

Well-being ambassadors in schools

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 21 January 2020
Petitions Committee | 21 Ionawr 2020

Reference: RS19/11038-7

Petition number: P-05-924

Petition title: Ensure that every school in Wales has Wellbeing Ambassadors

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that every school in Wales introduces trained Wellbeing Ambassadors, so that every child has an opportunity to receive peer support from role model students who have been trained to be a buddy to pupils who are vulnerable at break and lunchtimes, who will report issues of bullying and just be there as a friend to pupils who maybe feel lonely at specific times throughout the day. We hope the Well being Ambassadors' Roles will develop/evolve to run initiatives in schools, within county and nationally, to ensure that a clear message of zero tolerance to bullying is campaigned and that the well being of all pupils is placed at the highest of importance at each school, to further support the rights of the child. We hope that this initiative will go to further support reducing the amount of bullying witnessed in school across Wales, to ensure every child feels safe and happy at schools throughout Wales.

Additional Information: In 2016, we were chosen to represent Wales as part of the ENABLE project, a UK initiative to pilot lessons on anti-bullying. Part of the initiative involved training pupils to peer support others. However, we decided to take this a step further by training pupils to become anti-bullying ambassadors. After much discussion with our Senedd Ysgol, we evolved the ambassador scheme, changing its name to wellbeing ambassadors. We wanted to move away from using the word bullying too often as we felt pupils



didn't understand the difference between conflict and bullying. We also wanted pupils to know that at the forefront, wellbeing is our priority. Pupils who are part of the scheme surf areas around the school, spotting pupils who are alone or if they see bullying happening they report to the closest adult that they find, from Headteacher to dinner supervisors.

We meet once a month as a group and every year we evolve the scheme further. Currently we are looking at buddy benches so pupils who do feel alone can take a seat and a wellbeing ambassador will be there to support them. Many of our ambassadors also sit on the Junior Safeguarding Board as a result.

PRIORITY OF WELL-BEING IN WELSH SCHOOLS

Welsh Government strategy

The Welsh Government has sought to increase the level of priority given to pupil well-being in the education improvement agenda. This is one of the main differences between its education action plan, *Education in Wales: Our national mission 2017-2021*, published in September 2017, and its predecessor, *Qualified for Life*. One of the three enabling objectives of the action plan is 'Strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity and well-being'. The plan states:

Children and young people who have **strong relationships and a positive sense of self** – and who can understand and **manage their own health and emotions** – are in a better position to reach their full potential in the future. [my emphasis]

The Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams AM, told an Association of Directors of Education in Wales' (ADEW) conference in January 2018 that '**we are at a turning point** in how we deal with the wellbeing of children and young people'. She said it must be part of the school ethos and implemented across the board as schools have a big role to play and teachers are well placed to notice changes in pupils' behaviour.

Estyn inspections

Well-being features more prominently than previously in the *Common Inspection Framework*, which Estyn has used since September 2017. One of the inspection areas of the framework is 'Well-being and attitudes to learning'. Evidence *Estyn submitted* to the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee in autumn 2017 stated it had '**strengthened [its] focus on emotional wellbeing in [their] new inspection arrangements**' and included extracts of relevant guidance to its inspectors.

A whole school approach to emotional and mental health

The Welsh Government is developing a 'whole-school approach' to supporting pupils' emotional and mental health. This follows an *inquiry undertaken by the CYPE Committee*, which reported in April 2018 and highlighted the **need for a 'step-change'** in how children and young people's needs in this area are met.

The Welsh Government established a *Ministerial Task and Finish Group*, co-chaired by the Minister for Education and the Minister for Health and Social Services to take forward the whole school approach to emotional well-being and mental health, as part of a whole system approach which also recognises the links between mental and physical well-being. As the Minister for Education's letter to this Committee regarding the petition notes, the Welsh Government is drafting **new guidance for schools** on embedding this whole school approach.

ANTI-BULLYING GUIDANCE

The Welsh Government has recently published *new anti-bullying guidance*, replacing initial guidance (*Respecting Others, 2003*) and supplementary materials (2011).

The **new guidance is statutory**, which has been welcomed by the Children’s Commissioner for Wales who had previously criticised the proposed non-statutory, advisory status of the guidance. The Commissioner, Sally Holland, told the CYPE Committee on 6 November 2019:

... I'm absolutely thrilled because the Minister has announced today that the guidance will be statutory, which has been a key call from my office for a number of years, and that **schools will be required to record and monitor bullying incidents**. They will be required to monitor the effectiveness of their interventions to prevent bullying and to tackle bullying. They'll be required to look at the outcomes on bullying incidents. **Local authorities will also have statutory requirements** to look at the effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies across a local authority. (...)

... our response [to the consultation on the draft guidance] was ... that it wasn't good enough in the draft, because the draft was non-statutory. This is a really good example, I think, of a Minister actually—because the draft didn't even give the option on statutory—really listening to feedback and it being a really genuine consultation, because she's responded to that feedback and has announced today the advanced anti-bullying work that's going forward. So, I think it's got a much bigger chance now of being consistently effective.

The Children’s Commissioner highlighted in her annual report 2018-19 that **bullying remains a key priority for children and young people**, as demonstrated by her all-Wales Beth Nawr consultation, which shows it was their second highest concern.

THE NEW CURRICULUM FOR WALES

The Welsh Government, together with ‘Pioneer Schools’, has developed a new ‘Curriculum for Wales’, following the Successful Futures review by Professor Graham Donaldson in 2015.

The new curriculum will be built around four purposes and six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE), one of which is Health and Well-being. The Welsh Government published the draft Curriculum for Wales in April 2019 and following a feedback exercise is now refining it ahead of its publication in January 2020.

The new Curriculum for Wales is due to be introduced from **September 2022** on a phased basis. It will initially be taught in primary school and Year 7 before rolling into Year 8 in 2023/24 and so on as these pupils progress through school until they reach Year 11 in 2026/27.

The Welsh Government has emphasised that the new Curriculum for Wales is **purpose-driven** rather than simply defined by its content. There are therefore no ‘programmes of study’ and there will be comparatively less prescription of what must be taught than in the current curriculum. The new curriculum will be based on a three-pronged approach of **Knowledge, Skills and Experience**.

Within each AoLE, are a series of ‘**What Matters**’ statements, which will provide the basis of what is taught. One of the five What Matters statements in the Health and Well-being AoLE is ‘**How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being**’.

The draft statutory guidance on the Health and Well-being AoLE states:

The Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience will help learners to understand how mental health and emotional well-being influence the way people think, feel and behave. It will also help learners explore the connections between life experiences and mental and emotional well-being.

Through understanding the conditions that promote and impact on mental health and emotional well-being, learners will be supported to manage the experiences that they encounter. They will also be supported to develop their ability to focus their attention and to be aware of how they are thinking and feeling during their experiences. In addition, they will explore how experiences are perceived. This will give learners the opportunities to build skills of self-awareness and empathy. Self-awareness allows learners to be receptive and reflective, which helps them to adapt their behaviour and actions to different situations. This in turn enables learners to act with empathy, compassion and kindness towards themselves and others.

Further information about curriculum reform can be found in the Assembly Research Service's blog articles of May 2019 and January 2019.

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.