

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

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Lynne Neagle MS
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

15 September 2023

Ongoing work relating to the mental health of children and young people

Dear Lynne,

As you know, the Children, Young People and Education Committee has committed to considering children and young people's emotional and mental well-being in all of our work. Recent areas of our work that have focused specifically on mental health include:

- Mental Health Support in Higher Education. Thank you for your engagement with our inquiry, and for your support in facilitating a joint Ministerial debate on our report in Plenary on 14 June.
- Transitions between CAMHS and AMHS. Thank you for your letter dated 23 May responding to our letter dated 31 March, which we considered during our meeting on 14 June.

Children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing continues to be a key concern for us, and is an issue we will continue to scrutinise with vigour. With that in mind, I would like to begin the 2023-24 academic year by making a renewed request for information to build on the work we have carried out to date, and to support us in our ongoing scrutiny in this crucially important area.

Before I do so, I want to acknowledge your personal commitment to improving children and young people's emotional and mental wellbeing. We know this is an issue that you are very driven to improve, which was particularly demonstrated during your tenure as Chair of our predecessor Committee. As you know, an important part of driving forward improvements for children and young people across Wales is effective scrutiny of the Welsh Government and other public bodies. The work of our predecessor Committee is testament to the improvements that can result from scrutiny.

We are also conscious that the current public services climate is incredibly challenging, both financially, but also in terms of the volume of service demands and the complexity of these demands being placed upon them. This makes scrutiny even more important. We know the power of constructive scrutiny and how it can improve things for children and young people in Wales.

We note in the final paragraph of your letter dated 23 May that you would welcome a discussion about:

"...how we can use the development of the successor to Together for Mental Health to consolidate this work [recommendations made in the past from a range of Senedd committees]. This would ensure that any recommendations we are continuing to work on shape future actions, ahead of the public consultation on the strategy."

You and I had an initial discussion during our recent meeting about your thinking on this, but collectively we would welcome more detail on how you wish to consolidate this work.

The specific issues about which we would appreciate more detail are set out below.

Transitions from CAMHS to AMHS

1. As I mentioned in the debate on our report on Mental Health Support in Higher Education, we would like clarity as to which recommendations from 'Sort the Switch' don't align with the programme of work already under way to improve transition services. This clarity will be helpful to our scrutiny of this important issue. We can also share this with the young people who came up with the recommendations of Sort the Switch so they can better understand what work is being done to improve transitions and how it aligns with their recommendations. By providing this clarity now we believe it will save work in the longer term, and will help us understand what areas are being specifically prioritised by the Welsh Government.
2. We would appreciate an update on the Delivery Unit's work on CAMHS, as requested in our original letter dated 31 March. In your response you say that all Health Boards have now received their individual reports, with further work ongoing on the development of a thematic report. However, in light of the broad findings, you have "commissioned the NHS Executive to work with Health Boards to develop a consolidated specification for CAMHS....." which will help with consistency, service expectations and "most importantly, a more streamlined and effective service for children and young people." You commit to give us an update in "due course". This sounds like a key development and we would welcome greater clarity on the timelines for development of this specification, and what plans, if any, there are to include children and young people in the development work. We would also ask if the thematic report can be shared with the Committee so we have a

better understanding of the overarching issues around CAHMS service delivery, and for an indication of when you expect this report to be completed.

3. Can you let us know what concrete actions came out of the transitions workshops held over winter 2022/23? In your response to our letter you note that the workshops provided some “useful insights and areas for improvements, including a strengthened framework for monitoring implementation of the guidance and the replacement or redesign of the young person passport.”
4. We asked for information on how the Welsh Government “more generally evaluate the effectiveness of transitions support and services across Wales.” We would appreciate more clarity on how this is being done, in particular how children and young people are involved in any evaluation of services and support.

The whole-school approach

Concerns about children and young people’s mental health have been raised regularly by pupils, school leaders and teaching staff during our engagement work as part of our [Senedd-long inquiry into the implementation of education reforms](#). We also note the concerns raised by certain members of the Welsh Youth Parliament during their [meeting with you on 10 July 2023](#) that Welsh Government’s high level policy and funding announcements may not be translating into change on the ground.

We have seen first-hand that there are pockets of excellent practice across Wales. However, as you yourself acknowledged on 10 July, we believe that the whole-school approach is being implemented inconsistently, with some schools responding to mental health issues among learners much more effectively than others.

We are currently considering how we can best add value to the important work that has been carried out by the Welsh Youth Parliament and others in relation to the whole-school approach. To help us with our deliberations, please could you respond to the following.

5. On [23 November 2022](#), you described a greater focus within Welsh Government on delivery and implementation of the whole-school/whole-system approach. Please could you provide an update on work undertaken to date and planned actions which reflect this focus, including reference to:
 - a. The work of Public Health Wales’ implementation co-ordinators, how well-established the network of co-ordinators is across Wales, and what impact this work is having.
 - b. An update on work to measure and evaluate the implementation of/outcomes from the whole-school approach, following the publication of the [evaluability assessment](#) in January 2022.

- c. Barriers identified so far to the successful implementation of the whole-school approach across Wales (for example, in relation to the capacity of school staff to support children and young people's emotional and mental wellbeing, and the availability of specialist support in local areas).

We would appreciate a response by 1 November.

I am copying in the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee because of their shared interest in these issues.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

