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# Schools Mental Health Survey 2023

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John Healey MP  
Wentworth and Dearne Constituency



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# Introduction by John Healey MP

Five years ago a GCSE student from one of our local secondary schools wrote to me about their impending exams and the changes to the school system under Conservative Ministers. They explained their concerns and that the changes had caused “heightened stress and mental health issues”. It was something I was also hearing on my visits to local schools, from both students and staff.

Following these reports, I undertook a Schools Mental Health Survey in 2018 to find out how much of an impact mental health problems were having on schools across our constituency. I wanted to try and get the best possible information about the mental health concerns affecting our local schools, especially when everyone in education is already under a great deal of pressure. So, I wrote to ask all schools across the Wentworth and Dearne constituency to help by taking part in a schools mental health survey.

That survey showed that our schools were struggling to cope with mental health concerns and to provide essential early intervention and support. All schools reported an increase in the number and severity of students affected, yet many simply didn't feel they had the expertise, funding, time or back-up to deal with the pressure. The mental health crisis was especially stark in our primary schools.

Mental health problems can blight childhood and adolescence, as well as damage good learning but the evidence also shows that such problems often continue into adult life, unless properly treated; half of adult mental health problems (excluding dementia) start before the age of 14.

Five years have passed since that survey. Mental health has become more talked about and schools have had to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic with all the challenges that came with it - in terms of virtual learning, social isolation and then the return to the classroom.

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The 2021 NHS' Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey<sup>1</sup> show that 1 in 6 children aged five to 16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem. This is a huge increase compared to 1 in 9 in 2017 and equates to 5 children in every classroom

With that in mind I wanted to revisit this survey to see if there had been any improvement in mental health services and the access to expertise to help cope with what my 2018 survey confirmed was a mental health crisis in our schools.

All five of our mainstream secondary schools responded, as did 11 of our 34 primary schools. I am very grateful to these schools, and to the staff that made the time to provide the information.

This report sets out the results of the survey. It shows that, despite five years of promises to improve mental health support in schools, little has changed for the better. Every school has, again, reported an increase in the number of students with mental health problems, and most say the problems are now more severe with a big rise in reported anxiety. Four out of five secondary schools referred more than 20 students to support services and all primary and secondary schools reported an increase in the number of staff suffering mental health problems.

My survey confirms the mental health crisis in our schools has got worse over the last five years – for pupils and staff – yet there's still a serious shortfall in support. I will use the strong evidence in this survey – both locally and nationally – for improvements in mental health support for schools.

I will use these findings to meet ministers, promote the case for specialist mental health support in every school and work with teachers' unions for better staff access to counselling support.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

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I will bring together senior directors in Rotherham Council, health, education and community services and argue for a Rotherham action plan on schools mental health. I will meet the chief executives of the multi-academy trusts which run our local schools and urge them to improve support and I will work to promote a better understanding of the mental health crisis in our schools and the urgent need to improve the help available for students, staff and schools.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Healey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

**John Healey MP**

January 2023

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## Secondary Schools

### Key findings:

#### Students

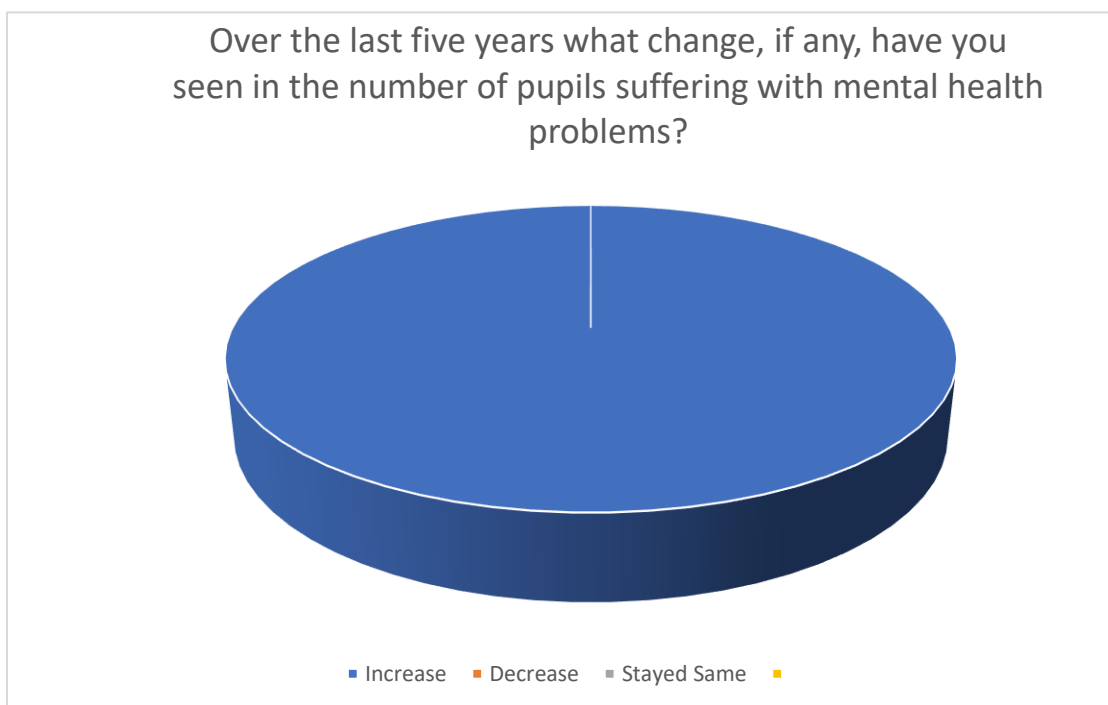
- Every school again reports an increase in the number of students with mental health problems over the last five years
- 60% of schools say students' problems have become more severe over the last five years
- 4 out of 5 schools said they had referred more than 20 students to support services in the past year
- All schools said there had been a rise in anxiety reported mental health problems since the Covid-19 pandemic began
- All schools said they have a designated mental health lead – but inconsistent on who holds the post
- 40% had a full time guidance counsellor providing standard mental health or social services to students while 60% of schools had part time guidance counsellor services
- Every school listed anxiety as a cause of concern

