

# CASE STUDY: SCHOOL NURSING AND OBESITY – BEYOND THE NATIONAL CHILD MEASUREMENT PROGRAMME (NCMP)

In 2011 the Trafford division of Bridgewater Community Healthcare Trust developed a project aimed at enhancing the School Nursing service delivery of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP). The NCMP involves local areas collecting data on the height and weight of children in English schools in Reception Year and Year 6 to enable the Government to monitor obesity trends (DHOT, 2012). Feedback letters about individual children are sent out to all parents.

The School Nursing service carries out the measurements on children each year and inputs the results for return to the Department of Health. School nurses are also the named contact point for parents to ask for advice and support, although it became apparent in 2011 that relatively few parents were responding to the letters, and if they did it was often to complain about the letter as a mechanism for advising them that their child was overweight.

The service recognised the importance of the NCMP as a data collection activity and firstly wanted to improve standards in relation to this. However practitioners wanted to go beyond collecting data and use the NCMP as a platform to more proactively address obesity by introducing a number of new initiatives:

1. providing proactive feedback by telephone to parents of very overweight children in Reception year
2. delivering a pre-measurement lesson to all pupils in year 6 to allay fears about the programme.
3. contributing to and building capacity of a multi-agency community programme for children and their families aimed at tackling obesity
4. contributing to the development and delivery of multi-agency training on obesity for children's service practitioners

## Key Outcomes

- Green in all areas of NCMP data quality measures (NHS Information Centre, 2012)
- Follow up phone calls were made by registered nurses to the parents of approximately 190 Reception children found to be very overweight in the academic year ending August 2012. This enhanced the public health role of the nurses and increased their contact with children, leading to increased job satisfaction.
- Fewer complaints about the letter were received.
- Lessons were delivered to all Year 6 classes in the 60 mainstream primary schools.
- Two ten-week community Change 4 Life Groups were co-delivered by the Children's Health Advisor during 2012.



- A new band 4 children's health advisor post was introduced within the service using existing funding. This led to a gain of over six hours staffing time per week to enable delivery of the lessons and the Change 4 Life programme. This also provided a career development opportunity for healthcare assistants within the service.
- Training sessions on obesity were delivered to approximately 90 members of staff within the multi-agency children's services teams (including social workers, youth workers and children's centre workers during the academic year).
- These initiatives have led to an enhanced public health role for the team, increased contacts with parents and children and a mechanism for raising the profile of and accessibility to the service, key recommendations of the School Nursing Call to Action (DH, 2012). This has also led to increased job satisfaction amongst staff.

## Background

### Trafford School Nursing Service

The Trafford School Nursing service is long established and aims to promote the health and well-being of children and young people within the area. It is an NHS provider service that is locally commissioned to deliver parts of the Healthy Child Programme including the NCMP and immunisations, as well as other public health and safeguarding children activities. The target population is the approximately 33,000 children and young people of statutory school age who access education services within the area. The 16 whole time equivalent (WTE) team consists of a skill mix of nursing staff, healthcare assistants and clerical support and is located across three geographical locations within multi-agency teams.

### Programme Context

- The NCMP uptake levels and standards of data collection are monitored by the Department of Health. Standards were already high and these needed to be maintained/improved upon. A training programme was put into place to ensure that measurements and data inputting were carried out to required standards (DHOT, 2012).
- Proactive feedback by telephone to parents was recommended by the Department of Health (DHOT, 2012). This was implemented in 2012 for parents of children in Reception year in an attempt to improve



communication with parents and promote support mechanisms. It was also hoped that complaints would reduce and the negative perception of the programme would be reversed.

- Staff and parents are often concerned that the NCMP might promote negative body image amongst year 6 pupils and that these pupils will also be anxious about being weighed and measured. The introduction of a pre-measurement lesson in 2012 aimed to alleviate pupil anxiety, give information about the NCMP, reduce anxieties about measurements and promote healthy lifestyles/positive body image.
- National guidance advises local areas to offer families access to resources to address obesity/overweight (DH, 2008, DH, 2011). As part of its public health role the service wanted to contribute to the delivery of a community weight management programme for children and their families.
- There was recognition that many non-health professionals work with children that are overweight. In addition to this there was an awareness of some cases where obesity had been a child protection issue. The safeguarding team wanted to raise awareness of these issues to the professionals and this led to the development and delivery of the multi-agency training programme.

## Key Aims

The key aims of the project were to:

- Maintain/improve standards of implementing the NCMP
  - All staff to be trained in growth measurements
  - Healthcare assistants to be trained in inputting data to NCMP standards
  - All staff to be trained in calculating BMI and recognising when this is a concern
- Proactive feedback of growth measurements to be given to all parents of children in Reception who are under or very overweight
  - Parents offered support/ongoing referral to specialist services
  - Improve communication with parents/promotion of access to the School Nursing Service
- All pupils in year 6 to have access to a pre-measurement lesson with the following learning outcomes:
  - State how weight can affect health and well being
  - State how activity and diet can affect weight
  - Identify healthier and less healthy foods
  - Identify fun ways of incorporating activity into daily lives
  - Gain an awareness of the NCMP
  - Identify two sources of help and advice in relation to weight or other health issues
- Establishment of a new band 4 post – children's health advisor (with relevant NVQ training and additional training in weight management) to increase capacity to deliver an enhanced NCMP programme and to contribute to the delivery of community weight management programmes.

