



EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – INFORMATION ITEM

**SUBJECT: PUPIL WELFARE: SUPPORT PROVIDED TO SCHOOLS SINCE
THE COVID PANDEMIC**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CORPORATE
SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report aims to provide an update for members of the types of issues encountered and support provided to pupil's post the Covid pandemic by the Local Authority education department support teams.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The covid pandemic has had a significant impact on pupil wellbeing and behaviour. There has also been an impact on staff wellbeing in schools and education settings.
- 2.2 The Covid lockdown period resulted in a number of lost opportunities for children of all ages to meet up, socialise and attend groups, in addition to the impact on learning opportunities due to the resultant school closures. This has impacted on pupils' ability to socialise and play, follow routines and boundaries set by school staff and communicate respectfully with fellow pupils and staff. This has likely contributed to an increase in both fixed and permanent exclusions (as highlighted in section 5.2 below). In the case of younger children, who have missed out on the opportunity to attend mother and toddler groups and early year's settings, there has been an increase in the number of pupils presenting with delayed speech and language, play and social skills.
- 2.3 Similarly, there has been an increase in attendance issues for those pupils in year groups who have missed out on a carefully planned transition to their next key stage. There has been an increase in pupil wellbeing needs as evidenced by an increase in referrals to LA education support services (school-based counselling service), an increase in safeguarding concerns reported by schools and increased requests for support linked to pupil anxiety, manifested as emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).
- 2.4 Refocussing support to schools has been critical in the period post pandemic. This report outlines the support provided by the LA Inclusion Services (Inclusion Officer, Educational Psychology Service (EPS), School-based Counselling Service (SBCS) and the School Improvement Teams (Education Welfare Service (EWS) and Healthy Schools).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report and
- a) consider the information contained in the report and to offer views and comments;

- b) endorse the approach taken by the LAs to address pupil welfare concerns in relation to behaviour, attendance and wellbeing needs.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Members are asked to endorse the approach the LA has adopted in its provision of universal, targeted and specific support to empower schools to understand and support the needs of pupils who have been most affected by the covid pandemic.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 Since schools re-opened in September 2020, there has been an increase in pupil exclusions, a decrease in school attendance figures and an increase in requests to support pupil wellbeing needs.
- 5.2 The pandemic has resulted in the need to reframe presenting needs. There is evidence of increased levels of low incidence high frequency persistent disruptive behaviour, reduced engagement, increased anxiety and reduced resilience which is observed in different ways.
- 5.3 The pandemic has impacted on the LA and schools' ability to work together to embed the approaches and guidance in the Inclusion Compendium linked to wellbeing and behaviour in schools. The approach to developing schools' internal provision varies across the LA and although there is clear guidance from Welsh Government regarding embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing this is at different stages across schools. Schools report they are focused on dealing with presenting issues and therefore the ability to be proactive and reframe approaches is challenging.
- 5.4 The LA continues to provide relevant training opportunities to schools in relation to wellbeing and behaviour (5.12).
- 5.5 There is a significant challenge facing the education directorate in improving pupil attendance across all schools in Caerphilly Local Authority. In recent months, the target to improve pupil attendance has been added to the list of strategic priorities in the revised education strategy 'Pursuing Excellence Together' alongside detailed discussion of the challenges and plans to make improvements in this area. The Education Welfare Service (EWS) have been working closely with schools and other settings to re-introduce/revise attendance processes (including challenge to parents/carers), as well as carrying out individual casework with pupils and families.
- 5.6 The EWS currently holds a caseload of around 600 pupils. Whilst the threshold for referral is usually those pupils with attendance below 85%, officers are working with individuals with much lower attendance than this. As well as supporting schools with strategies and whole school approaches, officers work with families in their homes, and a multi-agency approach is always beneficial. Close links with Children's Services, health, housing, and external support agencies all contribute to this work.
- 5.7 To support the work of the EWS and in recognition of the issues that underpin attendance the Education Psychology Service developed the Re-integrating Learners Toolkit (RLT) resource to support schools to both identify and understand factors that underpin school attendance and put supportive mechanisms in place to target pupil attendance. The EPS has provided 11 training sessions to 226 staff in schools, education other than at school (EOTAS) settings, home tutors and LA staff who support schools, children and young people; this has included: Education Welfare Officer's, Behaviour Support Officers, Inspire to Achieve and the Youth Service. The training delivered has included training on the RLT, 'Responding to anxiety relating to school avoidance' and training on how to develop pupil re-integration plans. (2020-2021: 5 training sessions were delivered to 83 staff; 2021-2022: 5 training sessions were

delivered to 143 staff; and 2022 to the end of Spring Term 2023: a bespoke training session was delivered to 1 EOTAS setting to support the creation of pupil reintegration plans).