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## Students

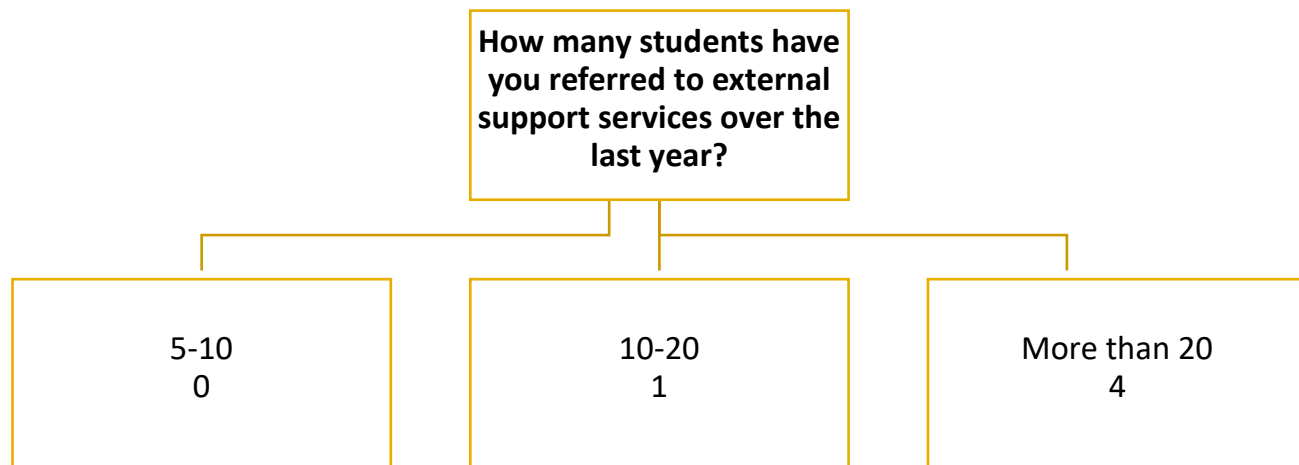
5 out of 5 secondary schools in the Wentworth and Dearne constituency returned the Schools Mental Health Survey.

All secondary schools say there has been an increase in the number of pupils suffering with mental health problems over the last five years. This has not changed since the previous survey in 2018.



3 out of 5 secondary schools say that the severity of the mental health problems they have been dealing with in relation to students has become more severe over the last five years.

All 5 schools said there had been an increase in mental health problems since the Covid-19 pandemic began with every school listing anxiety as a cause of concern.



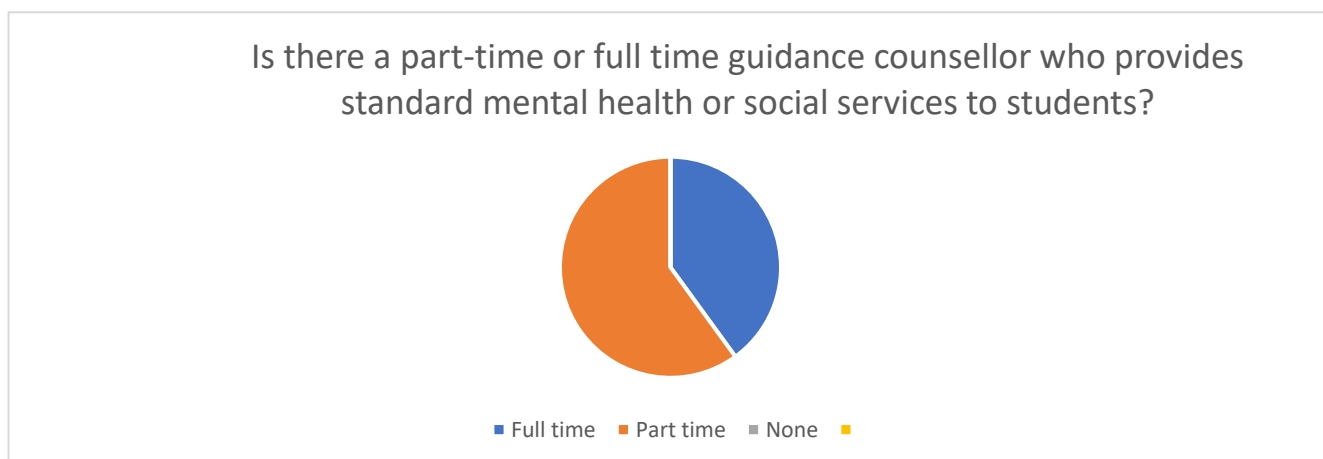
Four out of five secondary schools referred more than 20 students to support services compared to three quarters of schools five years ago.

