

Written statement: Consultation on framework guidance on embedding a whole-school approach to mental health and emotional well-being

CABINET STATEMENT

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Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education and Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services

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In 2018 the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee published its Mind Over Matter Report on the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people. In response we announced we would jointly convene a Ministerial Task and Finish Group to advise us on the work needed to meet the needs of young people outside of mainstream mental health services. This compliments the Together for Children and Young People Programme, and develops the role of schools – the whole school approach, within a wider whole system approach.

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We have been happy to make this a joint priority and today marks the next significant milestone in our work as we launch the formal consultation on our framework guidance for schools on developing and embedding their own whole school approaches. Now more than ever, as we begin to ease out of the restrictions caused by the Covid19 pandemic, the emotional and mental wellbeing of our children and young people has to be our number one priority. The pandemic and subsequent 'lockdown' has affected us all, particularly our children who have had to endure months without seeing friends and close family members, such as their grandparents; have seen the way in which they are educated change way beyond recognition; and, for some, have had to cope with the bereavement of loved ones.

This guidance seeks to support our Covid19 response by ensuring schools recognise and take account of the importance of not just learner wellbeing, but also the wellbeing of the wider school community. It builds on the range of good practice already occurring locally, regionally and nationally across Wales. In June 2019, Estyn published Healthy and Happy, its report into how primary and secondary schools support the health and wellbeing of pupils. This showed that around two-thirds of primary and a third of secondary schools have an inclusive whole-school approach to pupils' health and wellbeing. However, our ambition is for all schools to have such an approach. Not just as a response to Covid19, but longer-term so that all learners are able to develop as confident and empathetic individuals; and when, and if, needed that they can access an appropriate and timely level of wellbeing support.

That is what the framework is intended to achieve, by promoting consistency and equity. It is not intended to impose new burdens on schools, rather ensure that existing planning and continuous improvement arrangements take full account of the schools' wellbeing needs. It is intended to support schools in reviewing their own wellbeing landscape and in developing plans to addresses their weaknesses and build on their strengths. It sets out the role of Welsh Government, LAs, Consortia, the NHS and others, such as the third sector in supporting the school. It also recognises that the school alone cannot meet all the needs of what is a complex population of young people. Equally it is also intended to meet the wellbeing needs of teachers and other school staff as much as learners.

The framework is not about promoting any one initiative, nor intervention over any other as there is no 'silver bullet' and each school will need to consider how it addresses its needs in line with its own unique circumstances. At its heart the framework is about reinforcing the little things which build the positive relationships which, above all, make the difference and which foster the sense of belonging and community. Nor is the framework a standalone document, it will be supported by a suite of complimentary resources to help schools develop, implement, take forward and review their own whole school approaches. These resources are being developed in parallel to the framework.

We have also been pleased to make available £5m to support this work in 2020-21, with £3m from the Health and £2m from the Education budgets. This demonstrates our joint commitment to this important work and recognises the benefits it can bring to both our education and health responsibilities.

In developing the framework we have engaged with a range of partners across education, health and the third sectors. There are too many to mention, though we want to thank them all, and in particular those members of our Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group and the supporting Stakeholder Reference and Youth Stakeholder Groups for their enthusiasm and commitment to this work.

Now it is the turn of the wider community to comment. In particular we want to hear the views and comments of those people directly involved in delivering education across Wales and the young people who access and benefit from that education, as they are the ultimate beneficiaries of this work.

<https://gov.wales/embedding-whole-school-approach-mental-health-and-well-being>

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