Tackling the Mental Health Crisis in Schools

15 October 2024



We are witnessing the profound effects of a growing mental health crisis among both students and staff. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with academic pressures and the cost-of-living crisis, has led to a sharp increase in mental health issues, which schools are now struggling to manage. Supporting the mental health of our students and staff has become an essential leadership challenge.

The Extent of the Crisis

Recent studies reveal that one in six children now has a probable mental health disorder, while over 77% of teachers report poor mental health. These figures are not just statistics—they represent the real challenges our schools face daily, with students disengaging from learning and staff feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.

Leadership in Action: What Schools Can Do Now

Addressing the mental health crisis requires a multifaceted approach, focusing on creating a supportive school environment, accessing new funding, and implementing long-term mental health strategies.

- **Take Advantage of New Government Funding**: The government recently announced a £10 million expansion of the **Wellbeing for Education Return** program, which provides training and resources for school staff to support student mental health. School leaders should

ensure they are accessing this funding to equip their teams with the tools they need to provide meaningful mental health support.

- **Create a Whole-School Mental Health Strategy**: Leaders should develop a comprehensive mental health policy that integrates well-being into every aspect of school life. This might include regular mental health check-ins, dedicated well-being days, or peer support programs that encourage students to talk openly about mental health challenges.
- **Establish Mental Health Hubs**: The government is piloting **Mental Health Support Teams** in schools, offering on-site counselors and mental health professionals to support both students and staff. If your school is in one of the trial areas, it's crucial to take advantage of this resource. For schools not currently included, leaders can begin discussions with local authorities about expanding these services in the future.
- **Invest in Staff Well-being**: Teacher burnout is a serious issue, with many educators feeling they are not adequately supported in their own mental health. Leaders must prioritize staff well-being by providing access to counselling services, encouraging a healthy work-life balance, and creating a school culture where seeking help is not stigmatized.

Addressing mental health in schools is no longer an optional extra—it is a leadership responsibility. By taking a proactive approach, accessing available funding, and creating a supportive environment, school leaders can help alleviate the mental health pressures faced by both students and staff.