- 5.8 Educational Psychologists and Education Welfare Officers promote the use of the RLT to schools to target pupil attendance at the early stages of pupil attendance issues as a preventative/early intervention approach to prevent these issues from becoming entrenched. The EPS is currently developing training on Motivational Interviewing approaches to further support school staff to help to engage and motivate pupils to return to school. The EPS has also continued to provide ongoing support and advice to one secondary school since September 2021 to help them to develop an in-house provision for pupils displaying emotional based school avoidance (EBSA), in order to prevent school avoidance from becoming entrenched. Support has included upskilling staff, reintegration planning support and guidance around best practice in the provision.
- 5.9 The LA also invested in training the School Based Counsellor's to be able to deliver online, telephone and instant messaging counselling following the Covid lockdown. Consequently, the service can provide an adaptable, flexible service to support pupils who are not currently attending school through digital counselling methods.
- 5.10 Through the EPS and School Based Counselling Service the LA works in partnership with schools to empower schools to develop a whole-school approach appropriate to their setting. The services support a range of universal, targeted and specialist emotional wellbeing initiatives (as outlined later in the report). These interventions, through the provision of staff training and interventions with pupils, align with the objectives of the Health and Well-being curriculum AOLE, by enabling schools to support learners' mental health and emotional well-being and the development of positive relationships.
- 5.11 The EPS has developed a suite of training and interventions targeted to support both pupil and staff wellbeing and has employed and trained Assistant Educational Psychologists through Welsh Government (WG) funding (ALN Grant 20-21, Covid Recovery grant 2020-end of August 2021, ALN Learner Development and Whole School Approach (WSA) to Wellbeing grants 21-22 and 22-23) to deliver these to schools.
- 5.12 Since pupils returned to school in September 2020, the EPS has delivered 366 wellbeing training sessions to 4,118 staff (2020-2021: 168 training sessions delivered to 1,648 staff; 2021-2022: 129 training sessions delivered to 1,721 staff; 2022-2023 to the end of spring term: 69 training sessions delivered to 749 staff). This has included the 6-day ELSA (Emotionally Literate Support Assistant) training package, the 2-half day YMHFA (Youth Mental Health First Aid), Nurture and Human Givens training packages and ongoing half-termly supervision and coaching to both support school staff to implement these interventions and quality assure their integrity. In addition to this, the EPS has provided whole school twilight training on the following areas: emotion coaching, attachment, resilience, emotion regulation training (co-developed and delivered with Community Psychology), nurture training, trauma-informed training, positive psychology and staff wellbeing training. A series of 6 emotionally available adult workshops have also been developed to upskill staff to be able to support pupils in a trauma-informed way.
- 5.13 Comparison of pre-and post-staff evaluations has highlighted that over 90% of staff who attended the ELSA and/or YMHFA training reported their knowledge and skills had developed and it would inform their future practice. Inspection of pre-and post-data following ELSA interventions being run in schools has highlighted a significant post-intervention improvement on the areas being targeted by the ELSA interventions. This has included in areas of pupil wellbeing, anger, anxiety, emotional awareness, friendships, independence, growth mindset, social skills and self-esteem. Staff use of the YMHFA ALGEE model (which trains staff to: **A**pproach, assess and assist; **L**isten and communicate non-judgementally; **G**ive support and information; **E**ncourage the person to get appropriate professional help; and **E**ncourage other supports) has led to pupils being able to express their thoughts, seek help, stay in control and problem solve. An 8-week post-training follow-up survey sent out this term, highlighted that

100% of schools who responded stated that staff had used theory and strategies from the training in their practice; and one secondary school stated that staff had developed a package for teachers to embed a consistent approach across the school around neurodiversity and wellbeing following training.

