

Briefing for the Petitions Committee

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Medi 2016
Petitions Committee | 13 September 2016

Research Briefing:

Petition number: [P5-05-695](#)

Petition title: Introduce Compulsory Mental Health Education in Secondary Schools

Text of petition:

Mental Illness is an issue that has always been heavily stigmatised within society. The words 'Crazy', 'Nutjob', 'Insane' have become a normalised word to use when describing somebody hyper, and worse yet, to describe an individual having a psychiatric episode.

In October 2015, Plaid Ifanc Llanelli chair and Secretary Brett John and Ffion Rees proposed a motion to conference to introduce mental health education in Secondary schools. It passed with flying colours. However, we do not wish to stop there. We believe that by bringing in Mental Health education, we can tackle the stigma attached to Mental Illnesses before it has even properly begun within Secondary students. It will teach students a variety of lessons, such as how it is okay to not be okay, why Mental Illnesses develop, and the help that is available if they are suffering.

Welsh Government

Current position

Following [Professor Graham Donaldson's review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales](#), there will be a new curriculum available by September 2018 with all schools using it from September 2021.

In relation to the current curriculum, the [Education Act 2002](#) sets out the general requirements of the curriculum, that it should promote 'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society'.

Mental and emotional health and well-being is covered in the current curriculum by the Foundation Phase, National Curriculum and Personal and Social Education (PSE). Delivery of PSE is a statutory requirement of the basic curriculum in schools although content is at the discretion of schools. The [Personal and social education framework for 7 to 19-year-olds in](#)

[Wales](#) (2008) provides a recommended approach and learning outcomes. It is non-statutory guidance.

Health and emotional well-being is one of five themes of the PSE framework.

- At Key Stage 3 (age 14), 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.

New curriculum

As stated previously, [Professor Graham Donaldson's review of the curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales](#) will result in a new curriculum being available by September 2018 with all schools using it from September 2021. His report, [Successful Futures: Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales](#) (February 2015) states:

A continuing theme in the evidence was the importance of well-being, and in particular mental health. Schools need to care both for children and young people's physical and emotional needs and help them to take responsibility for their own lives, understanding the importance of, for example, diet and fitness and being confident in managing their own affairs.

The Welsh Government published its response to the Donaldson review in October 2015: [A curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life](#). Its website also provides information on the changes.

One of [the four purposes of the new curriculum](#) will be that children and young people will be healthy, confident individuals who [...]

- are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy;

- apply knowledge about the impact of diet and exercise on physical and mental health in their daily lives;
- know how to find the information and support to keep safe and well [...];
- have the skills and knowledge to manage everyday life as independently as they can.

The curriculum will comprise six 'Areas of Learning and Experience' (AoLE) one of which will be health and well-being. Schools will be able to use the AoLEs to determine their own curriculum and how it should be organised.

The new curriculum is being developed by a network of 'Pioneer Schools'. The Cabinet Secretary for Education has stated in a letter to the Committee (August 2016) that the Pioneer Schools are taking forward the design of the curriculum working with 'education experts, Welsh Government, Estyn, Higher Education, business and other key partners'. She went on to say that 'it is their collective expertise that will shape the new curriculum and they will consider evidence for all topics, including mental well-being'.

National Assembly for Wales

The Children, Young People and Education Committee of the Fourth Assembly published its ['Report into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\)'](#) in November 2014. The then Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford, subsequently launched the [Together for Children and Young People \(T4CYP\) programme](#) in February 2015. T4CYP is a three year programme, described as a 'multi-agency service improvement programme' intended to improve the emotional and mental health services provided for children and young people in Wales'.

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.