News links from June 2021

Education

"Catch-up" and the rapid rise in isolating pupils were two topics widely reported in June, as the month started with the resignation of the recently appointed Education Tsar, amidst a row about funding. Different voices and opinions were reported: students, education experts, MPs, commentators - with widespread support for the idea that the government should prioritise mental wellbeing. Many proposals include activities involving soft skills and play, and the inclusion of "recovery" and helping children with everything lost - both mentally and physically - over the past year. In some schools, outdoor learning has been reported to have already produced positive results.

English pupils in isolation rocketed in June, with an estimated 375,000 at home due to Covid-related reasons, although only 4% of them were positive cases. There was hope that the need to isolate whole bubbles of pupils would end in the new school year, as the disruption caused all round was proving considerable. Read more.

In non-Covid education news, white working-class boys have been let down by the system over the years, according to a report from the Education Select Committee. The reality for poor white pupils is often underachievement from early years onwards. Read more.

Working Groups Announced

The Children First Alliance is launching a series of Working Groups that will produce comprehensive policy blueprints for Government action to halt and then reverse the serious damaging trends in the health and wellbeing of children and young people both pre- and post-Covid. The first of these groups will be on the **Early Years** and the launch meeting is on **July 14**. Please contact us if you would like to participate.

Mental Health

Extra funding of £40m was announced in June, recognising the increasing incidence of eating disorders and other complex issues in children and young people. Read more.

The mental health of students is the overwhelming concern of professionals working in Early Years and Education, according to the **"Future of Education"** report by union *Community*: read the report.

The Co-Space study, which has tracked the mental health of parents, children and young people since the start of the pandemic published its latest findings. See here.

Prof. Michael Marmot unveiled a fresh set of recommendations on how to reduce health inequalities post pandemic. Read more.

School Meals

In response to Covid-19, could an expansion to universal free school meals deliver a win-win for healthier food and food security for our children? A webinar at the end of June, organised by Sustain, explored this issue.

The Scottish Government announced that free school meals for children in P4 (primary pupils aged 9) will start in the new school year with P5 following in January. Younger pupils are already entitled to free school lunches in Scotland. The commitment to roll out universal free school meals to all pupils, including P6 and P7, will happen by August next year.

England's policy on school meals and nutritional standards was updated in June and the House of Commons Library has full information. Read more here.

Abuse - in schools and online

Ofsted reported its findings from the review set up following the revelations (about the normalisation of sexual abuse and violence in schools and colleges) from the Everyone's Invited website back in March. The review revealed how sexual harassment and online sexual abuse for children and young people are much more prevalent than adults realise, with incidents being so commonplace that they see no point in reporting them. Many recommendations for schools and government were made and a Commons debate was held to discuss the findings. Read the full report.

As we know, far too many children are at risk in their own home, with deprivation being a key feature in cases. According to a Government review entitled "The Case for Change", council-run children's social care services are in urgent need of investment and reform, with the system under significant strain with an increasing number of families being investigated, more children in care and costs spiralling.

Reaching children and young people who are at risk of domestic violence is difficult, and the Violence and Mental Health network's report "Safe, Seen, Supported" sets out how to reach them.

The battle against online abuse continues, with good news that the NSPCC's Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation have launched an online tool for under-18s to remove unwanted nude images of themselves that have been shared online. Young victims can follow a few simple steps to fight back against this kind of abuse.

And to tackle the rapid spreading of abusive images, the Internet Watch Foundation has set up a new taskforce to assess millions of the most severe images and videos from the Government's Child Abuse Image Database (CAID). They will tag and distribute information globally to tech companies so that the material can swiftly be blocked or removed should anyone attempt to share these images or videos anywhere in the world.

Children with SEND

A CQC/Ofsted report was published in June on the experiences of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families, who have faced significant challenges during this time.

Obesity

The Government announced a 9pm watershed for advertisements of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) following a public consultation. The restrictions will come into effect at the end of 2022.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that childhood obesity has worsened during lockdown, so the return of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) was widely reported.

See here for the latest trend data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) showing the prevalence of excess weight and obesity in children at small area level.

Language and Social Development

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) is to collect data on children's language and socio-emotional development as well as comparing statutory assessment data for three years before, and three years following, the onset of Covid-19. Parents and teachers will also be consulted as the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of Covid-19 on the early years of schooling, to inform future policy development.

More information

Gaming Addiction

The pandemic and lockdowns have been blamed for a threefold rise in the number of children and young people being treated for gaming addictions, according to the Guardian, following an FOI request. According to a leading addictions therapist, *". . . with the pandemic and its effects on home schooling, it has definitely given children more exposure to screen time than we've ever had before."*

The CHILDREN FIRST Alliance