The majority of secondary schools say long waiting lists for CAMHS services are a concern. Other challenges secondary schools say they face include:

- Lack of available services
- Meeting CAMHS threshold
- Lack of funding for support staff
- Limited support from school nursing service

All schools said they have a designated mental health lead (75% in 2018) but there is inconsistency on who holds the post. This varied from members of the Senior Leadership Team to support staff and counsellors.

2 out of 5 schools had a full time guidance counsellor providing standard mental health or social services to students with 3 having part time support.





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Since 2018 access to a guidance counsellor has improved with all secondary schools having access to a full or part time counsellor. However, 60% of secondary schools still only have access to part time counsellor services.

Five secondary schools provided information on the hours counsellors spend at school per week. Access and availability vary considerably from 6 hours per week to 32.5 hours a week.

5 out of the 5 secondary schools provided figures for the number of pupils counsellors see each week. 3 said fewer than 10, 1 said more than 10 and 1 said more than 20.

Students report a wide range of causes at the roots of their mental health problems including:

- Social media
- Family and peers
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Exams
- Gangs
- Appearance
- Trauma
- Anxiety
- Lack of self esteem
- Worry about Covid impact on education
- Gaps in learning
- Bullying
- Identity (LGBTQ+)
- Poverty
- Substance misuse
- Relationships
- Bereavement
- Personal illness

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Provisions secondary schools have in place to help pupils deal with mental health problems include:

- Pastoral support
- Engagement and learning referrals for short term support and manage anxiety
- Kooth
- Half termly CAMHS consultation
- Students support workers
- Safeguarding team
- Drop in clubs
- 1 to 1 support
- External referrals
- Sensory rooms
- Atlas provision
- Lessons and assembly
- Counsellors
- With me in mind
- Family support team
- Mental health first aid trained staff

Provisions secondary schools have in place for referral to help pupils beyond school include:

- Post 16 support if they stay in 6th form
- MASH
- IAPT for students 16+
- Early help
- CAHMS
- School Nurse
- Social Care
- With me in mind

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The range of action that secondary schools believe needs to be taken includes:

**School** – Continue to progress mental health support and train existing mental health staff. Appropriate dedicated mental health worker. Be provided with greater financial/personal resource. Ensure curriculum within school and staffing is deployed to best effect to support students with mental health issues. Funding for mental health worker in school.

**Parents** – Information and guidance for parents to understand their children’s mental health and who to contact beyond school. Listen to your child and take them to GP. Closely monitor and limit social media and internet use.

**Local Authority** – Promotion of services available within locality. Provide funding for mental health in school. Provide training, development and support for staff. Implementation of triage service to support schools. Improved early help service so parents have effective support when needed.

**Local NHS** - GPs take more responsibility and not pass everything on to school. More staff to deal with referrals so students don’t have to wait. Better funding. Higher capacity. Deliver treatments in timely fashion. Immediate action to tackle CAMHS waiting list. Improve triage so pupils do not get turned away.

**Government** – Make mental health a priority and invest in school staff. Funding for counsellors in schools. Provide more funding for schools. More funding for mental health services.

