

Mental Health Education in the curriculum

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 21 Mai 2019

Petitions Committee | 21 May 2019

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-879

Petition title: Add Mental Health Education to the mandatory teaching curriculum for all schools in Wales

Text of petition: When working for Mental – The Podcast to Destigmatise Mental Health, I am continually concerned by the lack of education in schools around mental health. With 1 in 4 of us experiencing mental illness every year according to the charity Mind, this seems to be a real and significant gap in our education system.

KEY STATISTICS:

- Over half of all mental ill health starts before the age of 14, and 75% of this has developed by the age of 18;
- A 2015 survey found that 13% of adults (16 & older) living in Wales were reported to have received treatment for a mental health problem, an increase from 12% reported in 2014;
- The overall cost of mental health problems in Wales is an estimated £7.2 billion a year.
- The statistics are shocking, yet whilst there is a whole subject in the Welsh curriculum about our physical health in the form of PE, our young people are left without knowledge of even the most common mental illnesses.
- Not only does this leave them unprepared & vulnerable when it comes to looking out for their own mental health, but also sets the standard that Mental Health is not discussed. This plants a seed of stigma that many carry for their whole lives.
- We are keen to hear back from those in power on a more extensive plan to better the lives of Wales's young people.

CAMPAIGNING FOR:

- Mental Health education becoming mandatory teaching for all schools in Wales without the addition of any exams/homework on this subject.

- Every child in Wales having the ability to access a qualified counsellor through their school.
- Every school in Wales offering Mental Health training for its staff.

1. Current curriculum

Mental and emotional health and well-being is included in the current curriculum through Personal and social education (PSE). Delivery of PSE is a statutory requirement of the basic curriculum although content is at the discretion of schools. The non-statutory [Personal and social education framework for 7 to 19-year-olds in Wales](#) (2008) provides a recommended approach and learning outcomes. Health and emotional well-being is one of five themes of the PSE framework. The framework states that:

- At Key Stage 3, learners should be given opportunities to display a responsible attitude towards keeping the mind and body safe and healthy, and to understand the range of emotions they experience and how to develop strategies for coping with negative feelings and the benefits of accessing different sources of information, support and advice.
- At Key Stage 4, learners should be given the opportunities to accept personal responsibility for keeping the mind and body safe and healthy. They should understand the factors that affect mental health and the ways in which emotional well-being can be fostered. They should understand the statutory and voluntary organisations which support health and emotional well-being and how to access professional health advice and personal support with confidence.
- Post-16 learners should be given opportunities to accept responsibility for all aspects of personal and social development and well-being. They should understand how to critically evaluate personal lifestyle choices in the context of physical health and emotional well-being, considering the short and long term consequences of such decisions and the life experiences which enhance or damage self-esteem and explore how best to cope with the demands of such situations.

2. New Curriculum for Wales (to be introduced from September 2022)

The Welsh Government [published the draft new curriculum on 30 April 2019](#). The statutory introduction of the new curriculum will be in September 2022. The new curriculum will initially only be introduced in primary schools and Year 7 in September 2022, before rolling into year 8 for 2023, year 9 in 2024, and so on as the cohort moves through.

Learning in the new curriculum will be organised in six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLEs) rather than narrow subject boundaries. Within these, statements of 'what matters' set out the most important knowledge, skills and experiences to be gained. The six AoLEs are:

- Expressive Arts
- **Health and Well-being**

- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology.

Learning about mental health will fall mainly within the Health and Well-being AoLE.

The new curriculum will be organised into **Progression Steps** at ages 5, 8, 11, 14 and 16 (rather than key stages) and take the form of **Achievement Outcomes** relating broadly to expectations at those ages. The progression steps are set out in terms of what a learner can do, or has done.

3. Health and Well-being AoLE

The draft Health and Well-being AoLE concerns the physical, psychological, emotional and social aspects of lives. It aims to recognise good health and well-being as a key enabler of successful learning. The AoLE aims to support learners to develop and maintain their physical health and well-being and their mental health and emotional well-being, as well as developing positive relationships in a range of contexts. It is available in an [online format](#) or [a stand-alone PDF format](#) [PDF 1.32MB].

‘What matters statements’ in this AoLE seek to describe the fundamental factors which underpin health and well-being. They aim to give professionals the flexibility to identify those topics and issues which are relevant to the needs of their learners, school and community.

There are five elements within the Health and Well-being what matters statements:

- Developing physical health and well-being has lifelong benefits.
- **How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being.**
- Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others.
- How we engage with different social influences shapes who we are and our health and well-being.
- Healthy relationships are fundamental to our sense of belonging and well-being.

Information on the progression steps and experiences, knowledge and skills that learners contained in the ‘how we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being’ element is attached at Annexe A.

4. Assembly activity

The [Children Young People and Education Committee](#) (CYPE) published the report of its inquiry into children and young people’s emotional and mental health, [Mind over Matter \[PDF 3.4KB\]](#), in April 2018. The key recommendation was:

that the Welsh Government makes the emotional and mental well-being and resilience of our children and young people a stated national priority.