5.14 Universal and Targeted interventions to pupils

- 5.15 Since September 2020, the EPS has delivered 133 targeted group and individual interventions to support pupil wellbeing (2020-2021: 10 group interventions; 2021-2022: 61 interventions; 2022-2023 to the end of spring term: 62 interventions). Interventions delivered have included: Lego Therapy (to develop pupils' social skills), Draw and Talk, Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) targeting pupil anxiety, low mood, and anxiety and perfectionism.
- 5.16 Over the current academic year, the EPS has also commissioned 6-week whole class Yoga groups for primary aged pupils to support pupil wellbeing needs and emotion regulation. 15 yoga groups were run in the Autumn term of 2022 and 14 groups are currently running in the spring/summer term of 2023.
- 5.17 Through WG funding the reach of the SBCS has been extended to include pupils in years 4 and 5 of primary school (in addition to the service provided to years 6-13) and Music Therapy support has been commissioned. Consequently, the SBCS has expanded and the range of support available has increased through more creative approaches (Art and Music Therapy) to engage and support pupils in addition to more traditional talking therapies. A school-based counselling return is collated annually for WG at the end of each academic year. The number of pupils in years 4-13 who completed an episode of counselling was: 335 pupils in 2020-2021; 469 pupils in 2021-2022. Data will be compiled for the current academic year (2022-23) at the end of this year.
- 5.18 The EPS provides a whole-school wellbeing training package for school staff, which is accompanied by a 39-week wellbeing programme. The educational psychologist can support staff to identify their wellbeing targets and tailor the wellbeing initiatives from the programme to meet the needs of the school. This whole school training has been offered to all schools to support them in response to the covid-19 pandemic and the impact that this has had on staff stress levels and their capacity to support and teach children and young people.
- 5.19 A school-based counsellor provides. b Mindfulness Foundations course for teaching staff. This course teaches school staff to become more self-aware and equips them with the skills to manage negative emotions more effectively and reduce stress.
- 5.20 The EPS has developed and delivered two, 6-week staff wellbeing support groups to one alternative education provision (Learning Pathway Centre in 2021-22) and a secondary school (in 2022-23). This is in recognition of the impact that low staff wellbeing and morale can have on staff relationships with pupils, in terms of the tolerance threshold and ability to respond empathically to pupils; and in turn the impact that poor teacher-pupil relationships can have on pupil wellbeing, learning and behaviour.
- 5.21 Comparison of pre-and post-intervention measures highlights that the wellbeing interventions have led to a significant positive impact on pupil wellbeing (e.g., the CBT groups led to a significant reduction in levels of anxiety; Lego therapy led to an improvement in pupil social skills both during the group sessions, in class and on the yard; and Draw and Talk led to a significant improvement in pro-social behaviour and a reduction in behaviour difficulties. Pupil and staff evaluations of Mindfulness training have been very positive: 97% of pupils who attended the Paws b (primary aged) Mindfulness course found it to be both enjoyable and useful. The main way pupils felt it supported them was '*knowing what to do when I wobble*'. Additional positive impacts included support with '*tests and exams*', '*concentration*' and '*worrying, feeling sad or being angry*'.

- 5.22 The SBCS is highly valued by schools and pupils who have received the service and has been found to have a significant positive impact on pupil mood as assessed using pre-and post-measures of the YP CORE, clinical reporting tool.
- 5.23 Positive staff evaluations have been received for the staff wellbeing training; 75% of staff rating the training as very/extremely effective in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding, and 76% reporting that it would inform their future practice. 100% of staff who attended the b Mindfulness Foundations course (secondary aged staff) rated the course as a 4 or above (out of 5) in terms of developing their knowledge, skills and understanding and influencing their future practice (with 1 being unsatisfactory and 5 being very good) and 87% said they would recommend the course to others as a way of supporting their health and wellbeing. Positive feedback has been received from the staff who attended the two staff wellbeing groups. Attendees particularly valued having a protected, empathic space to discuss those work-related factors that are impacting on their wellbeing, in addition to receiving advice around supportive practices that they could put in place to support their wellbeing.
- 5.24 Where pupils school attendance issues have become more entrenched and have developed into emotion-based school avoidance, the EPS has provided intensive, ongoing support. This support is aimed at identifying pupil needs, overcoming barriers to school attendance, identifying appropriate education placement and co-developing with the pupil and their family a reintegration plan back into an education setting. Since September 2020, 64 pupils have received this intensive level of support (in 2020-21: 17 pupils were supported; in 2021-2022: 22 pupils were supported; from September 2022 to end of Spring Term 2023: 25 pupils were supported). This support has, in a very few cases, also included access to individual CBT sessions. Additionally, the EPS has started work with 9 pupils this academic year from the newly formed Llais Centre pilot project. The Llais Centre has been created to help educational settings obtain an objective and person-centred overview of a learner's aspirations, goals, skills and needs. Llais means "voice" and the centre therefore works in a person-centred way to empower the learner, support the family system, and help educational settings to support pupils to engage with learning. This support has entailed working with pupils and their families to identify pupil views and needs and support re-integration planning into an appropriate education setting.
- 5.25 Outcome data shows staff have rated RLT training as highly effective at improving staff knowledge and of having an increased staff awareness of EBSA and strategies to support reintegration. As a consequence of the training, a larger proportion of secondary aged pupil's experiencing EBSA have been identified by school and are receiving support from their school and/or the LA.
- 5.26 EBSA support and the Llais Centre work has led to a better understanding of pupil needs and views and positive steps towards pupil reintegration to education. All of the pupils who have received intensive support for their entrenched EBSA have a person-centred reintegration plan in place and 21 of these pupils have reintegrated back into an education setting. Work has been completed with 3 of the 9 pupils from the Llais Centre project. The following outcomes have been established for these 3 pupils:
- 1 has reintegrated back into mainstream secondary school
 - 1 is due to start in one of the Learning Pathway Centres
 - 1 is accessing home tuition and is on the post 16 pathway
- 5.27 Positive pupil, parent and school feedback has been received from this work. Pupils have enjoyed working with the Llais Centre and having a report at the end of the support, they have felt better understood and commented that they now know the areas that they need to work on. Parents were optimistic about their child moving forward into a new school and building a brighter future; and school staff reported having a greater understanding of how best to support the pupil as a result of Llais involvement and as having used Llais advice and feedback to support the pupil in their new education setting. A detailed analysis is currently underway to identify when this level of support is most effective at supporting pupil

