

NSPCC Cymru/Wales

Response to:

Thinking Positively: Emotional Health and Well-being in Schools and Early Years Settings

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About us:

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. The NSPCC's purpose is to end cruelty to children. We seek to achieve cultural, social and political change - influencing legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.

The NSPCC exists to end cruelty to children through a range of activities designed:

- to help children who have suffered abuse overcome the effects of such harm;
- to prevent children from suffering abuse;
- to prevent children from suffering significant harm as a result of ill-treatment;
- to help children who are at risk of such harm; and
- to work to protect children from further harm.

The NSPCC has more than 180 teams and projects throughout Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Their work includes:

- family support, assessment, counselling and therapy to children and families experiencing abuse;
- investigations into allegations of child abuse; and
- work within schools and other youth organisations to provide a voice for children and advocate their rights.

Since February 2006 NSPCC has also delivered the ChildLine service, the UK's free, 24-hour, confidential helpline for children and young people.

Introduction

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the proposals around promoting the emotional health and well-being of children and young people in schools and early years settings in Wales.

We agree with the need to provide guidance to schools and early years settings in order to meet all of the aims set out at the start of the proposals. The development of school-based counselling services in Wales is a significant step forward in providing children and young people with someone to turn to if they have a problem. However it is crucial that this development does not replace the pastoral responsibilities of education professionals to support the emotional development of all pupils. This guidance will play a crucial role in ensuring that there is wrap around support for any pupil experiencing difficulties.

We acknowledge that in Wales some schools have long recognised that they have a role in supporting young people's wider development and in particular the role wellbeing has in promoting educational attainment. However, some schools have not embraced the concept of supporting the 'whole child' through their pastoral care, ethos, teaching, curriculum and activities beyond the school day. We believe it is vital in this respect for schools and early years settings to understand and realise their role in promoting emotional health and well-being and we hope this good practice guidance can assist in this.

We have chosen to respond by highlighting the significant issues we have with in each section of the guidance. We were unclear as to how exactly responses were to be tailored and believe the influx of varied methods may not easily be cross-matched and co-ordinated.

Section 1: Background and context

1. Introduction

Despite welcoming the development of this guidance we are disappointed with the content of the document and believe there needs to be some considerable changes and additions made before it can be claimed the proposals reflect a comprehensive guide for professionals. At present we find it difficult to see how an education professional will practically apply this good practice guide in its current format.

We welcome the recognition of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to the UNCRC via the seven core aims for children and young people in this guidance.

In 2007 the UNCRC Monitoring Group in Wales recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government, alongside key statutory partners, should (amongst many others):

- continue to promote participation in schools with strong emphasis on excluded groups and expand participation to areas such as recruitment of teachers, curricula, school performance and inspections
- Take all necessary measures to ensure local education authorities and schools implement effectively anti-bullying policies within schools
- Survey children's experiences of bullying in Wales annually
- Take measures to ensure effective delivery of the PSE Framework within schools
- Develop and embed the principles of the UNCRC across the curriculum and in initial teacher training programmes.

Furthermore, within the Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations to the UK State Party in October 2008¹, it was recommended that the State party address issues around reproductive health education, information on toxic substances with support when necessary, tackling bullying and violence in schools and strengthening of children's participation in all matters of school. Within this guidance it would be useful to explicitly highlight a rights based approach, indicating how delivering emotional health and well being in schools not only makes children's rights a reality, but also addresses the concluding observations raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. This would also then fit with the new PSE Framework, which includes for the first time provision for children and young people to be taught about the UNCRC and their rights.

¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008) Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Geneva.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to address this gap and ensure that the final draft of this guidance elaborates on a rights based approach to delivering emotional health and well being to pupils, which includes highlighting the specific articles of the Convention as well as the relevant concluding observations from October 2008

Promoting emotional health and well-being in children and young people is crucial to safeguarding. It helps them to learn about personal safety and improve their understanding of pro-social and respectful relationships, including parenting and family relationships, as well as abusive behaviours. It also helps children and young people develop the skills to ask for help. This can contribute to a reduction in childhood abuse and neglect². Similar evidence shows that it is also an important intervention for preventing bullying.