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## Primary Schools

### Key findings

#### Students:

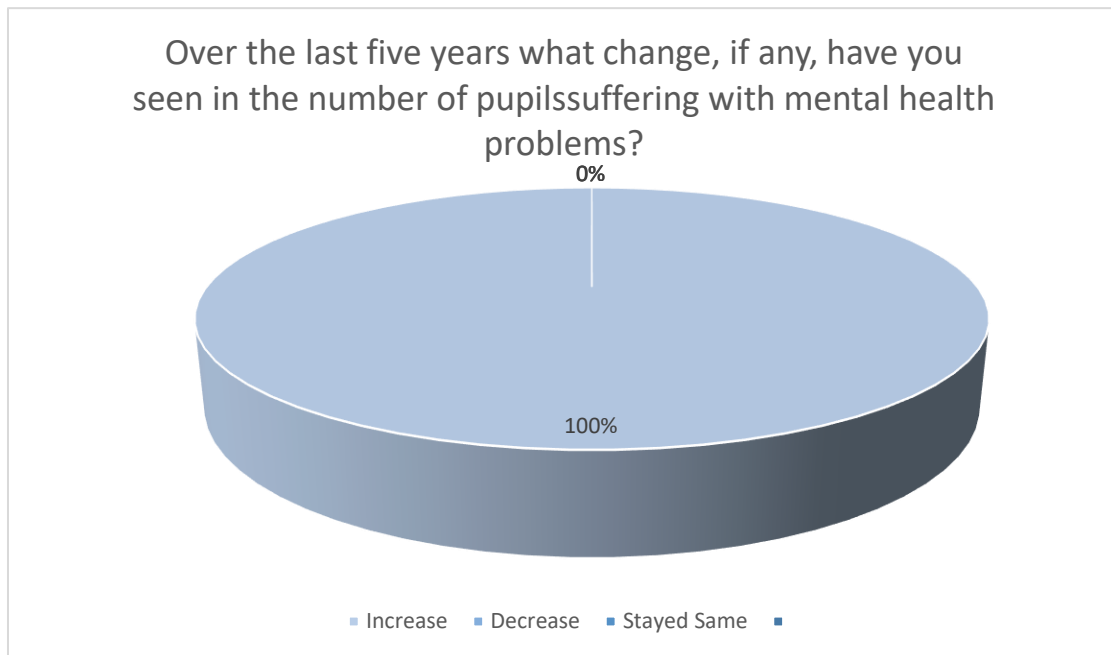
- 100% of schools again report an increase in the number of students with mental health problems over the last five years
- 8 out of 11 schools (73%) say the mental health problems they deal with have become more severe over the past five years
- 73% say cases have increased amongst pupils since the Covid-19 pandemic
- 5 out of 11 have referred between 5-10 pupils to support services during the last year
- 7 out of 11 (64%) have no part time or full time guidance counsellor but 10 out of 11 have a designated mental health lead
- 10 of the 11 schools listed anxiety as a cause of concern

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## Students

11 primary schools out of 34 (32%) returned their surveys.

All 11 schools say they have seen an increase in the number of pupils suffering with mental health problems over the last five years. This was also 100% in the previous survey in 2018.



8 primary schools say the cases they are dealing with have become more severe over the last 5 years, 2 say cases are about the same and 1 did not answer.

5 schools (45%) have referred 5-10 pupils for specialty support in the last year, 2 have referred 10-20 and 1 school more than 20.

8 out of 11 schools say mental health problems have become more severe since the Covid-19 pandemic began.

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The type of mental health problems which have become apparent for students due to the Covid-19 pandemic include:

- Anxiety
- Low self esteem due to pressure from peers and social media
- Depression
- Living in homes with mental health problems
- Self regulation difficulties
- Poor concentration
- Managing emotions
- Separation anxiety
- Bereavement
- Self harm

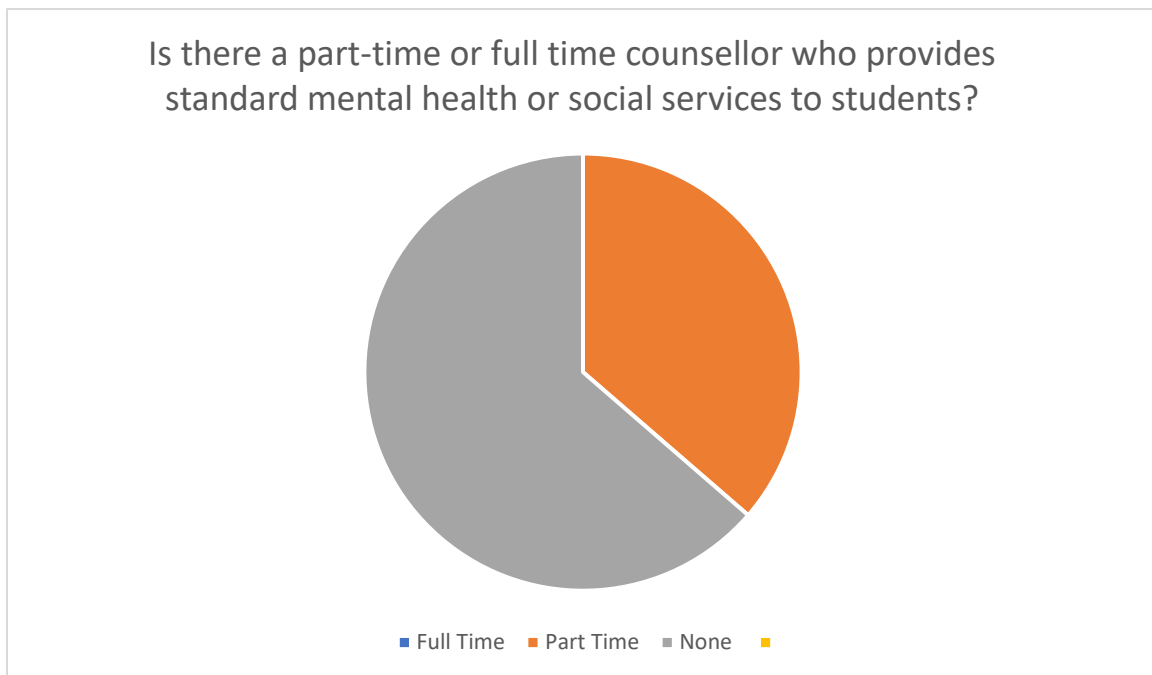
The major challenges primary schools say they face with regards to mental health of pupils include:

- Supporting families
- Lack of services
- Long waiting times for support
- School seen as responsible for addressing mental health issues by DfE and parents
- Girls mental health and self-esteem due to pressures from peers and social media
- Lack of capacity from local services due to overwhelming demand
- Parents feeling like they do not know how to support child
- Access to services to signpost families
- School funding leading to reduced number of staff
- Low self esteem and low mood in general
- Children's exposure to online safety issues

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10 out of 11 primary schools say they have a designated mental health leader with 1 school saying it has none.

