

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-879
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/06415/19

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
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24 June 2019

Dear Janet

Thank you for your letter of 13 June in relation to Petition P-05-879 from Annie Harris entitled - Add mental health to the mandatory teaching curriculum for all schools in Wales.

I will respond separately to each of the specific points raised in your letter:

How pupils should be able to access counselling services in schools;

School counselling provision has been operating successfully in schools for a number of years. Since April 2013 local authorities have been required, under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act to make reasonable provision of independent counselling services for children and young people aged between 11 and 18 on the site of each secondary school that it maintains and for pupils in Year 6 of primary school. The latest statistical release for *Counselling for Children and Young People 2017/18* (SFR 18/2019 March 2019), showed over 11,300 children accessed the service in 2017/18.

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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.

Despite this success there is always more we can do to improve provision. The Children, Young People and Education Committee's *Mind Over Matter* Report (April 2018) recommended that Welsh Government should assess the quality of the counselling available, not least how the service copes with increasing demand, tackles stigma and meets the needs of children and young people. This should include consideration of providing counselling support online and outside lessons / school, and for those younger than 11 years old.

We are working with local authorities and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy to assess provision and see what further improvements we can make to ensure the service is accessible and meets the needs of those young people accessing the service. This includes:

- updating and revising the school based counselling operating toolkit. When published, towards the end of 2019, the toolkit will provide a valuable resource for counselling providers on the best practice in delivering the service, but more importantly it will promote consistency of provision and equity of access to those young people who need the service.
- reviewing capacity and demand for the service to ensure it is able to meet current and future demand and that service delivery is available as and when it is required, for instance during summer holidays and outside of school hours.
- exploring how we can provide online support to children and young people, working alongside face-to-face provision. Many local authorities across Wales are already using online counselling resources to support their children and young people. We have asked Health Technology Wales to undertake a Topic Exploration Report to consider the evidence for self-directed and guided programs. It will enable us to work with partners and Health Technology Wales to identify those technologies that could benefit from fuller assessment, by for instance focussing on a particular brand of self-help tool, or a specific type of intervention that shows promise in a particular population.
- looking at the effectiveness of links with providers of other support including Local Primary Mental Health Support Services for children and young people.

How the mental health and wellbeing of pupils is incorporated into teacher training and ongoing professional development.

We recognise that students in initial teacher education need both an understanding of child development and knowledge to learn and engage with emerging issues and areas of concern around emotional and mental wellbeing for learners. This needs to form part of a wider understanding of interdependencies including ALN and the range of approaches to behaviour and pedagogy.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that well-being has traditionally not formed part of initial teacher training. However, Welsh Universities providing initial teacher training have confirmed that, in line with delivery of the new curriculum, well-being will form part of the new syllabus from September 2019. However, this will not be a stand-alone module, rather it will permeate all aspects of the syllabus.

The curriculum for ITE under the terms of the new accreditation is being developed by Universities in readiness for delivery from September 2019. We will have the opportunity to consider how well this has addressed a range of priorities, including child development and well-being. Based on an assessment of how well the new programmes have addressed

these issues, the criteria for accreditation which inform ITE curriculum development could be revised for programmes submitted for accreditation from 2021 onwards.

We are therefore working with the Universities to support their efforts to make learning resources and opportunities available that enhance the main programmes and which can be accessed by students in many education and related programmes across our Universities. Working through the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) Cymru we will develop materials which are voluntary and / or support enrichment. This could take the form of self-assessment training, and we will look to promote the use of online project and learning materials delivered through the innovative use of digital technology. There will also be a need to ensure any material is aligned with the exiting teacher training syllabus.

This proposal is still at its early stages and initial discussions with ITE providers have been positive. It was proposed that UCET Cymru would consider taking the lead role in the development and initial planning envisages that materials will be ready for use from September 2020. While it will only be available as non-accredited training initially, we will ensure that it is 'future proofed' and able to form part of accredited training as and when the existing syllabus is reviewed.

