

Inquiry into the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders (Cymru)

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 18,000 heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK.

ASCL Cymru represents school leaders in more than 90 per cent of the secondary schools in Wales.
- 2 ASCL Cymru has been fully supportive of the increased emphasis given to the emotional and mental health of children and young people, and supports the principles outlined in the T4CYP programme.
- 3 Our responses below are based on feedback from members, and inevitably are not necessarily statistically reliable, nor are they able to respond to all the questions you ask to be considered. However, they do represent first-hand experiences of the system and outline a number of concerns that are recurrent and consistently raised.
- 4 The overwhelming response from our members, though is that whilst there is an abundance of good intention with relation to this issue, there is a significant lack of consistency in its delivery across Wales. This lack of consistency has resulted in a real “postcode lottery”, and means that whilst some young people may be well supported, others in a neighbouring authority are not.
- 5 In many cases, CAMHS referrals take an extraordinarily long time to initiate, meaning that the young person does not have timely access to professional support. This appears to our members to be the result of CAMHS being short-staffed and with a huge (and increasing) workload. There is sympathy for those working under this level of pressure, but this does not help the young people who are left without support.
- 6 Schools are now responsible for drawing up support plans, but there is a high level of frustration expressed by members about the difficulty of doing this.
- 7 It is incredibly hard for schools to arrange effective inter-agency meetings, as many of those who ought to be involved are very busy and prioritise their attendance accordingly. As schools have no authority to insist on attendance at these meetings, it frequently means that either the meeting has to be postponed (past the point where timely support can be provided), or the meeting has to go ahead without all the appropriate agencies being present.
- 8 We appreciate that there is a perception about over-referral of young people to CAMHS; however, our members and their staff are the ones that have to deal with these young people on a daily basis. Their understanding of the problems and needs of young people with emotional and mental health issues are grounded in their need to

ensure not only the support of the individual, but also the impact that the lack of support may have on the other young people who are taught and live alongside them.

- 9 Members report that some mental health professionals are not fully trained in the T4CYP programme, and therefore may not realise the importance of communicating effectively and in a timely manner with schools. Again, this may be due to lack of staff and workload pressures.
- 10 It is enormously frustrating for schools who have identified a young person in need of urgent support and are unable to gain access quickly to someone who can offer practical advice.
- 11 In some authorities there appears to be a significant shortage of Educational Psychologists. CAMHS will not consider a referral without an EP report, and yet because of the shortage of EPs, it can take two to three weeks before an assessment can be made and a report written. In the meantime, the young person is receiving no support.
- 12 In some authorities there is well co-ordinated and effective provision of school nurses, counsellors and other outside support. These can have a significant impact, and support teaching staff in their delivery of Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE). As the new curriculum is prepared, it is critical that there is a national consistency of support and provision.
- 13 Unfortunately, currently there is not this level of consistency, and some areas schools are left without appropriate support, or with a tiny allocation of resource that is simply not able to meet the needs of the school.
- 14 There is much good work that is done at an individual school level to help young people in building resilience and support their emotional wellbeing. However, in many cases this is done by classroom teachers who have no formal training but are “filling the gap”. Again there is a real need for a consistent approach and funding to ensure that proper training and proven resources are made available.
- 15 In the best authorities this work is given a high priority and schools benefit from effective support to the benefit of their young people. Our frustration is based on the lack of consistency that leaves some young vulnerable people unsupported, at a time when quick and effective interventions could prevent manageable problems becoming major issues, which subsequently could have a major impact on their wellbeing.

Conclusion

- 16 I hope that this is of value to your inquiry. ASCL Cymru would be happy to contribute to further discussions.

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Director of ASCL Cymru
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