64% of schools surveyed have no access to a guidance counsellor compared with 68% in 2018, whilst 36% have access to a part time counsellor (32% in 2018)



4 primary schools provided information on the hours counsellors spend at School. The time ranged from 2 hours per week to 6 hours per week.

All 4 schools said the counsellor saw fewer than 10 pupils a week.

The main causes of pupils' mental health problems are:

- Family
- Peers
- Appearance
- Social media
- Exams/curriculum
- Anxiety

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Provisions primary schools have in place to help pupils deal with mental health problems include:

- ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) trained staff
- Time to talk intervention
- Staff trained in bereavement counselling
- Play therapy
- Mental health first aid training for staff
- Key workers
- MIND counsellors
- SENDCO
- Weekly forest school sessions

Primary schools believe the main responsibility for responding to student mental health problems lie with parents and the majority of schools (10 out of 11) say the government should provide more funding to help schools cope with mental health problems.

A particular issue for schools is the long waiting lists for students to access support services.

The action that primary schools believe needs to be taken includes:

**School** - More money to train staff. Continue to have staff available for pupils but need to be available and not timetabled. More funding to offer more support and resources. More availability from professionals.

**Parents** - Need to engage with info sharing and training and not assume school is the problem. More capacity for crisis point contact and support.

**Local Authority** - More services/training. Ensure lower waiting times for services. Training for staff.



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**Local NHS** – Shorter waiting times. Refer children and family to services - not rely on schools to do additional work alone. More counselling services available and promoted.

**Government** - More funding and services. Provide schools with additional funding for counsellor or Mental Health practitioner in every school. Fund SEMH needs and development. More training for staff.

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## **Staff**

### **Key findings**

#### **Secondary Schools**

- 80% of schools say they have seen an increase in the number of staff suffering mental health problems in the last five years – compared to 50% in 2018
- 3 out of 5 said the mental health problems they experience are more severe
- Over half listed anxiety as an issue for staff
- 80% said workload was a reason for staff mental health problems
- 4 out of 5 schools have referred staff to support services for mental health problems in the last year.

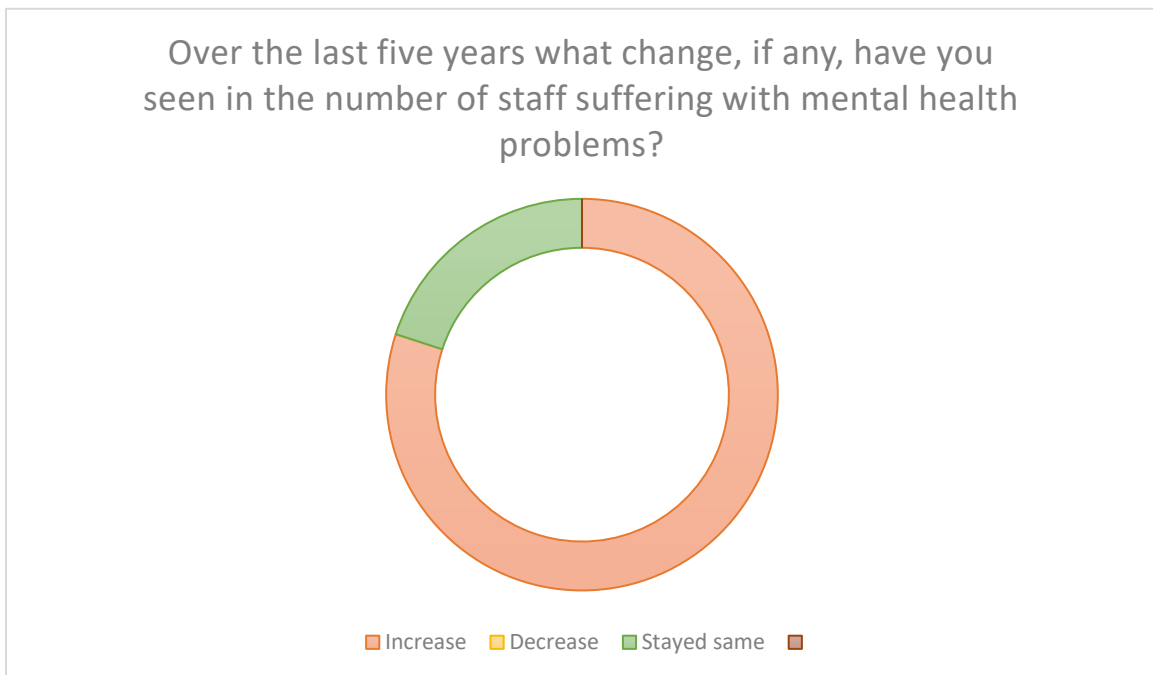
#### **Primary Schools**

- All schools referred staff to mental health support services in the last year.
- 8 out of 11 schools (73%) said they have seen an increase in the number of staff suffering with mental health problems
- 7 out of 11 primary schools (64%) listed anxiety as a cause of concern for staff
- 6 out of 11 say there has been an increase in staff mental health problems since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic
- 5 out of 11 say cases have become more severe over the past 5 years

