



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Health & Social Care*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

Abigail Combes
Assistant Coroner
The Medico-Legal Centre
Watery Street
Sheffield
S3 7ES

9 May 2024

Dear Ms Combes,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 10 October 2023 about the death of Alex Dews. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for mental health and patient safety.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Alex's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention. Please accept my sincere apologies for the significant delay in responding to this matter.

Your report raises concerns over the provision of mental health care for young people in schools. In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England and the Department for Education, and I understand that that Department and Outwood Grange Academies Trust have each already carefully considered the matters of concern in your report and have provided you with comprehensive responses setting out the actions being taken to improve the mental health support being provided in schools.

I have been advised by the local NHS that, if a child or young person in Barnsley is struggling with their mental health, referrals can be made by professionals, and self-referrals from children and young people and from their families/carers to Branching Minds. This is the single point of contact for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and mental health support teams. If a professional is unsure about what support is needed, a telephone call to Branching Minds is encouraged to obtain advice with the case being explored/discussed further as a collaboration. Each referral is assessed based upon the individual situation, background, risk or triggers.

A recommendation is then made as to whether the referral is appropriate for CAMHS. If a child or young person is receiving support from an alternative service at the time of referral, this would not prevent them from being accepted into CAMHS. The clinician on duty would make contact with the young person and/or parent/carer to have a discussion about what support is being received and if this was meeting their need. They would also assess the suitability of continuing this support whilst waiting for a CAMHS assessment/intervention.

Depending on the presenting need, the young person may be advised to complete an ongoing course of counselling before commencing with CAMHS treatment to allow for the benefits of the current treatment to be realised. However, they would not be declined on the basis of receiving another service.

Barnsley CAMHS encourages access to appropriate support whilst waiting and is embedding a 'waiting well' approach. Barnsley health and social care partners continue to work with schools to ensure they are clear on the pathways and processes for referring to mental health services, including CAMHS, and have access to risk assessment advice.

More generally, we are aware that some children and young people are not able to access support they need in a timely manner. Through the NHS Long Term Plan, we are continuing to expand and transform NHS mental health care and spend on children and young people's mental health services has increased from £841 million in 2019/20 to just over £1 billion in 2022/23.

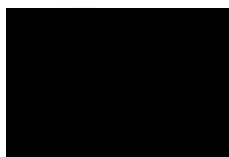
NHS England's priorities and operational planning guidance for 2024/25 sets out the aim to increase the number of children and young people accessing community mental health services to 345,000 by the end of March 2025 compared to 2019 and we are ahead of schedule in rolling out Mental Health Support Teams in schools and colleges. We achieved our original ambition of covering 25% of pupils in England a year earlier than planned. We expect this to increase to 44% by spring 2024. And we plan to go further, extending coverage to 50% of pupils by 2025.

In addition, NHS England is working towards implementing new access and waiting time standards for mental health services including one for children and their families and carers to start to receive community-based mental health care within four weeks from referral.

With regard to children's gender identity services, NHS England continues to overhaul these following the serious clinical and safeguarding issues which were raised regarding services at the Tavistock clinic and the recommendations set out by ██████████ in her landmark report into children's gender services published in April 2024. Following recommendations from ██████████, two new services opened at the start of April and will operate under a fundamentally different service model, supported by clinical experts in mental health, neuro-development and safeguarding.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Maria Caulfield.

MARIA CAULFIELD