

Impact of Pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Issues: Training and Support for Teachers April 2019

Background

The 2018 AGM passed the following resolution:

"That this AGM call on EIS to demand training and support for all teachers and associated professionals in order to address the impact of the increasing number of pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues being accommodated within schools."

This paper, in referring to pupils' social, emotional and mental health issues, means issues which go beyond what might be classed as 'normal' or typical adolescent experiences and behaviour, which can be challenging at times. Children and young people in Scotland may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties, which manifest themselves in different ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or distressed behaviour, including self-harming, substance misuse, or disordered eating. Sometimes these behaviours reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression.

Other children and young people may have diagnosed disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder, although some children and young people may experience social, emotional and mental health issues but have no formal recognition in terms of a diagnosis.

Some of the social and emotional difficulties experienced by young people and the underlying mental health issues that drive them are becoming high profile themes of discussion in the Scottish polity. There appears to be a consensus gathering on the need for intensified efforts to address the prevalence of poor mental health among children and young people in Scotland, and growing awareness of the extent of the problem.

In Autumn 2018, Audit Scotland reported that one in ten children and young people aged five to 16 has a clinically diagnosable mental illness; and that there has been a 22% increase in the number of referrals received by specialist services since 2013/14¹. The issue of building capacity to support young people to develop good social and emotional skills and good mental health has been high on political and public policy agendas; it has also been the focus of significant efforts by the third sector.

¹ Children and Young People's Mental Health, Audit Scotland, Sept 2018
http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180913_mental_health.pdf

In addition, the specific issue of training for teachers on supporting young people with mental health issues has been the focus of parliamentary scrutiny in the last year. A number of pertinent Parliamentary Questions were posed in the Scottish Parliament during session 2018/19, including a question asked by Edward Mountain MSP (“To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken in the last year regarding the provision of training for teachers and staff to support pupils with mental health issues”)²; and one asked by Mary Fee MSP (“To ask the First Minister, in light of it being Children’s Mental Health Week, what action the Scottish Government is taking to increase the provision of mental health support for young people”)³.

The role of other professionals was also discussed, for example Anas Sarwar MSP raised a question about occupational therapists (“To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to increase the number of occupational therapists in schools to help improve mental health provision for children and young people.”)⁴

Caveat

Any training for teachers aimed at enabling them to better support pupils with social, emotional and mental health issues must recognise the limits of the teacher’s role. There will always be a need for qualified and extensively trained mental health professionals to be the lead specialists in this area. There is a clear distinction between ‘normal’ adolescent anxiety (for example about sitting exams) and behaviour to which teachers may reasonably be able to respond, and behaviours linked to mental health which is so poor as to constitute a psychiatric illness, to which they are not and indeed should not. Schools need to be able to signpost pupils about whom they are seriously concerned to e.g. Educational Psychologists and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). However, the context of significant cuts to Educational Psychology and CAMHS provision is very concerning. It is the EIS view that children presently have too little access to mental health professionals.

The wider context is that children and young people’s mental health is affected by many factors, including an over emphasis on attainment, on Literacy and Numeracy specifically within the BGE, and qualifications acquisition within the Senior Phase, and too little emphasis on Health and Wellbeing; and current curriculum architecture (with not enough time and space available for activities that promote positive health and wellbeing generally and good mental health specifically). These factors should be addressed in a range of ways.

² Scottish Parliament Official Report:
http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11934&mode=html#iob_107865

³ Scottish Parliament Official Report:
http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11935&mode=html#iob_107905

⁴ Scottish Parliament Official Report:
<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-19633&ResultsPerPage=10>

Actions taken by the EIS

Our demands for training and support for teachers were conveyed to government, Education Scotland and employers, and will continue to be articulated when appropriate. We also scoped out what training and support was being planned or offered by central/local government. Further, we met and/or held discussions with several third-sector organisations, namely:

- The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)
- Support in Mind Scotland
- Mental Health UK
- The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families
- The Mental Health Foundation.

The purpose of the discussions with the above organisations was to ascertain what training and support is available for teachers and associated professionals from third sector partners; and to make them aware of our needs in relation to professional learning for teachers.

All discussions were informed by the EIS view that guidance and training for teachers and associated professionals are useful and necessary but not sufficient to address this issue. Thus, the EIS, as well as demanding training has, in a range of fora, and through means such as consultation responses and meetings with key educational partners, persistently made calls for a more holistic approach to ensuring that schools and teachers are better enabled to support young people.

ASN Network perspective

The EIS ASN Network was consulted on the resolution, and offered the view that some programmes which are widely used in schools to address pupils' social, emotional and mental health issues, e.g. 'Seasons for Growth', are perhaps being provided as a cheap form of therapy, which is not their purpose. The programme is useful but should be used appropriately.