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## Secondary Schools

80% schools say there has been an increase in the number of staff suffering with mental health problems over the last five years this compares with 38% in 2018. 1 out of 5 say cases have stayed the same.



3 out of 5 secondary schools say the severity of mental health cases relating to staff have become more severe over the last five years. 2 out of 5 say cases are the same.

3 out of 5 schools say there has been a change in mental health problems for staff in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic with 2 out of 5 saying cases have stayed the same.

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The type of mental health problems that have become apparent for staff since the Covid-19 pandemic include:

- Covid anxieties
- Hygiene
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Safety of family
- Work/life balance
- Workload
- Low mood

4 out of 5 schools have referred staff to support services for mental health problems in the last year. 2 of the 5 schools referred 5 to 10 members of staff, 2 schools referred fewer than 5 and 1 school did not supply figures.

Provisions in place to help staff deal with mental health problems include:

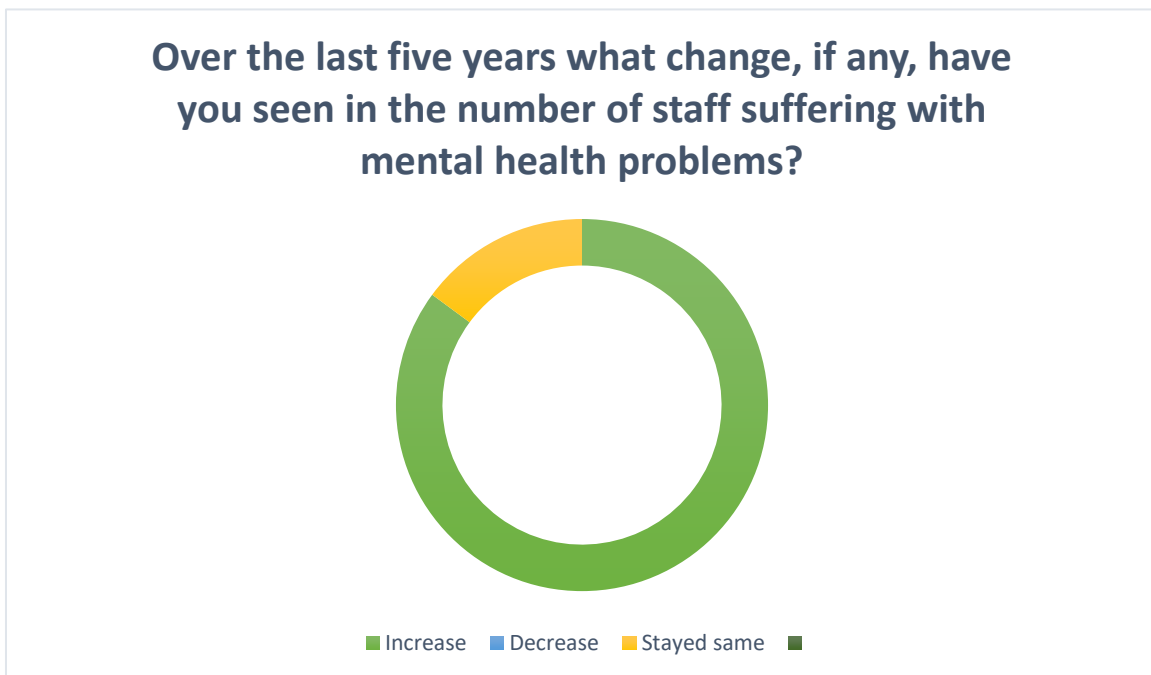
- Counsellor
- Mental health first aiders
- Staff buddying system
- Wellbeing sessions
- Employers Access Programme

Family and workload were commonly cited as causes of mental health difficulties.

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## Staff – Primary Schools

73% of primary schools surveyed say there has been an increase in the number of staff suffering with mental health problems in the last 5 years compared to 37% in 2018. 27% said the number had stayed the same.

