

## **About Mind Cymru**

We're Mind Cymru, the mental health charity. We believe no one should have to face a mental health problem alone. We provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. We campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding.

In Summer 2019, we launched our insights on the development of a whole school approach to mental health, drawn from pilot work conducted in schools and a survey of 3,000 pupils.

Our pilot work uncovered that:

- 1 in 5 pupils said that they had experienced a mental health problem;
- 1 in 3 teachers said that they had experienced a mental health problem;
- 1 in 4 parents said that they had experienced a mental health problem

## **Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)**

We are currently improving our evidence base amongst young people in Wales, prioritising young people's voice, but do not yet have sufficient information in this area to provide expert advice. However, our work so far with young people in Wales suggests lines of inquiry which we believe should be followed.

In her letter to the Children, Young People and Education Committee of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the Education Minister writes that: "Children and young people in EOTAS are some of the most vulnerable learners. They often come from chaotic and challenging backgrounds and can frequently experience family breakdown and mental health issues."

In recognising the scenario described by the Minister, we believe that the committee inquiry should consider the following issues related to young people's mental health and EOTAS.

1. What is the provision of mental health support to young people who receive EOTAS, and how can the quality and consistency of this support be assured across Wales?
2. What resources do Welsh Government, local authorities and regional education consortia provide to ensure good mental health support for young people in EOTAS provision, and how are these evaluated?

3. What progress has been made on the Estyn recommendation on EOTAS (June 2016) that the Welsh Government should strengthen guidance to local authorities to 'improve access to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and other specialist agencies for pupils who receive EOTAS'? How can this progress be evidenced within everyday experiences from those who receive EOTAS?
4. What work is undertaken by mainstream schools across Wales to correctly identify the mental health needs of those pupils 'at risk' of going into EOTAS provision, and consideration of whether EOTAS provision is the most appropriate support?
5. There are concerns that learners with mental health problems may find themselves in non-mainstream learning circumstances as a result of pressure within the school, a process which falls under a wider umbrella process referred to as 'off-rolling' (taking pupils off the school register without a formal, permanent exclusion or encouraging a parent to remove their child from the school). At the time of writing, we are awaiting Estyn's thematic report regarding 'off-rolling'. What evidence is there whether off-rolling of learners with possible mental health problems takes place, or not, in Welsh educational settings, and then fall into EOTAS provisions, and whether any efforts are made to prevent this?
6. Our work with young people has uncovered concerns that young people may be negatively labelled as 'naughty' or 'difficult' when they are in fact facing mental health or neurodevelopmental challenges. Within school settings, the staff member responsible for pastoral care may also be responsible for discipline, and this joint responsibility may make some young people reluctant to seek help from somebody whom they already feel has given them a negative label. This raises questions about the pathway to EOTAS and whether learners have received appropriate support prior to their change in circumstances. How can these learners be identified and signposted or referred appropriately?
7. Recognising the role of positive mental health underpinning good learner outcomes, how will Welsh Government ensure that mental health is better integrated within the new curriculum for those receiving EOTAS so that all young people reach their potential?
8. What should a 'Whole School Approach' look like in EOTAS provision?
9. Are Welsh language resources to support mental health in EOTAS equally available and appropriately used as English language resources? If not, then what work is being undertaken to ensure parity between the official languages? Are there examples of best practice of Welsh language resources for mental health in EOTAS settings?