

New initiative to put specialist emotional & mental health support in Wales' schools

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething and Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams have agreed a £1.4m investment to strengthen the support from specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to schools.

Dedicated CAMHS practitioners will be recruited to work with pilot schools in three areas across Wales. The practitioners will provide teachers with on-site help and advice, ensuring pupils experiencing difficulties such as anxiety, low mood, and compulsive self-harm or conduct disorders receive early help in schools from suitably trained staff, preventing more serious problems occurring later in life.

The model will enable:

- support for teachers to better understand childhood distress, emotional and mental health problems, and reduce stress experienced by teachers concerned about their pupils, by up-skilling them to recognise and deal with low level problems within their competence
- ensuring that when issues are identified that are outside teachers' competence and skills, that specialist liaison, consultancy and advice is available to enable the young person to be directed to more appropriate services such as CAMHS or Local Primary Mental Health Support Services, and to support the teacher and school in providing for the young person's educational needs
- ensuring systems are in place to share appropriate information between CAMHS and schools, shared care arrangements are agreed for those young people requiring more intensive support, and that arrangements are in place to escalate/de-escalate as the young person's needs dictate.

Initially operating as a pilot programme, the initiative will commence by the end of 2017 and cover two full academic years, concluding in the summer of 2020. The results will be evaluated, and take into account a broad range of measures from the perspective of both teachers and pupils.

Wales has led the way in the UK by being the only nation that requires local authorities to provide counselling services in their area for children and young people aged between 11 and 18, as well as pupils in year 6 of primary school. This initiative complements that work by providing an additional layer of more specialist support in schools.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“One in four people in Wales will experience mental health problems at some point in their lives. Getting the right treatment at an

early stage, coupled with greater awareness of conditions, can in many cases prevent long term adverse impacts.

“This unique new initiative we’re unveiling today will see specialist NHS Wales services extend into the classroom. This will ensure children, teachers and others charged with caring for children in our schools, receive support to promote good emotional and mental health. It will help identify and address issues early, helping to prevent more serious problems occurring later in life.

“One of the Welsh Government’s key aims is to improve the health and well-being of the people of Wales. This will help us achieve our ambition of prosperity for all, while taking significant steps to shift our approach from treatment to prevention.

“We hope this initiative will improve accessibility to support services, better address school related stress, and ease pressures on specialist CAMHS by reducing inappropriate referrals. We also hope it will facilitate a wider culture which promotes and values positive mental health and wellbeing within our schools.”

Education Secretary, Kirsty Williams said:

“Most young people spend a large part of their time in school, so there is a clear need for teachers to be able to help and support them should they experience difficulties in life, such as anxiety, low mood, compulsive self-harm or behaviour disorders.

“Through this new initiative, we are making schools places that actively promote positive mental health and wellbeing, providing evidence-based prevention and early intervention where it’s needed.

“For children and young people, it will enable them to have their problems addressed earlier, before they escalate. For teachers, it will help ensure they feel able and confident in dealing with emotional distress, and know where to go to seek support.”