



# Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

## Submission on the Department of Education and Skill's Statement of Strategy 2015- 2017

13<sup>th</sup> October 2014

### Introduction

Mental Health Reform welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Department of Education and Skills' Statement of Strategy 2015 – 2017. As the national coalition promoting improved mental health services and implementation of the mental health policy A Vision for Change, Mental Health Reform makes this submission with particular reference to individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. Specifically, this submission is focussed on recommendations relating to

- The implementation of a Vision for Change
- The national guidelines on mental health promotion in post primary schools
- The national guidelines on mental health promotion in primary schools

### Implementation of a Vision for Change

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Statement of Strategy makes a commitment to the implementation of A Vision for Change in accordance with the Department's strategic objectives. A Vision for Change recognises the importance of both adult education and child and adolescent education as a means to addressing social exclusion for adults and/or children experiencing mental health difficulties. With respect to child and adolescent education, the policy highlights the need for effective liaison and ongoing engagement between schools and mental health services to ensure the mental health needs of children and young people accessing the school system are adequately and appropriately addressed. The policy also recognises the importance of the education system as a site where the promotion of mental health can be carried out.

Recommendation 4.6 in A Vision for Change states that: "Evidence-based approaches to training and employment for people with mental health problems should be adopted and such programmes should be put in place by the agencies with responsibility in this area." Furthermore, with respect to adult education, A Vision for Change recommends the "flexible provision of adult education programmes that can help address the educational needs of adults with mental health problems, especially for those who may have dropped out of education early. Practical support to overcome barriers to education may be required, such as help with enrolment and travel expenses. Mentoring has also been found to be helpful." As vocational training and education clearly fall within the remit of the Department of Education and Skills, it is important that the Department's Statement of Strategy acknowledge its responsibility in implementing this recommendation.

The Healthy Ireland framework further endorses the importance of education in the area of mental health by outlining the need to ensure that every child is attending a school that promotes a whole

school approach to mental health and that every child has been educated in how to look after their mental health and where to go for help.

Such measures ensure the enhanced social inclusion of adults, children and young people with mental health difficulties and encourage their enhanced participation within society. An individual's access to education also decreases the likelihood of them experiencing socio economic issues, such as poverty and homelessness and lends to their recovery from mental health difficulties.

### **The national guidelines on mental health promotion in post primary schools**

Mental Health Reform welcomed the publication of the national guidelines on mental health promotion in post primary schools. The guidelines provide an effective resource for schools and teachers in identifying children and young people at risk of developing a mental health disorder, addressing such needs through appropriate training and referral mechanisms and promoting positive mental health and well-being. Young people's mental health and well-being at school is fundamental to the achievement of all education goals. The economic benefits of early intervention in the area of mental health are also well established. Schools are uniquely placed to act as a promoter of positive mental health and well-being and an early identifier and referral point for students with mental health difficulties, which is why the guidelines are a welcome step in the right direction. In 2013 the Children's Mental Health Coalition submitted recommendations on the national guidelines. Following publication of the guidelines, the Department's Statement of Strategy should make a commitment to supporting schools to implement the post-primary guidelines, including with the provision of resources to enable them to implement a whole school approach.

### **The national guidelines on mental health promotion in primary schools**

Mental Health Reform welcomes the Department's intention to introduce national guidelines on mental health promotion in primary schools following its recommendation for the provision of such guidelines in its submission to DES on the post primary school guidelines. In early October 2014 the Children's Mental Health Coalition provided feedback on the draft national guidelines for mental health promotion in primary schools. The Coalition submitted a number of recommendations which are fully in keeping with its recommendations on the post primary guidelines, including

1. The appointment of a senior official within DES to drive the effective implementation of the guidelines
2. Liaison with the Children's Services Committees should be clearly outlined in the guidelines
3. A national protocol template should be developed by DES in partnership with the HSE to support effective inter-agency working between primary schools and CAMHS
4. A commitment by DES to allocate assigned resources for the effective implementation of the whole school approach
5. The guidelines must speak to and factor in the different ways teachers can potentially support young people in the role of 'one good adult' as recommended by Headstrong's *My World Survey*
6. The DES should commit to providing basic training for all primary school teachers so that they can identify children at risk of developing a mental disorder and promote mental health and well-being under the *whole school approach*
7. The primary school guidelines should be monitored and evaluated by DES on a long-term basis

The Department's Statement of Strategy should make a commitment to supporting schools to implement the primary school mental health guidelines including the provision of resources to support a whole school approach and provide training for primary school teachers.

## **Conclusion**

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department's Statement of Strategy make a commitment to implementing A Vision for Change through the Department's strategic objectives. Primarily, DES should recognise the important role it has to play in supporting individuals with mental health difficulties through educational opportunities. The provision of flexible education programmes is required to address the educational needs of adults, children and young people presenting with mental health difficulties or at risk of developing a mental health disorder. There is a strong evidence base to suggest that early intervention in addressing the mental health needs of children and young people leads to a decrease in the development of mental health problems. Mental Health Reform, therefore, recommends the effective implementation of the national guidelines for mental health promotion in primary and post primary schools. Overall, this will require an integrated approach by DES, the Department of Health and the HSE in developing a national protocol to support schools in implementing effective communication and referral mechanisms with community child and adolescent mental health services, including CAMHS. Resources should also be developed and supplied to schools so that they can successfully adopt the whole school approach in promoting mental health and well-being.

## **About Mental Health Reform**

Mental Health Reform is the national coalition of 48 organisations working to promote improved mental health services and the implementation of the mental health policy A Vision for Change.

Mental Health Reform is available to discuss the above recommendations. Please contact Kate Mitchell, Policy and Research Officer at 01 874 9468 or via email at [kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie](mailto:kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie) for further information.