Recognising and promoting teaching excellence is a key objective of 'Our National Mission', our shared action plan for education reform, and is crucial to translating the new curriculum into practice.

Our own "made in Wales" approach to professional learning will be made available to every practitioner in schools across Wales and pulls together our new professional standards and the Schools as Learning Organisations approach to create a vision fit for our evolving system.

The new approach is centred on the learner and embodies the four purposes of the new curriculum. It is designed to be responsive to school, local and national priorities and encompasses the individual learning journey of all practitioners. It will also include a focus on supporting teachers to better understand and improve pupil mental health and well-being.

Integral to the national approach to professional learning is ensuring that professional learning for our practitioners is adequately resourced including both financial resources and time for teachers and leaders to engage with high quality professional learning opportunities.

Since the autumn, professional learning pioneers have been interacting with the draft curriculum through cycles of action enquiry supported by higher education partners. Cardiff Metropolitan University is supporting pioneers to explore the professional implications of the new Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE).

During the spring term, enquiry cycles extended to the wider community of schools, with some pioneers focusing on the implementation changes for schools including internal organisation, timetabling and subject specialism.

Pioneers leading on enquiries linked to the Health and Well-being AoLE focused on how schools will need to plan and develop their school curriculum to deliver this AoLE, exploring how pupil voice, community links and outside agencies could also inform the curriculum for this AoLE.

Early feedback reflected that practitioners were pleased that health and well-being has an equal footing within the other areas of learning and experience, acknowledged that the AoLE achieves an appropriate balance between knowledge and skills and recognised the need to be creative in delivery to consistently develop pupils' knowledge and skills.

Regional consortia will have a variety of ways of sharing the outcomes from the ongoing enquiry cycles as part of the wider professional learning offer. We will work with the regions to ensure that the relationship between pioneers and the wider community of schools delivers for all educational practitioners in Wales.

How mental health education is included in the current PSE curriculum

Personal and Social Education (PSE) forms part of the curriculum for all registered pupils aged 7 to 16 in maintained schools. It prepares learners to be personally and socially effective by providing learning experiences in which they can develop and apply skills, explore personal attitudes and values, and acquire appropriate knowledge and understanding.

The non statutory framework for PSE for 7-19 year olds supports schools to develop a broad and balanced PSE programme, structured around five themes including Health and Emotional Wellbeing.

The framework is designed to support and provide scope for schools to allow learners to develop respect for themselves and others, value and celebrate diversity and equality of opportunity locally, nationally and globally.

The five themes in the framework are:

- Active citizenship;
- Health and emotional well-being;
- Moral and spiritual development;
- Preparing for lifelong learning; and
- Sustainable development and global citizenship.

Schools have the flexibility to select appropriate topics from the PSE framework as contexts for learning. It is the responsibility of schools to plan and deliver a broad, balanced programme to meet the needs of their learners. Schools can work with specialist organisations on aspects of PSE provision.

Through the Health and Emotional Wellbeing theme, learners can be helped to maintain their emotional and physical health, be enabled to explore their feelings, develop self-awareness, self-respect and develop their self-esteem.

At Key Stage 2, learners build on the skills, attitudes and values, and knowledge and understanding they have started to acquire and develop during the Foundation Phase.

Learners should be given opportunities to:

- take increasing responsibility for keeping the mind and body safe and healthy; and
- feel positive about themselves and be sensitive towards the feelings of others.

The requirement to teach the current National Curriculum is still in force and will continue for school year groups until such time as they move onto the new curriculum.

I launched the new draft curriculum and assessment arrangements for feedback on 30 April which is accessible via this link: <https://hwb.gov.wales/>. The feedback period runs until 19 July and may be of interest to the Petitioner in this case.

The refined Curriculum for Wales 2022 will then be made available in January 2020 for use in September 2022 by primary schools and for year 7 pupils in secondary schools. The curriculum will then be rolled out on a year by year basis in secondary schools.

I hope this letter clarifies the position on the issues you have raised.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kirsty Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

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Minister for Education