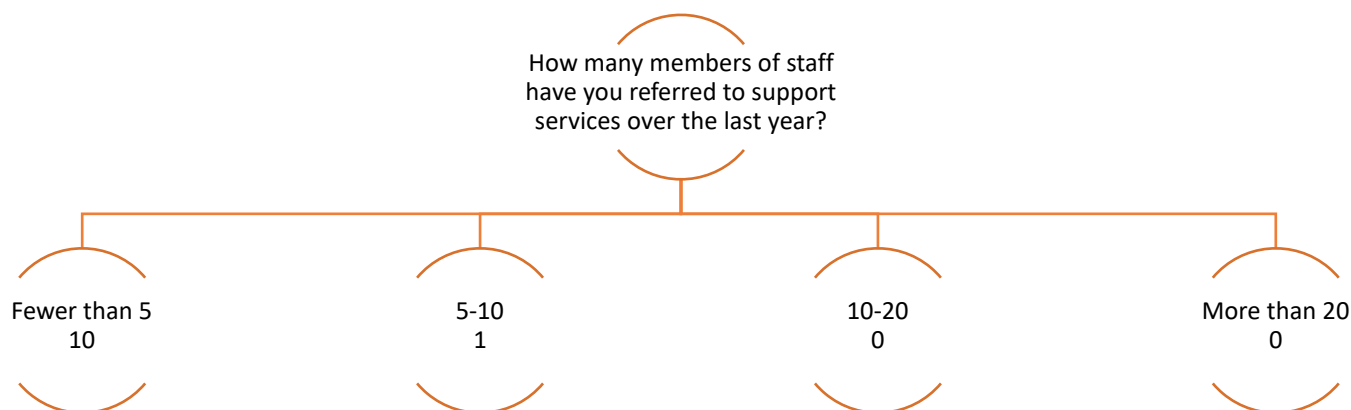


However, 5 primary schools say the severity of mental health cases relating to staff have become more severe over the last five years. 6 say cases are the same.

6 schools say there has been an increase in the number of mental health problems for staff since the Covid-19 pandemic began. 7 schools list anxiety as a more prominent problem for staff since the pandemic began.

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All schools say they have referred staff to mental health support services in the last year. 10 out of 11 primary schools have referred fewer than 5 members of staff with 1 school referring between 5-10 and reporting a 24% increase in the last year.



Provisions in place to help staff deal with mental health problems include:

- Mental health first aid staff
- With Me in Mind drop ins and workshop
- Open door policy
- Wellbeing days
- Pay for counselling if needed
- Signposting
- Wellness action plans
- Provide drinks and snacks

Family and workload are highlighted as the main cause of mental health problems with staff. Schools also highlighted pressures of Ofsted, SATs exams, school underfunding and losing new and experienced staff due to the excessive demands of working in a school.

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## The way forward

This report shows that despite a welcome rise in the profile of mental health conditions across the country schools are still struggling to cope with mental health problems and provide the essential early intervention and support that is needed.

Five years after my original Schools Mental Health Report, school leaders still don't feel like they have the expertise, funding or time to deal with the day-to-day issues they face to support both students and staff.

Every school has reported an increase in the number of mental health cases. One thing that is evident in this report is a rise in reported anxiety issues for both students and staff following the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools say that a variety of anxiety issues are increasing and the severity of the cases they are having to deal with has also increased.

This is a picture that is replicated nationally with figures showing 1.6 million people are waiting for mental health treatment.<sup>2</sup> Something which is also replicated locally is the apparent postcode lottery of care that is on offer. The mental health support that is available to students in both secondary and primary largely depends on what the school feels is necessary and there is no apparent overall national strategy or system for schools to seek the support and guidance they say they desperately need.

The NEU's State of Education: mental health of young people and pandemic recovery survey<sup>3</sup> agreed with this finding stating that "there is a gulf between what a school wants to do for education recovery and what is possible through funding and other Government policy."

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/news-and-features/latest-news/detail/2021/09/19/pandemic-impact-on-mental-health-backlog-catastrophic-says-royal-college-of-psychiatrists#:~:text=NHS%20England%20now%20estimates%20that%20a%20staggering%201.6,June%202021%20compared%20to%20316%2C974%20in%20June%202020>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/state-education-mental-health-young-people-and-pandemic-recovery>

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This national crisis in mental health has led the Labour Party to guarantee access to mental health treatment in less than a month for all who need it; with plans to recruit 8,500 new staff so that one million additional people can access treatment every year; put an open access mental health hub for children and young people in every community; provide specialist mental health support in every school; improve service quality, bringing in a whole-Government plan for improving mental health outcomes and giving mental health its fair share of funding. This builds on evidence which shows school-based counselling can improve the wellbeing of pupils, as well as contributing to better academic outcomes. This would follow the example of the Labour-led Welsh Government which has legislated to put counselling support for pupils from age 10 -18 on a statutory footing.

Unlike the Government's approach, which is requiring current staff to take on additional responsibilities for mental health, providing this additional staffing capacity would provide specialist support for pupils whilst ensuring that teaching staff are not required to take on additional pastoral responsibilities beyond their areas of expertise, ensuring staff capacity is used most efficiently.

Schools have told me the value of Mental Health First Aid courses which are designed to raise the awareness of mental health and reduce the stigma around mental health issues. Those that take part in the courses are trained to spot the signs and symptoms of mental health early and help pupils to access any support they might need. I believe these courses should be available to all school staff to help with early intervention and signposting to appropriate services for both students and staff.