The report was wide-ranging but there was a strong focus on preventative and early intervention services, focusing in particular on schools and how they can work more effectively together with health services to build emotional resilience in children and young people.

The Committee were not satisfied that the [Welsh Government's initial response](#) [PDF 1.2KB] met the Committee's report recommendations. During the [plenary debate on 4 July 2018](#), the Chair of the Committee Lynne Neagle AM said:

I and the committee are deeply disappointed with the Welsh Government's response to our recommendations. [...] the Government's response does not meet our expectation of, and demand for, a step change in approach. As a committee, we reject this response; it is not good enough.

The Ministers for Health and Social Services and Education subsequently announced their intention to form a 'Ministerial Task and Finish Group' and a 'Stakeholder Reference group', in response to the Committee's and Assembly Members' concerns.

On [14th January 2019 the Health and Social Services Minister announced £7.1 million](#), to support the Government in its work following recommendations made by the Committee. The funding is intended to protect, improve and support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people by further developing services. The Minister said:

The £7.1m investment is in addition to £1.4m being invested by the Welsh Government in a programme of mental health in-reach support for schools to strengthen the support from CAMHS [children and adolescent mental health services] in schools in four pilot areas across Wales.

In May 2019, [the Ministers for Health and Social Services and Education provided an update on the recommendations to the CYPE Committee](#). In relation to teacher training, the Ministers said:

We will build on the work done in integrating mental health and emotional wellbeing into Initial Teacher Training (ITT), and commission bespoke training packages for teachers and other school staff on mental health and wellbeing. These will be available for teachers and other school staff as part of their continuing professional development. We recognise that teachers and wider school staff must underpin a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing and that they must be supported to enable them in turn to support children and young people.

Previous Petitions

The Committee considered two petitions, [Introduce Compulsory Mental Health Education in Secondary Schools](#) and [To Make Mental Health a Part of the National Curriculum](#) in 2016. At that time, the Minister for Education said that as part of the design of the new curriculum, the Health and well-being AoLE would draw on mental, physical and emotional well-being. As such, the Committee closed both petitions.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Annexe A: Progression steps and experiences, knowledge and skills that learners contained in the ‘how we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being’

Progression step 1 (age 5)

- Being aware of perceptions and thoughts;
- Being aware of and communicating feelings;
- Being aware that thoughts and feelings change;

Progression step 2 (age 8)

- Focusing attention on my *perceptions* and thoughts;
- Communicating feelings;
- Understanding how and why my thoughts, feelings and actions change in response to different experiences.

Progression step 3 (age 11)

- Recognising the benefits of being able to focus attention on perceptions and thoughts and know self-awareness is being developed.
- Having developed strategies to self-regulate emotions in a healthy way and can manage this with increasing independence and success.
- Being able to reflect on the way that past events and experiences have impacted upon thoughts, feelings and actions.
- Having developed the ability to anticipate how future events may make me and others feel.

Progression step 4 (age 14)

- Independently focus attention on perceptions, thoughts and feelings in order to further develop self-awareness.
- Identify different strategies to self-regulate my emotions in response to a range of experiences.
- Reflect and learn from the past in order to anticipate and prepare for future experiences.
- Understand the value of being able to empathise with others and how this leads to actions which are compassionate and kind.

Progression step 5 (age 16)

- Use self-awareness to appreciate the complexity of my emotions and apply strategies to self-regulate them in a healthy way and to connect with others.

- Reflect, respond and learn from past and current experiences in order to anticipate and prepare for future events.
- Transfer these skills in order to care about the feelings and thoughts of others.
- Empathise with others which helps me to be compassionate and kind towards myself and others.

Each What Matters statement includes details of the Experiences, knowledge and skills that learners should gain. For the how we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being' element these include, at all progression steps:

Learners need to experience:

- opportunities to turn an empathic feeling into an act of kindness and compassion for themselves and others
- opportunities which promote reflection both individually and in a group, within a supportive and protective environment
- safe and supportive discussions about experiences which affect mental health and emotional well-being.

Learners need to know:

- that our mental health and emotional state is susceptible to change
- how self-image impacts on mental health and well-being
- about a range of strategies which promote awareness of mental health and well-being
- how the brain is interconnected with the rest of the body, which includes the stress response system and physiological changes that occur
- that they can access a range of support to manage their mental health and emotional well-being
- that other people's mental health and emotional well-being may be different from their own
- about medical conditions that may affect our mental health and emotional well-being
- that the environment can impact upon our mental health and emotional well-being.

Learners need to be able to:

- recognise and articulate what they are perceiving, thinking and feeling in order to develop their self-awareness and to understand their emotions
- reflect upon, and anticipate how, experiences may affect them
- develop strategies to self-regulate without guidance from others

- communicate how they are feeling and ask for help when needed.