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The Rowan Group: Researching young people, health and wellbeing

The Rowan Group is a focus for policy-related research on children and young people's education, health and well-being. It is a collaborative group based in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen and the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Teesside. Our overall aim is to undertake research that promotes the well-being and development of children and young people and to establish a coherent body of research on children's and young people's issues. A major element of our work is geared towards effective dissemination of research findings to practitioners and policy makers to enable them to make the best use of new findings in their work. This has enabled us to act as a focus for the policy and practice community and researchers working with children's and young people's issues, in formal and informal education, in health promotion, and in health service delivery.

Schools' responses to mental health and wellbeing

Over the last three years, youth mentoring, sexual health and relationships education and mental health issues for schools have been the main focus of our research. In this article we will concentrate on a Scottish wide study of schools' responses to mental health and wellbeing funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department (Shucksmith et al, 2005). The overall aim of the study was to examine the responses (both proactive and reactive) of schools, education authorities and their partners to challenging behaviour (including disruption, withdrawal and

truancy) which was triggered by poor mental health. The methods included an extensive review of the theoretical and policy literature. This was followed by a scoping study consisting of interviews with representatives of education authorities, health boards and voluntary sector organisations across Scotland. From these interviews six examples of good or innovative practice were selected for intensive case study. The final report focused on three key aspects: the impact of school ethos and environment, the curriculum and professional partnerships.

Findings

Findings from the study raise a number of important questions for researchers, policy makers, practitioners, parents and young people themselves. In particular, it illuminated the benefits and the tensions inherent in developing and sustaining joined up approaches between teachers and other practitioners in dealing with this topic. Issues around how teachers develop their capacity to engage with mental health issues and the implications of 'parallel working' rather than genuine interagency working, were evident and raised further questions about how children and their families navigate the structures and services.

References

- Shucksmith, J., Spratt, J., Philip, K. and Watson, C. (2005). *Investigating the Links between Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.
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<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/resource/DOC761690019851.pdf>.
- Spratt, J., Shucksmith, J., Philip, K. and Watson, C. (2006). Part of who we are as a school should include responsibility for well-being: links between school environment, mental health and behaviour. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 24 (3): 14-21.