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## My pledges and action plan

I want to see:

- Specialist mental health support in every school
- Improved waiting times for specialist mental health services beyond the school, such as CAMHS
- Improved mental health support for school staff
- Guaranteed mental health treatment within a month for all who need it as a national government policy
- More government attention given to mental health in schools, with funding to back the action required

Nationally I will:

- Present the conclusions of this report to Ministers and the Labour Party and argue for action on the problems
- Promote the case for a counsellor in every school
- Work with teachers' unions to promote the case for better staff access to counselling support

Locally I will:

- Promote a better understanding of the mental health problems faced by our schools
- Set up discussions to see how schools, the NHS and local government can work together better and produce a Rotherham action plan
- Meet with the school headteachers to press for better mental health support and help them improve specialist help from local agencies
- Promote access for schools to mental health first aid training courses with in-school access to a counsellor

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**Appendix 1**

**LOCAL SCHOOLS MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY FROM JOHN HEALEY MP**

NAME OF SCHOOL:

YOUR NAME:

POSITION:

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Information from responses to this survey will be collated into a report, without identifying individual schools. I will ensure your school receives a copy of the analysis and will be happy to discuss it with you.

If you would like me to keep you up to date with the action, I take to follow up the findings of this survey, please tick here



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**Section 1.**

**Questions Relating to Students**

Please circle where appropriate.

1. Over the last five years, what change, if any, have you seen in the number of pupils suffering with mental health problems?

Increase

Decrease

Stayed the same

2. If you collect such data, can you share the aggregate numbers to show any trend or pattern?

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3. Has there been any change in the severity of mental health problems you have been dealing with in relation to students over the last 5 years?

Cases are more severe

Cases are about the same

Cases are less severe

4. Has there been a change in mental health problems for pupils since the Covid-19 pandemic began?

Increase

Decrease

Stayed the same

5. What type of mental health problems have become apparent for students in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic?

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6. What do you feel are the major challenges your school faces with regards to mental health?

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7. What do pupils say is causing their mental health problems? (Circle more than one if applicable)

Family

Exams/Curriculum

Peers

Appearance

Social media

Other

8. If other, please give details

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9. How many students have been referred to support services during the last year?

Fewer than 5                  5-10                  10-20                  More than 20

10. Does your school have a designated mental health leader?

YES    NO

11. If yes, what is their role?

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12. What provisions do you have WITHIN the school in place to help pupils deal with mental health problems?

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13. Is there a part-time or full-time guidance counsellor who provides standard mental health or social services to students?

FULL TIME                          PART TIME                          NONE

14. If your school does have access to a counsellor how many hours does the counsellor spend at school each week?

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15. How many pupils does the counsellor see each week?

Fewer than 10                          More than 10                          More than 20

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16. What provisions, if any, do you have for referral to help pupils BEYOND school?

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17. Where do you believe the main responsibilities for responding to student mental health problems lie? (Please rank 1 to 4, with 4 being most responsible and 1 being least responsible)

School (and Trust)

Parents

Local Authority

Local NHS

Government

Other

18. What action would you like to see each take to help?

School (and Trust)

Parents

Local Authority

Local NHS

Government

Other

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19. Any other comments

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**Section 2.**

**Questions Relating to Staff**

20. Over the last five years, what change, if any, have you seen in the number of staff suffering with mental health problems?

Increase

Decrease

Stayed the same

21. If you collect such data, can you share the aggregate numbers to show any trend or pattern?

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22. Has there been any change in the severity of mental health problems that you have been dealing with relating to staff over the last 5 years?

Cases are more severe

Cases are about the same

Cases are less severe

23. Has there been a change in mental health problems for staff since the Covid-19 pandemic began?

Increase

Decrease

Stayed the same

24. What type of mental health problems have become apparent for staff in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic?

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25. How many staff members have been referred to support services during the last year?

Fewer than 5                  5-10                  10-20                  More than 20

26. What provisions do you have in place to help staff deal with mental health problems?

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27. What do staff say is causing their mental health problems? (Circle more than one if applicable)

Family                  Workload                  Peers                  Other

28. If other, please give details

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29. Any other comments

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Thank you for completing the survey. Please feel free to provide any additional information you feel would be helpful.

Please return to: [john.healey.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:john.healey.mp@parliament.uk) or John Healey MP, 79 High Street, Wath-upon-Deerne, Rotherham S63 7QB

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## Appendix 2

I would like to thank James Bolton and Abi Moore for their assistance in helping to produce this report.

I am also very grateful to the staff from the following schools that made the time to respond to my survey and provide the information on which this report is based.

### Secondary schools:

Wath Comprehensive School  
The Dearne ALC  
Swinton Academy  
Saint Pius X Catholic High School  
Rawmarsh Community School

### Primary schools:

Rawmarsh Thorogate Junior and Infant School  
Swinton Fitzwilliam Primary School  
Monkwood Primary  
Kilnhurst St Thomas CE Primary Academy  
Our Lady St Joseph Primary Wath  
Kilnhurst Primary School  
Thrybergh Fullerton CE Primary Academy  
West Melton Primary  
Carfield Primary  
Bramley Sunnyside Junior School  
Rawmarsh Ryecroft Infant School