Other training that was felt to be useful was that centred on resilience and adverse childhood experiences, and the film 'Resilience'⁵ was also recommended. NHS Scotland had offered training sessions on this topic which were felt to be very good. A number of local authorities are offering such training in schools.

It was reported that the impact of trauma on children was an emerging issue; that some of the pupils who are most traumatised are migrants and asylum seekers; and that teachers themselves can experience vicarious trauma from supporting children who have had particularly difficult experiences. This needs to be recognised. The Rivers Centre⁶ in Edinburgh was noted as a potential source of support. Colleagues in one authority had been trained as 'trauma associates'.

⁵ <https://kpjrfilms.co/resilience/>

⁶ <https://services.nhslothian.scot/riverscentre/Pages/default.aspx>

The issue of teachers' own mental health, and their capacity to support young people in difficulty, was raised.

Some members reported taking part in mental health or anxiety management training that they felt to be inadequate, e.g.

- a one-day course that contradicted some local authority guidelines, and made assumptions about teachers' preparedness to deal with extremely challenging situations, for example, pupils with suicidal ideation, which participants felt were not reasonable
- an anxiety management course which was too basic and focused on low-level anxiety, e.g. around exams, which schools are well used to, rather than emergent issues such as self-harm among highly anxious children, which members wanted more information about (whilst also wishing to be able to direct such children to specialist services and support)
- a half-day 'mental health champions' course, which was also offered to senior pupils (the appropriateness of this had caused members concern)
- a 45-minute suicide awareness training, held in the aftermath of specific incidents within the local authority area, which was felt to be too short.

Members felt that they would need much more support and guidance than the courses offered, and that young people deserve better than access to insufficiently trained supporters. It was also noted that participants were not asked about their own mental health in advance or during the course, in terms of whether they felt able to take part. Sensitivity to what teachers might have experienced outside of school in their own lives appeared to be missing. Concerns about the efficacy of cascading training using a 'train the trainer' model were also raised.

Members suggested that 'mental health first aid' may be a misnomer as it implies low-level incidents as opposed to life and death situations; mental health illnesses were felt to be very serious, and something that teachers cared passionately about but wanted to raise with pupils in ways appropriate to their professional role.

EIS Professional Learning

The EIS, through its Network of Union Learning Representatives, and through partnership with Scottish Union Learning, offers professional learning to members on these matters. For example, we have recently provided courses on 'Additional Support for Learning: Social, Emotional & Behavioural Needs' and on 'Developing Awareness of Young People's Mental Health Needs', which were fully subscribed.

Scottish Government Developments

Developments regarding support for teachers around pupils' mental health issues were scoped out by the Education and Equality Department. The Scottish Government launched a new 10-year mental health strategy in 2017, which included various actions relevant to schools, including:

- Review Personal and Social Education (PSE), the role of pastoral guidance in local authority schools, and services for counselling for children and young people.
- Roll out improved mental health training for those who support young people in educational settings.
- Commission the development of a matrix of evidence-based interventions to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Determine and implement the additional support needed for practitioners assessing and managing complex needs among children who present a high risk to themselves or others.
- Fund improved provision of services to treat child and adolescent mental health problems.

The 2018/19 programme for government⁷ included:

- Ensuring that, by the end of academic year 2019-20, every local authority will be offered training for teachers in Mental Health First Aid, using a 'train the trainer' model to enable dissemination to all schools.
- Providing counsellors in schools – around 350 counsellors will be created. The details of this programme are not yet available. (The EIS notes that there are 359 secondary schools in Scotland so this is not quite one counsellor per school, and that 350 counsellors equates to one per 806 pupils, although the way that counsellors is allocated will affect the counsellor to pupil ratio in any given area. There are also questions about how sustained this will be; the funding is for 4 years initially. There are also concerns about focussing on secondary schools, given that earlier intervention can prevent issues worsening over time.)
- Recruiting an additional 250 school nurses by 2022, which Scottish Government says, "will help provide a response to mild and moderate emotional and mental health difficulties experienced by young people in the form of local help available immediately".

In relation to a parliamentary question about trauma-informed practice, the DFM has drawn attention to Education Scotland guidance for schools on nurturing approaches, and to Education Scotland developing "additional career-long professional learning resources on trauma-informed practices".⁸ New guidance on nurturing approaches is welcome, as the EIS supports schools being enabled to offer a more nurturing environment, but we would note that such approaches need to be well resourced. While PEF funding should offer opportunities to develop such approaches, we are mindful that this is short-term project funding.

