

News links from February 2020

Children's Mental Health Week

Preet Gill MP, Shadow Minister for International Development, held a debate during Children's Mental Health Week in February. She called for 'A children's wellbeing commissioner, or similar, with real teeth, powers and resources to work across Departments' and also wrote an article previewing the debate on Politics Home. Her main points were:

- More transparency is needed about the level of investment
- One in eight 5-19 year olds now have a mental health difficulty and 33% of them referred in 2018/19 were still waiting at the end of that year
- There are huge shortages of mental health professionals: there has been an increase of 238,000 'interactions' yet the workforce has barely increased
- 60% of local authority areas have seen a fall in spending on mental health services for children who come under the 'low-level' bracket

Nadine Dorries, in her response, referred in some detail to trailblazing schemes roll-out and also said that 'The Prime Minister has announced his absolute commitment to mental health.' [Read the Hansard Report](#)

Activity: Study finds that any degree of activity might be beneficial to mental health

Children who spend lots of time sitting still are more likely to develop depression by the age of 18, a study suggests. Researchers at University College London looked at the activity levels of 4,257 12- to 16-year-olds and found that those who did an additional hour of light activity each day, such as walking or chores, had fewer depressive symptoms when they reached adulthood. The study suggests people of all ages should be encouraged to move more.

[Read the full article](#)

Scotland: Annual Survey of Scottish Schoolchildren

Researchers surveyed 5,286 pupils – aged 11, 13 and 15 – from 208 schools to find out about adolescents' health behaviour. They found quite a few eye-catching findings.

[Key findings](#) [Download the report](#)

Nutrition: Some Infant Formula contains more sugar than soda drinks

Researchers from Leeds University investigated the sugar content of 212 infant formula milk products sold in 11 countries and compared sugar content with average breast milk compositions and sugar content guidelines. They found that over half of the products contained more than 5g of sugar per 100ml, and in some, over 7.5g per 100ml, which exceeds European parliament recommended levels for infants. For example, a powdered product for infants under six months sold in France contained 8.2g of sugar per 100ml while a ready-to-drink milk formula for infants under 12 months sold in the UK contained 8.1g of sugar per 100ml.

This comes at a time when sugar-sweetened beverages have been subject to widespread taxation to reduce their sugar content due to negative impacts on health. As a result, many formula products included in our study contained almost double the sugar of well known drinks such as Fanta Orange.

[Read the article](#)

Child Protection: Baroness Benjamin calls for "joined-up policies"

Baroness Benjamin welcomed the re-introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill and urged the Government to make child protection its very first priority, saying that she was lobbying to upgrade the minister for children to Cabinet level to ensure we have joined-up policies. She added, "... there is a risk the new Bill will stop short of introducing a duty to make support available to all children who are affected – with those living in the family home (rather than a refuge) at risk of missing out."

[Read the full article](#)

Education: Schools are killing curiosity

Research from America research suggests we should be encouraging questions, because curious children do better. Researchers from the University of Michigan CS Mott Children's Hospital and the Center for Human Growth and Development investigated curiosity in 6,200 children, part of the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. The study is highlighted in a new book by Wendy Berliner and Judith Judd - *How to Succeed at School. What Every Parent Should Know*.

The researchers gauged levels of curiosity when the children were babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers and then checked reading, maths and behaviour in the first year of school. They found that the most curious children performed best. In a finding critical to tackling the stubborn achievement gap between poorer and richer children, disadvantaged children had the strongest connection between curiosity and performance. They also found that the ability to stay focused and not be distracted was less important than curiosity.

[Read the article](#) or [Read the study](#)

Early Years: Lords debate early intervention

On 27/02/20, The House of Lords debated the importance of early years intervention, with the Lord Bishop of Gloucester calling for "... investment in the start of life, which affects the long-term well-being of individuals, families, households, communities, our country and beyond. There is a very strong case for improving early years interventions and having a clear and joined-up strategy for doing so." Contributions from other members echoed the need for joined-up thinking.

[Read the full debate in Hansard](#)

Nutrition: Tackling Food Insecurity – report from Eastbourne

Levels of food insecurity in Britain are among the highest in Europe. Here, campaigners and struggling families explain why food banks alone won't solve the problem

[Read the article](#)

Child Mental Health: Focus needed on children in new legislation

An Early Day Motion tabled by Holly Lynch MP calls for the Government to guarantee that new mental health legislation will focus on children's needs and the needs of their parents and carers, as well as putting in place a properly qualified workforce to deliver services.

[Read the article in Nursery World](#)

Child Mental Health: Number of schools buying in mental health support has doubled

In 2016 more than a third (36%) of schools surveyed provided school-based support for students' emotional and mental wellbeing. By 2019 66% of school leaders said they were commissioning their own professional support for pupils, including school-based counsellors.

The poll, by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), indicates that schools have developed an improved understanding and recognition of children's mental health needs, but headteachers say there is still a lack of capacity in specialist services for those with more serious problems.

[Read the article](#)

[Read the Education Policy Institute's CAMHS report](#)

[Read an interview with one of the researchers](#)

Nutrition: New Report on the Role of Supermarkets

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood published its report on the present and future role of the supermarket. Recommendations included getting supermarkets to re-balance promotions away from products that are high in fat, sugar and/or salt (HFSS) to healthier foods; giving price discounts and promotions on healthy foods while restricting those on HFSS products. There was also a call to control the criteria for child eye-level in the placing of products, and also to offer promotions on healthier, culturally-appropriate products to engage people from ethnic minority groups.

[Read the article](#) or [Download the report](#)