attendance/ reintegration planning (this will be linked to the complexity of pupil need, their context and how entrenched their attendance issues are). This analysis will help the LA to identify which pupils we can have the most impact with to target our resources to, and those pupils and contexts where we need to develop a different level or type of intervention in collaboration with other agencies (e.g., health, social care and the third sector).

- 5.28 In relation to the statutory Whole School Approach to Emotional Mental Wellbeing Framework, schools receive intensive support to complete and embed the self-evaluation tool, and to develop action plans which address school priorities. The LA is confident it can meet the Welsh Government target of overall engagement with 75%.

5.29 Conclusion

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on pupil wellbeing and behaviour and resulting referrals to agencies. This has also impacted on staff wellbeing. The LA has clear mechanisms in place for tracking pupil attendance and exclusions and utilises a Team around the School approach with schools who require more focused intervention. The LA applies a strategic approach to supporting pupil welfare through the delivery of whole school training to schools. This training aims to empower staff to both understand and support pupil wellbeing, behaviour and attendance by developing schools' universal and targeted provision. The LA has also provided specific interventions to those pupils who require a more specialist approach in either a group or individual setting to target their wellbeing and attendance. This latter work requires a highly bespoke intensive approach which has been possible through the provision of WG grant funding.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 The LA has a key responsibility to identify and address the impact that the Covid pandemic has had on its schools and education settings. The LA does this through consultation with schools (at a variety of levels, including through Head Teacher forums and via the work of the education directorate support teams) and through the ongoing tracking of pupil attendance and exclusion data. The consultation and analysis, in turn, informs the LA where to target resources, which it does through a multi-layered approach. This approach includes the offer of training to all schools to develop universal and targeted provision, to a Team Around the School approach, and through to access to more targeted, bespoke support for the most vulnerable learners who have been most impacted by the Covid pandemic.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report provides information and therefore an integrated impact assessment has not been completed at this time.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Staff costs to deliver staff training and interventions have been funded through access to Welsh Government funding provided in the LA Education Grants since 2020. In 2022/ 2023 these grants totalled circa £800k.
- 8.2 WG have confirmed a 3-year cycle of support for the WSA to Wellbeing grant, of which the year 2022/23 was the first year of the cycle. Currently the LA employs 11.5 fte staff (assistant educational psychologist and school-based counsellors) from the grant to deliver interventions. Welsh Government have advised indicative funding for ALN of £14.1m a year across Wales. The programmes for ALN are part of the LA Education Grant. The longer-term position remains unclear at present.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The EPS would be reliant on the continuation of Welsh Government funding to continue to finance the expanded SBCS and the Assistant EPs who deliver the wellbeing training and interventions under the supervision of the EPs and cognitive behaviour therapist.

The Education Welfare Service would also be reliant on additional funding to continue to provide one officer per cluster of schools. Current funding has been secured until March 2024.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The report reflects with views of the consultees.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing (Wales) 2021
Education Act 1996
Equality Act 2010
Social Services and wellbeing Act (2014)
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
Armed Forces Covenant (Wales)

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