⁷ Programme for Government 2018/19: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/delivering-today-investing-tomorrow-governments-programme-scotland-2018-19/>

⁸ Scottish Parliament Official Report: http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11934&mode=html#iob_107861

Third sector offers

Mental Health Foundation

Early conversations took place between Assistant Secretary Andrea Bradley and Mental Health Foundation Policy Officers. They may develop self-assessment tools for young people, and are also thinking about teacher health and wellbeing, but are in the early stages of planning.

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

SAMH were keenly interested in discussing training needs with the EIS. In 2018 they conducted a survey of school staff on training needs, and just over 3,000 responded, an unprecedented level of response to a SAMH survey and found that

- 66% of teachers who responded to the survey did not feel they have received sufficient training in mental health to allow them to carry out their role.
- Only a third of respondents said their school had an effective way of responding to pupils experiencing mental health problems.
- Only one in 100 respondents recalled doing detailed work on mental health when they were student teachers.

The survey formed part of an ongoing campaign to get more support for young people with mental health issues, 'Going to Be Well Trained'⁹. Their position is that all school staff should be trained.

National Officer Jenny Kemp met with two SAMH staff in early 2019 to discuss all of the above. They have developed a free online e-learning resource about mental health, to be launched early in 2019, which they are calling "a start" in terms of meeting teachers' professional learning needs. They agreed to keep the EIS updated on this. It should take a teacher about 2 hours to complete, and at present SAMH intend for it to include content such as:

- we all have mental health
- looking after your own mental health
- a teacher's role and the duty of care
- GTC standards and mental health
- Curriculum for Excellence and mental health
- general info about specific issues (anxiety, panic attacks, depression, eating disorders, suicide)
- young people's stories
- links to further information.

The e-learning has been designed to be suitable for both primary and secondary teachers, but is more targeted at secondary in terms of language. A teacher was involved in developing and testing the content.

⁹ <https://www.samh.org.uk/get-involved/going-to-be/well-trained>

SAMH shared some concerns about the roll out of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training as this is an expensive model because it is licensed, and is perhaps not focused on open and general conversations about what mental health is, but is more reactive. It is also a two-day course, which may pose issues for teachers while there is a cover crisis. They are planning to closely scrutinise the implementation of local authority led MHFA training.

Support in Mind Scotland/Mental Health UK

National Officer Jenny Kemp held tripartite discussions with the Head of Young Person's Programme for Mental Health UK and with a Project Lead at Support in Mind Scotland, who are looking at developing a new young person's programme, with a 14-18 focus, for delivery within schools. There will be a component for teachers. They reported that the biggest need is teachers requesting support. They are seeking to build resilience in young people around key transition points; and have been holding roundtable meetings to explore the issues. They stated that "teachers' own resilience is an issue" and noted that although there are lots of toolkits out there, there is still much progress to be made.

Anna Freud Centre

National Officer Jenny Kemp spoke with the Project Manager for 'Mentally Healthy Schools' at the Anna Freud Centre, a London based children's mental health charity that approached the EIS for advice. The Anna Freud Centre has been working with Place2Be and YoungMinds, with funding from the Royal Foundation, on a relatively new website, Mentally Healthy Schools (www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk) which was launched in March 2018, targeted at Primary teachers in England.

They hope to make it relevant to devolved nations and to secondary schools, and were seeking advice on the current mental health landscape in Scotland and the usefulness of their website as it stands. The website would need quite a number of changes to make it relevant to Scotland, and more easily navigable. They offered to keep us updated on developments as their scoping continues.

Recommendations

1. Local Association Secretaries are recommended to raise in local negotiations on professional learning and around pupils' and students' mental health, the demand for training and support for teachers in order to address the impact of the increasing number of pupils in schools with social, emotional and mental health issues. Local Association Secretaries may wish to explore the possibility of such professional learning being organised through Regional Improvement Collaboratives.
2. Local Association Secretaries are recommended to query with Local Authorities how Mental Health First Aid training is being provided, and to whom.

3. Members are recommended to note the training and support offered by the third sector and, within the terms of their contractual obligation to undertake continuing professional learning, may wish to avail themselves of any relevant opportunities to take part in professional learning, including e-learning on mental health.
4. The EIS should continue to advocate at a national level for training and support for teachers on social, emotional and mental health issues, including in discussions with key educational partners and the Scottish Government; and should continue to advocate for educational provision that enhances pupils' health and wellbeing and promotes positive mental health.
5. The EIS should consistently raise the need for initiatives aimed at supporting young people's social, emotional and mental health needs, e.g. the provision of school counsellors, to cover children in early years settings and primary schools as well as secondary schools, to ensure that any emerging mental health issues are addressed as early as possible.