We strongly believe there should be a specific section in the background chapter of this guidance relating to the duty of education professionals to safeguard and protect children and young people. Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 outlines the duty on local education authorities and school governors to exercise their functions to safeguard and protect children and young people³. In April 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government published *Safeguarding Children in Education: The role of local authorities and governing bodies under the Children Act 2002* as statutory guidance. The role of education in safeguarding children and young people is also outlined in *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004*. The section on safeguarding should highlight these pieces of guidance and reiterate that if a education professional is worried about the safety of a child they should follow standard child protection procedures.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales strongly recommends that a clear section is added at the beginning of this guidance restating the child protection and safeguarding responsibilities of education professionals and schools. This section should also make clear the link between positive mental health and safeguarding.

We are surprised not to see any consultation work with children and young people across Wales currently included within the proposals. Article 12 of the UNCRC details the right of

² Harries, J (2006) Promoting Personal Safety in PHSE, London.

³ 175 Duties of LEAs and governing bodies in relation to welfare of children

(1) A local education authority shall make arrangements for ensuring that the functions conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

(2) The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school.

(3) The governing body of an institution within the further education sector shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the institution are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children receiving education or training at the institution.

(4) An authority or body mentioned in any of subsections (1) to (3) shall, in considering what arrangements are required to be made by them under that subsection, have regard to any guidance given from time to time (in relation to England) by the Secretary of State or (in relation to Wales) by the National Assembly for Wales.

(5) In this section—

- “child” means a person under the age of eighteen;
- “governing body”, in relation to an institution within the further education sector, has the meaning given by section 90 of the Further and Higher Education Act [1992 \(c. 13\)](#);
- “maintained school” means a community, foundation or voluntary school, a community or foundation special school or a maintained nursery school.

children and young people to express their views freely in all matters affecting their lives. From some recent consultation work we have undertaken, the NSPCC has come to know more about the issues children and young people talk about in relation to emotional health and well-being. The children and young people we spoke to believed emotional health and well-being education needed to be in place at both primary and secondary schools, and that there needed to be a range of accessible people to turn to, both inside and outside of schools. One of which was ChildLine, a service provided by the NSPCC. It is crucial that the delivery of information on positive emotional health is informed by how children and young people want to receive information if it is to be effective.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to consider how they can facilitate the input of children and young people to the proposals set out within this consultation in a meaningful and long-lasting way. Children and young people ought to feel that they have made a significant contribution to the proposals and that their views are given due weight within further developments. This must be thought of at the outset and not as an afterthought. These views must then be integrated into the good practice guidance to ensure that delivery is meeting the needs of children and young people.

2. Understanding the issues: Key terms and concepts

NSPCC Cymru/Wales holds concerns around the section relating to definitions and terminology, particularly the “Emotional health, well-being, psychological well-being and mental health” section. The sources of important definitions contained within this section are missing and as a consequence of this, it is unclear as to whether these come from existing strategies or not. We know from our experiences in child protection that a common language is crucial in ensuring successful multi-agency working. Without the clarity over where the definitions have originated and a clear statement recognising that these are definitions agreed across professional boundaries we are concerned that professionals will be using the same terms, but essentially speaking a different language.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales urges the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that the definitions offered within this document are properly referenced and are commonly agreed across professional boundaries.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes the proposed role of education professionals set out within the document is vitally important. It is suggested that “the emphasis throughout is on the need for staff at schools and in early years’ settings to recognise that they are often the first point of contact and so have responsibility for initial assessment and intervention and for linking with a range of partners” (pg3). We agree that as professionals within Tier 1 of the CAMHS Strategic Framework⁴, teachers and other school staff play a vital role in identifying early signs of mental distress and signposting to other more specialist services as appropriate. However, professionals need to be empowered and enabled to do this by effective multi-agency training in order to meet the needs of the child or young person. We are concerned with the lack of appropriate and necessary training specified within the proposals, both through Initial Teacher Training courses and then ongoing training throughout an education professionals career.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales notes with concern that some of our practitioners have encountered situations where an education professional has identified a vulnerable child, but then does not know where to go for help or has found it difficult to locate or refer to appropriate services. This is frustrating in terms of accessing support services for pupils. It is important that all schools know the type and the availability of services provided by both local authorities and other sectors. It is also important that the infrastructure is in place to support any child or young person identified as needing a further service.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that high quality and continuous training for *all* professionals, particularly those with responsibility under Tier 1, is accessible across Wales. This should include raising awareness of *Everybody’s Business*⁵, the CAMHS Concept and the variety of roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of children and young people around mental health. This should also include

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government (2001) *Everybody’s Business: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – Strategy Document*, Cardiff.

