




# Early evaluation of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer programme

A summary of interim findings for schools and colleges

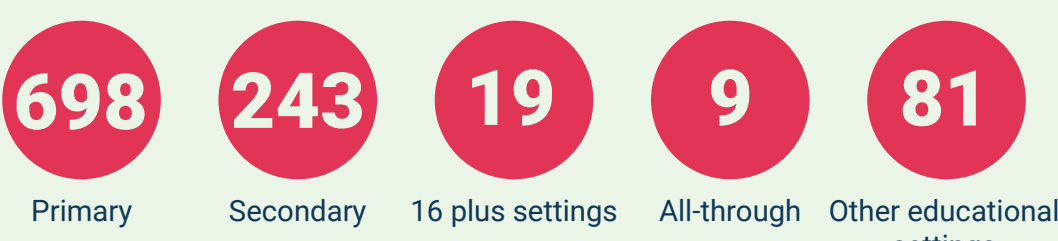


## What is the Children and Young People's Mental Health Trailblazer Programme?

The Trailblazer programme, launched in 2018, is led by the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education and NHS England and Improvement. It is funding the creation of mental health support teams (MHSTs) and training education mental health practitioners (EMHPs) to work directly in educational settings. The MHSTs have three core functions:

-  to provide direct support to children and young people with **mild to moderate mental health problems**
-  to support educational settings to **introduce or develop a whole school or college approach** to mental health and wellbeing
-  to **give advice to staff** in educational settings and liaise with external specialist services to help children and young people get the right support and stay in education

Educational settings across England in the first 25 areas participating in the programme (called Trailblazer sites) include:



## What are we investigating?

We are undertaking an early evaluation of the Trailblazer programme to examine the:

- 1 development
- 2 implementation
- 3 early progress

of MHSTs in the Trailblazer sites.





## Methods


-  Interviews
-  Two surveys – one with key school and college staff
-  Document review
-  Programme monitoring data




## What have we found so far?

 Schools and colleges **welcomed the funding of additional capacity** to provide in-house mental health support, and the programme's focus on prevention and early intervention.


 It was widely agreed that **engagement of educational settings was critical to success of the programme**, but only around half of the schools and colleges responding to our survey had been involved in the design and set up of the MHSTs in their area.


 Prior to Covid-19, Trailblazers were making **good progress implementing MHSTs**. The recruitment, training and transition into practice of the first cohort of EMHPs was widely regarded as a major achievement and all teams were operational by early 2020.


 Early positive impacts reported by schools and colleges included **schools feeling more supported**, **school staff feeling more confident talking about mental health issues** and **better signposting to external services**.




## How did Covid-19 impact the programme?

 Covid-19 had a **major impact, both on programme implementation and on day-to-day delivery** of the MHST service. Coupled with the impact of lockdown, some MHSTs found it harder to build relationships with staff in schools and colleges and establish the new service.


 MHSTs responded to the challenges that lockdown presented in three main ways: **using communications** and working with other services to try and increase referrals; switching to **remote delivery of support**; and **changing or expanding the support** they could offer.


 Many educational settings saw an **increase in mental health problems** among children and young people, parents and carers, as well as their own staff.


 Consistent with the pattern across children and young people's mental health services generally, there was a **substantial fall in referrals to MHSTs** in the initial months of the pandemic.




## The challenges

 The **remaining gaps in support**, with particular concerns raised about a **lack of support** for children, whose needs were not 'mild-moderate' but also not serious enough to meet the referral criteria for specialist mental health support.

 Educational settings that had made good progress towards a **whole school approach** were often able to make more of the opportunities offered by the programme than those that had not.

 There were **limitations in the reach and effectiveness of digital and online interventions**. Some children and young people were unable to access support online, and these were often the same children and young people whose lives and mental health had been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

 The extent to which **children, young people and families had been involved in shaping the design and approach of their local MHSTs** was highly variable, some Trailblazers had made more progress in creating opportunities for influence than others.



In the next phase of the evaluation, we will be speaking to a wider range of stakeholders in six case study Trailblazer sites and undertaking focus groups with children and young people. Alongside this, we will undertake a second round of surveys with educational settings and key people involved in the set up and delivery of MHSTs. Our findings will be shared in a second report to be published in summer 2022.



Read more about the evaluation at:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/BRACE/trailblazer.pdf>

BRACE, including this evaluation, is funded by the NIHR Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme (HSDR16/138/31). PIRU, including this evaluation, is funded by the NIHR Policy Research Programme (Project No: PR-PRU-1217-20602). The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.