

CYPE(6)-17-22 - Paper to note 17

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref: Pupil Absence
Ein cyf/Our ref: CYPE – Pupil Absence

6 September 2022

Dear Jayne,

Thank you for your letter of 6 July in relation to the CYPE Committee inquiry into pupil absence.

Additional information is provided below as requested.

Whether, and how school absence data is used to support early identification for mental health support?

We know that schools use attendance data to highlight concerns to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) which in turn could lead to a CAMHS referral; but I am interested in what more we can do to maximise attendance data to support early identification for mental health support. We intend to commission research to explore this, building on the existing research (published in November 2021), by Professor Ann John et al, which explored the association between school absence, exclusion, and pupils' mental health.

I will update the Committee on progress.

When the data on elective home education will be available?

We have received a report from Data Cymru, containing data on home educated children for 2021-22. The report, compiled by Data Cymru on behalf of Local Authorities, is intended for use for operational and management purposes and is not published. My officials will explore with the data owners whether a modified version can be made available for sharing. The official data, based on PLASC returns will be published in the autumn.

Once available the evaluation of the funding provided to local authorities to provide additional emotional, mental health and well-being support to young people.

Local authorities provide targets and information on how they intend to monitor and evaluate activity as part of their proposals to use their funding allocations, which were agreed in the summer of 2022. Towards the end of 2022-23 we will be contacting LAs to

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

provide final outturn information against their agreed proposals which will be used to assess the impact of the funding.

This in turn will feed into wider activity to evaluate the effectiveness of our whole school approach using the research we commissioned from Cardiff University, published in January 2022 on the development of a theory of change and evaluability assessment for the programme.

Our whole school approach is predicated on ensuring that children and young peoples' wellbeing is as valued as their progression and attainment. Over £12m of funding has been provided in the current year, as part of a package of over £43m over the next three years. Funding will be used to build resilience through the introduction of universal and targeted interventions in schools; training school staff on wellbeing; and ensuring that the wider system is able to support children and young people by ensuring they receive interventions appropriate to their need in a timely fashion.

As you are aware, additional funding was provided in 2021-22 for the provision of targeted person-centred support for Year 11 learners who are not attending school and are not likely to complete GCSEs.

Formal evaluation will take place at the end of September when data is submitted by LAs. Informal feedback from one LA includes the appointment of 4 Education Support Workers to support secondary schools. The Education Support Workers work with children and their families to address the barriers to education and promote the educational achievement, school attendance and integration of these children into formal education settings. Appointing the 4 education support workers has enabled this LA to meet the additional demands on the service and enable provision of more effective advice and support to families and support greater multi-agency working.

As discussed at committee, I will write with a further update on how the funding was used to support learners' attendance and the level of success these approaches have had, upon completion of our evaluation.

Whether the funding for Family Liaison Officers is ring-fenced at both local authority and school level? If not, what steps are being taken to ensure that this funding is being used for Family Liaison Officers, and not being absorbed into more general school spending?

Funding for Family Engagement Officers has been provided to Local Authorities via the Local Education Authority Grant (LEAG). The funding is ringfenced for the purpose of expanding the provision of Family Engagement Officers in schools serving disadvantaged communities and where attendance issues are particularly challenging.

Local Authorities have some discretion in how the funding is apportioned in order to respond to local need. We have provided Local Authorities with essential and desirable criteria to target this support.

We have also set out clear monitoring and reporting requirements for the funding, including: a short update report at the end of the Summer term; and completion of a monitoring form at the end of the funding period.

Further to this, schools which benefit from the funding will be required to co-operate with researchers to help us understand the impact of the funding and build an evidence base for future support. Some case studies will be developed to support this.

Whether the funding for counselling services, discussed during the Committee, goes directly to counselling services?

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide counselling services, with some providing these 'in-house' whilst other commission counselling from third party providers. In the current year we are providing local authorities with an additional £2.3m to support improvements in and an expansion of counselling provision, including extending appropriate support to the children below the current Year 6 threshold. LAs submitted proposals earlier in the year which included targets and information to enable us to monitor and evaluate provision. Towards the end of 2022-23 we expect LAs to provide us with further information enabling us to ensure that funding is having the expected impact.

We are aware, anecdotally, of pressures being placed on some children and young people as a result of sustained specialist teacher absence in secondary schools. For example, where a subject specialist has been away for a long period, and no adequate specialist cover is available. During these lessons, children are being asked to provide support to their peers which is causing stress and anxiety. Are you aware of this issue, and what do you feel can be done to address the issue?

Under local management of schools arrangements and the Staffing of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2006, head teachers and governing bodies are required to ensure there is an appropriate and effective workforce in place. This includes sourcing supply cover that is suitable for the needs of learners.

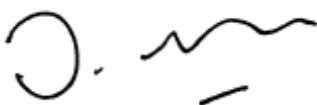
There are around 12,000 support staff and teachers registered in the supply category with the EWC. Overall recruitment and retention rates and numbers of supply staff registered throughout Wales show little evidence of concern, however, we are aware of anecdotal evidence that there are pockets of difficulty in recruiting to certain secondary subjects, in some geographical locations across Wales as well as with certain Welsh medium subject provision.

These recruitment issues for priority subjects are targeted via various policy programmes and financial incentives. For example, schools can pay recruitment bonuses if required and bursaries are available for those training in priority subjects. Additionally, the Welsh Government has a Programme for Government and Co-operation Agreement commitment to develop a new model for the employment of supply teachers.

Planning for the new model is currently underway and it is expected to be implemented during the 2023/24 academic year. The model's focus is on improvements to pay and conditions for supply staff but consideration is also being given to how the model can capture data on supply cover and how schools cover vacancies and absence. Improved data will inform policy and ensure that any identified gaps in specialist cover provision can be addressed.

I trust that this information is helpful and I look forward to receiving the Committee's report.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Miles AS/MS

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