

Work begins on step change in emotional and mental health support in schools

As part of a multi-agency approach, schools have an important role to help deliver the ambitious goal of building a population of emotionally-resilient and mentally healthy children and young people in Wales.

A 'whole school' approach would ensure that mental health and wellbeing becomes central to the way schools work and will touch on many different aspects of school life. This means that the school ethos will support the broader mental health and wellbeing of learners, which in turn will help to prevent other issues from developing or escalating, including mental health issues.

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams and Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething today announced a Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group is being set up to accelerate work on this approach.

Schools have a clear role in supporting prevention and helping with early intervention. It will look at the new curriculum being developed and consider issues such as staff training.

The new group will see how different activities already taking place can be brought together; highlight any gaps in provision; and ensure energy and resources are targeted so they can have maximum benefit.

The work of the group is in response to and, will be informed by, the report by the National Assembly's Children, Young People and Education Committee, Mind over Matter, which called for emotional and mental wellbeing and resilience to be a stated national priority and contained recommendations for how this could be taken forward.

The group will be jointly chaired by the two Cabinet Secretaries and will bring together those working in education and health and the wider public and third sectors. Lynne Neagle AM, chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, has agreed to act as an observer to the group and will participate in its work.

A multi-agency and multi-profession workshop will take place today (Friday September 7) to explore what a 'whole school approach' could involve and where gaps in current support exist. Findings from the workshop will further inform the work of the task and finish group.

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams said:

"The emotional and mental health of our young people is paramount and that's why we want to make sure they are fully supported – through each stage of their education – to be emotionally and mentally resilient, confident and, above all, happy.

"Work is already underway to provide dedicated professional support to schools, including our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) pilot, but what we're talking about here is an approach that goes right across the school, connects activities already taking place and identifies where we can go further and faster.

"We want to schools to become exemplary in the way they promote mental health and wellbeing and this group is just the beginning of a process that will take us to that point."

Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething added:

"In 2016, the Welsh Government made mental health one of its five national priorities, because we recognise good mental health is absolutely vital.

"We fully recognise the importance of supporting the emotional well-being of our children and young people. Schools have a crucial role in identifying problems early, and helping to provide children and young people with the tools to cope with the stresses of growing up.

"And that's what today's announcement is all about. Taken together – the work we are announcing today, and that of our partners across statutory and third sectors, has the potential to deliver the step-change we all seek. It will help ensure our children and young people have the right support, in the right place, at the right time, which will enable them to grow up in healthy and nurturing environments, giving them the best possible opportunity to fulfil their true potential."

Lynne Neagle, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, said:

"I welcome the establishment of this important group, as a direct response to the work of the Children, Young People and Education Committee and our recent report on the emotional and mental health of children in Wales. As a committee, we are keen to maintain the pace of work necessary in this area and look forward to being involved in shaping the final terms of reference by the end of this month.

“Cross-sector and cross-professional cooperation is key to this, and as an independent participant in the group’s work, I will do all I can to ensure that a whole-school approach is part of a wider whole-system approach to emotional and mental health for Wales’ children and young people.”