## Key Stages of Setup

The school nursing service was already delivering the basic NCMP programme on an annual basis. The enhanced programme was initiated at the start of academic year 2011/12 as follows.

1. A training programme was developed by the team leader and a senior practitioner and delivered to all members of staff carrying out the measurements and inputting the data at the start of the academic year.
2. Measurements of Reception year children were carried out by the trained staff in the Autumn term. Nurses were given guidance in delivering proactive feedback to parents and this was instigated after the measurements were undertaken.
3. A lesson plan was developed by senior practitioners and a dietician. This was delivered by School Nurses and Support Workers to year 6 pupils in the summer term prior to measurements being carried out.
4. The children's health advisor post was established and recruited to by the team leader and service manager in the summer term.
5. The multi-agency training package was developed during the Autumn term. This involved some Senior School Nurses, the safeguarding children team, dieticians and a Consultant in Public Health.

## How It Works

This is a rolling programme that starts with support workers carrying out the growth measurements of pupils in Reception and Year 6 during the autumn and spring school terms. At the beginning of the academic year all staff attend training on growth measurements, obesity trends and community resources available for referral.

A lesson on healthy lifestyles and body image is delivered to all Year 6 pupils prior to the measurements being carried out. This aims to revise with pupils some of the factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle such as healthy foods, physical activity, sleep and relaxation. It also examines and challenges the media imagery relating to body shapes. In addition it aims to give information about the NCMP and to alleviate some of the anxiety that pupils might feel about being weighed and measured. After the lesson and measurements pupils are offered the opportunity to speak to one of the nurses about any concerns they might have.

Letters are sent to the parents of all the children taking part advising them of their child's weight and the details of the School Nursing Service to contact should they require any support. In addition School Nurses make phone calls to parents of children in Reception who are underweight or very overweight to proactively offer information, advice and ongoing support prior to the letters being sent out.

After the measurements are carried out a team of support workers input the data which are uploaded and submitted to the Department of Health for monitoring. This data is used to generate the feedback letters that are sent to all parents.

The children's health advisor supports the delivery of a "Change 4 Life" based weight management programme (Change 4Life, 2013) that is delivered over ten weeks on a rolling programme to children aged seven and above and their parents. The programme is led by a dietician and a leisure services practitioner and provides a resource for school nurses to refer parents of children in Year 6 who ask for support following receipt of their feedback letter.

Finally some school nurses have been involved in the development and facilitation of a half-day training package that is delivered to multi-agency teams that work with children and young people including social workers, youth workers and parenting workers to raise awareness about obesity. This includes information about healthy lifestyles, the risks of obesity and support services. It also examines the factors that might be suggestive that obesity is a child protection issue.

## Resources

The NCMP growth measurements have always been funded from public health monies. The additional activities including lessons for Year 6, proactive feedback for parents of Reception children and the delivery of the Change 4 Life programme have been enabled by the introduction of the children's health advisor post. This is a band 4 post and was generated from a band 5 vacancy. Introducing this skill mix generated an additional 6.5 hours of staffing time per week to support the team to deliver these new developments.

## Key Challenges

Staff members were anxious about making phone calls to parents in case of negative responses. Support and supervision was given in relation to this and with practice nurses built on their existing skills to gain confidence in the delivery of these calls.

Arranging sessions in schools to deliver the lessons for Year 6 was difficult in some cases particularly as the timing clashed with SATS in some cases. However the use of existing relationships and skills from setting up previous projects enabled this to be achieved in all schools.

Lack of time was initially an issue but team members were motivated by the increase in contacts with children and families. The introduction of the children's health advisor post helped to overcome resource difficulties.

## Key Learning

The main lesson learnt was that staff members feel they are delivering a better, more public health focussed service to children and families. It is recognised that the evaluation of some of the outcomes (for instance reductions in the numbers of complaints and pupils' response to the lessons) has been anecdotal and that more robust evaluation is required.

It was noted that the timing of the Year 6 lessons (in the summer term) was not optimal due to SATS and feedback letters were not sent out until the end of the academic year. For this reason in the current academic year the Year 6 measurements were delivered in the Autumn term with the Reception measurement being delayed until the spring term. This had the additional benefit of giving the Reception children more time to settle into the routines of school and be more confident in taking part in the measurements.

## Sustainability

The measurements, proactive feedback for Reception children, lessons for Year 6 and the data inputting are all now written into the core programme of the School Nursing Service. The introduction of the skill mix post has supported this practice to be permanently embedded into everyday practice. It has also enabled the contribution to the Change 4 Life community weight management programme to be continued. Existing resources will allow the multi-agency training to be delivered as and when required.

## Next Steps

- Continue with the current delivery programme.
- Monitor and evaluate NCMP delivery standards.
- Evaluate pupils' responses and learning from the Year 6 lesson
- Monitor and evaluate parents' responses to proactive feedback i.e. is further support accessed?

## Further Links

- Department of Health  
<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=national+child+measurement+programme&tab=government-results&organisation=department-of-health&sort=>
- Public Health England  
<http://www.noo.org.uk/NCMP>
- Health & Social Care Information Centre  
<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/ncmp>

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