



CPsychI welcomes the announcement of Mental Health pilot programme in schools by Department of Education

Thursday, 22nd June 2023

Following the announcement of the second strand of the €5 million pilot programme this week, the College of Psychiatrists welcomes the imminent roll-out of targeted, responsive wellbeing and mental health supports at primary school level.

The provision of one-to-one counselling sessions for primary school age children, early intervention by trained and supervised 'education wellbeing/mental health practitioners' and psycho-education for parents and teachers will be key in supporting young people who present with mild or emerging mental health needs. This is not only necessary in ensuring students reach their full educational potential, but crucial in the early detection and possible amelioration of further serious mental illness or disability as well as a reduction in inappropriate onward referrals.

With the ongoing roll-out of this pilot programme, we would further expect to see the development of parallel supports and referral pathways to primary and secondary specialist care for those who require more high-level support, while also taking into account the mental health needs of children requiring disability services, or those with neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD or autism. Data emerging from these first and second strands of the pilot should be used to quantify unmet need and to funnel funding upstream towards specialised services that are then staffed to an appropriate level by multidisciplinary team members. A cross-departmental and collaborative approach will ensure that specialist CAMHS and other secondary services are made more accessible, with reduced waiting times for the small percentage of children who will develop moderate to severe mental illness.

It is encouraging to see the targeted provision of programme that reflects the evolving prevalence of mental health need in young people. Early intervention, community supports and provision of information are all key to our young people thriving in educational settings and in society as a whole as they grow older.

The College extends further appreciation to Ministers Foley and Madigan, and the Department of Education, for their roles in the successful application for funding and the imminent rollout of this pilot project. We hope to see continued funding of this and similar projects that will ensure young people receive the most suitable care at this significant period in their education and development.

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