⁵ Welsh Assembly Government (2001) *Everybody’s Business: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – Strategy Document*, Cardiff.

ensuring that Initial Teacher Training courses provide appropriate information and dedicated time to exploring issues around communicating positive emotional health messages and dealing with some of the challenging issues education professionals may face. Any ongoing training should include localised information around what services are available and appropriate referral routes.

We are disappointed that looked after children, nor children and young people with a disability are not necessarily considered as fully as they should be within the consultation. These children and young people, alongside other groups such as those that are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are extremely vulnerable and must be made a priority in any guidance relating to emotional health and well-being.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to address this and make the appropriate amendments to the consultation in order to address the potential needs of the most vulnerable children and young people across Wales, even if this means further and more specific guidance.

Section 2: Promotion and Intervention

3. Risk and resilience

We are slightly concerned with the continuous reference made to the resilience of children and young people. NSPCC Cymru/Wales is very aware of how resilient children and young people can be but we believe this should not be taken for granted. Professionals who have direct contact with children and young people, including those at educational settings, need to ensure that those who appear more resilient are using healthy coping strategies and are fully supported with any potential need they may have. It is crucially important that no assumptions are made around the perceived resilience of a child or young person by an adult. ChildLine, a service provided by the NSPCC, received and counselled over 176,000 children and young people between March 2007 and April 2008. Childline can often be the only source of help and support for these young people, with many who contact us not in touch with any other agency

Professionals must not work only to a crisis management approach here, by prioritising those children and young people who appear less resilient than others. This is the approach some children and young people are currently experiencing when accessing CAMHS in Wales and where they do not meet the high thresholds, are often left unsupported and for considerable lengths of time, allowing their problems to escalate. This good practice guide is for all children and young people, recognising that some may be more vulnerable than others due to their experiences.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to look again at the risk and resilient section and take a more holistic approach to the needs of all children and young people across Wales and not focus on what could be perceived as crisis management. We also urge the Welsh Assembly Government to produce a clearer summary for teachers and other educational staff to take away and use practically to identify such issues amongst the children and young people they come into contact with.

5. Major influences on mental health and emotional well-being in schools and early years settings

Avoiding bullying and dealing with bullying behaviour

We welcome the identification of bullying as one of the major influences on the emotional health and well-being of children and young people in schools and early years settings. In November 2008 NSPCC produced a ChildLine Casenote on bullying, which was based on detailed analysis of calls. The Casenote can be downloaded via:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/publications/Serials/ChildLineCasenotes/bullying_wda61701.html

Between April 2007 and March 2008 32,562 children and young people called ChildLine specifically to talk about bullying problems. This represents 18 per cent of all callers, making bullying the most common specific reason that children and young people call ChildLine. These calls make us only too aware of the negative mental health impact bullying can have.

The United Nations Committee also reported within its recently published Concluding Observations that the State Party should “intensify its efforts to tackle bullying and violence in schools, including through teaching human rights, peace and tolerance”⁶.

Whilst a great deal has been done to improve the way in which schools respond to bullying, we still believe that there needs to be greater co-ordination and sharing of best practice. The success of local anti-bullying co-ordinators in driving change in schools and providing advice and support can be evidenced in Cardiff, as outlined in the guidance itself. We firmly believe that these posts provide schools with the support they need to combat bullying.

Based on the evidence from the ChildLine service and the further recommendation made by the UN Committee, NSPCC Cymru/Wales would urge the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that local or regional anti-bullying coordinators are established across Wales to provide support and advice to schools and other agencies on issues relating to bullying, including disseminating best practice and organising local training events. These roles would help to ensure that the Respecting Others guidance produced by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2003⁷ is reflected in practice and that professionals have the support they need to put in place successful interventions.

Sex and relationships

NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that it is crucial here to refer to Circular 11/02: Sex and Relationships Education in Schools, which provides clear information on what should be taught at each key stage. Our experience from the ChildLine service has been that the delivery of sex and relationships education in schools has not engaged children and young people, particularly some of those who would be viewed as most vulnerable. In March 2007 Estyn undertook an evaluation of the delivery of Circular 11/02⁸ in Welsh schools and identified a series of recommendations for schools, including taking into account the views of pupils when reviewing sex and relationships education.

