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

A summary of interim findings

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

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 first 25 areas participating in the programme (called Trailblazer sites).

Methods
Interviews Surveys 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.

Prior to Covid-19, Trailblazers were making good progress implementing MHSTs. The rapid uptake and implementation of the first cohort represented an important major achievement and all teams were operational by early 2020.

Covid-19 had a major impact, both on programme implementation and on the day-to-day delivery of the MHST 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.

Early positive impacts reported by Trailblazers included better partnership working, schools feeling more supported and school staff feeling more confident talking about mental health issues.

What were the challenges...
...and enablers?
A receptive local context and, in particular, pre-existing experiences of partnership working across health and education.
Co-production of the MHST service and approach with children, young people, parents and carers.
Collaboration between MHSTs and other local mental health services.

Where next?
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 an evaluation of the range of partnership working across health and education.

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