



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group on a Whole-School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing**

DATE **07 September 2018**

BY **Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education**
Vaughan Gething, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Services

In April the Children, Young People and Education Committee published *Mind over Matter*, the findings from its inquiry into the emotional and mental health support for children and young people. The report called for emotional and mental wellbeing and resilience to be a stated national priority and in July we debated the report and our formal response in Plenary. Quite rightly, there was considerable strength of feeling among AMs about this important topic. Since the debate, we have reflected on what more we can do to recognise and accelerate the pace of the good work that is already taking place in this area, and achieving a truly whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing.

We fully recognise the importance of supporting the emotional wellbeing of our children and young people. We have already stated this as a priority in *Prosperity for all* – highlighting the important role of schools in identifying problems early and the need to provide children and young people with the tools to cope with the stresses of growing up. We have also made mental health one of five national priorities, to challenge all of Welsh Government to consider its impact on mental health and wellbeing.

We have been delivering in recent years across a number of areas and with a range of partners. This includes developing the new curriculum with its Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience; supporting the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes; and launching the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service school in-reach programme in 2017. However, we agree with the Committee that further action needs to be taken, underpinned by planning, resource and commitment to deliver real change.

Taken together our work, and that of our partners across statutory and third sectors, has the potential to deliver the step-change we all seek. However, we recognise this has become a crowded landscape with a multitude of partners and initiatives all contributing to this agenda. As such, there is potential for disconnect, duplication and competition in an area

where all are working with the best intentions and in the best interests of the young person.

We have therefore agreed a new focus on a 'whole school' approach to mental health and wellbeing for children and young people to support wider and ongoing reforms of mental health support. As part of a multi-agency approach, schools have an important role to help deliver the ambitious goal of building a population of emotionally resilient and mentally healthy children and young people in Wales.

A 'whole school' approach would ensure that mental health and wellbeing becomes central to the way schools work and will touch on many different aspects of school life. This means that the school ethos will support the broader mental health and wellbeing of learners, which in turn will help to prevent other issues from developing or escalating, including mental health issues.

We have also agreed to convene a Joint Ministerial Task and Finish Group to accelerate our work to achieve this whole school approach. We will jointly chair the group, which will bring together the key strategic stakeholders from across education, health, the wider public and third sectors. Lynne Neagle, AM, has agreed to act as an observer on the group in her role as chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee and will fully participate in its work. The group will enable us to move the next stages of this agenda forward at pace; knitting the various strands of activity together; highlighting gaps in provision; and ensuring energy and resources are targeted to have the maximum benefit.

The Ministerial Task and Finish Group will be supported by a stakeholder reference group, to ensure the broad range of agencies with a role in delivering a whole school approach have a meaningful engagement in this programme. Central to this will be ensuring that children and young people also have the opportunity to directly feed in their views to inform the activity which directly impacts upon them.

The detailed work-programme for these two groups is yet to be agreed, but will be informed by a multi-agency and multi-profession workshop we are holding on 7 September. Here, with our partners, we will explore our understanding of what a 'whole-school approach' means; identify our collective contributions; and identify where any gaps may exist. The outcomes of this workshop will inform the first Ministerial Task and Finish Group meeting which we intend to hold soon after the National Assembly returns from recess.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish us to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns we would be happy to do so.