief Executive of YoungMinds, said:

“It is crucial that the new government makes the mental health of our children an absolute priority. But at the moment the education system is so heavily skewed that it’s hard for schools to focus on the wellbeing of students rather than their academic achievements.

“Many schools are doing excellent work to promote good mental health. But funding constraints, coupled with the lack of prominence given to wellbeing in legislation and the Ofsted inspection framework, mean that when schools face tough decisions about which services to cut, they are under pressure to prioritise other areas.

“At a time when rates of self-harm are skyrocketing, and when teachers are seeing a sharp rise in anxiety and stress among their students, this cannot be right.”
YoungMinds is launching its Wise Up campaign in parliament on Tuesday, calling for greater recognition for good work schools do on wellbeing, proper funding for wellbeing initiatives, and mental health as an integral part of teacher training.

Letter to the Daily Telegraph:

Sir,

Children and young people face a huge range of pressures - from exams to cyberbullying, from body image to finding a job when they finish education. An estimated three children in every class have a mental health condition, one in four experience emotional distress, and rates of self-harm are skyrocketing.

Alongside 2,000 teachers, 1,000 mental health professionals, 4,000 parents and 1,000 young people, we have written to the Prime Minister urging her to address the mental health crisis in our classrooms. We are now calling on all parties to make manifesto commitments to do the same.

While it is not the role of schools to replace the specialist support that mental health services provide, they can and should play a crucial role in developing the skills young people need to cope and flourish in today’s world. But at the moment the education system is fundamentally unbalanced, with an over-emphasis on exams and too little focus on student wellbeing.

We want to see greater recognition for good work schools do on wellbeing, proper funding for wellbeing initiatives, and mental health as an integral part of teacher training. It is time to ensure that the wellbeing of students is as important as academic achievement in schools.

- Sarah Brennan, Chief Executive of YoungMinds
- Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive of National Children’s Bureau
- Ruth Sutherland, Chief Executive of Samaritans
- Dr. Peter Hindley, Chair of the Child and Adolescent Faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists
- Heidi Stewart, Director of Enterprise & Innovation, Rethink Mental Illness
- Jenny Edwards CBE, Chief Executive of Mental Health Foundation
- Denise Hatton, Chief Executive of YMCA England
- Chris Martin, Chief Executive of The Mix
- Jo Hobbs, Chief Executive of British Youth Council
- Mark Lever, Chief Executive of The National Autistic Society
- Dr Hadyn Williams, Chief Executive of British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Martin Pratt, Chief Executive of Association of Child & Adolescent Mental Health
- Evan Grant, Trustee of Cameron Grant Memorial Trust
- Jamie Bristow, Director of The Mindfulness Initiative
- Adam Shaw, Chairman of The Shaw Mind Foundation
For further information and to arrange an interview with a spokesperson from YoungMinds please contact Nick Harrop on 020 7089 5066 or 07494 512 742. Email nick.harrop@youngminds.org.uk

NOTES:

1. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,006 children (11-18 years old). Fieldwork was undertaken between 13th - 21st April 2017. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB children (aged 11-18).

2. YoungMinds is the UK’s leading children’s mental health charity committed to improving the mental health and emotional well-being of children and empowering their parents and carers. For further information go to www.youngminds.org.uk