We are disappointed that these findings have not been reflected in this guidance to enhance the delivery of this important aspect of emotional health and well-being. NSPCC also produce a number of materials that can help professionals discuss inappropriate relationships with children and young people, which we would be happy to discuss further with officials.

We further believe that it is important either under this section or in a separate section to highlight the need for children and young people to understand an abusive relationship and that if they are experiencing any problems or issues that it is not their fault and they should seek help. This should also cover agencies that can help them and key contact numbers, such as ChildLine.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales urges the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that the recommendations made by the Estyn review in 2007 are included in this guide as an example of good practice in the delivery of sex and relationships education. The Welsh Assembly Government should also strongly consider highlighting the need to discuss issues around abuse with children and young people so that they can keep themselves safe and seek help and advice if they are worried about any situation.

Domestic abuse

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is very disappointed that under this section domestic abuse has not been specifically referenced. The Welsh Assembly Government’s *Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy*⁹ recognised domestic abuse as a child protection issue and the negative emotional impact living with domestic abuse can have on children and young people. Alongside the strategy the Welsh Assembly Government also published *Good*

⁶ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008:16) Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 44 of the Convention, Geneva

⁷ National Assembly for Wales (2003) *Respecting others: anti-bullying guidance*. National Assembly of Wales Circular, 23/3003. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

⁸ Estyn (March 2007) *Sex and relationships education*.

⁹ Welsh Assembly Government (2005) *Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy*. Cardiff

*Practice on Domestic Abuse: Safeguarding Children and Young People*¹⁰, which is specific good practice guidance relating to headteachers and governing bodies to protect children involved in domestic abuse situations and to undertake preventative work. We are deeply disappointed at the apparent lack of awareness about this guidance and the failure to provide specific reference to it. Many children and young people continue to suffer in silence as victims of domestic abuse, some of whom carry the emotional scars well into adulthood. Schools can play a crucial role in supporting identifying and supporting these children and young people.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales strongly recommends an extra section is added in relation to domestic abuse, recognising the good practice guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly Government and the emotional damage living with domestic abuse can have on children and young people.

Section 3: Further information and resources

Useful Resources and sources of support

Despite the list of useful resources and sources of support provided within the final section of the consultation, we believe the Welsh Assembly Government could make this a far more useful and comprehensive list. We believe that through the consultation process, many organisations will inform them of their own resources and those that are missing.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales would like to highlight here the resources that we have developed around the area of emotional health and well-being and wider. Listed below are those that we feel fit well within the list but are currently missing. We would be happy to discuss these further with the relevant Officials.

ChildLine

ChildLine on 0800 1111 is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in danger or distress. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advice and protect children and young people. ChildLine is a service within the NSPCC. In Scotland it is delivered by CHILDREN 1ST on behalf of the NSPCC. Calls to ChildLine on 0800 1111 are confidential, but if a child is in immediate danger the counsellor will let the caller know if they have to break confidentiality and contact the emergency services to save the child's life.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales Helpline

The NSPCC Cymru/Wales Helpline (**0808 800 5000**) is a free bilingual service offering advice and support to anyone with concerns about the welfare of a child. Lines are open between 10am and 6pm Monday to Friday. Calls outside of these hours are transferred to the 24 hour NSPCC Helpline service. The helpline also provides advice by email at helplinecymru@nspcc.org.uk and a textphone service for people who are deaf or hard of hearing on 0808 100 1033.

NSPCC Inform

NSPCC inform is the UK's only free, specialised online child protection resource: www.nspcc.org.uk/inform

Others include:

Harries, J (2006) *Promoting Personal Safety in PSHE*, Paul Chapman Publishing, London.

We urge the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure such resources are included and made clear within any final guidance sent out to schools and early years settings to enable them to develop emotional health and well-being policies and enable a whole-school approach to be taken to safeguard all children and young people across Wales.

Conclusion

¹⁰ Welsh Assembly Government (2004) *Good Practice on Domestic Abuse: Safeguarding Children and Young People in Wales*. Cardiff

NSPCC Cymru/Wales hopes that the points we have highlighted above will be taken on board to ensure that this good practice guidance is as comprehensive and useful as possible to education professionals. We would be happy to discuss any of our points with the relevant Officials.

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