

Meeting of:	EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	15 SEPTEMBER 2025
Report Title:	MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	LINDSAY HARVEY CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE
Responsible Officer:	GAIL BIGGS GROUP MANAGER (INCLUSION) MARK LEWIS GROUP MANAGER (EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE)
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.
Executive Summary:	<p>Bridgend schools have adopted a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing guided by both local and national frameworks.</p> <p>The approach emphasises embedding mental welfare into all aspects of school life inclusive of leadership, curricula, staff training, policy and support services.</p> <p>The strategy is co-ordinated with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board ensuring both consistency and equity for both learners and staff.</p> <p>Schools complete assessments, identify needs and analyse data to improve and develop support systems.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Education and Youth Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee with further detail as to how the Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate ('the directorate') is working with delivery partners and stakeholders to support the mental health and wellbeing of learners.

2. Background

- 2.1 Welsh Government's framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing provides statutory guidance for all schools in Wales. The framework supports schools to create positive, inclusive environments through leadership, curriculum, staff wellbeing, partnerships and pupil voice. Its goal is to promote and protect the wellbeing of learners, staff and the wider community. <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/framework-on-embedding-a-whole-school-approach-to-emotional-and-mental-well-being.pdf>
- 2.2 This framework is issued as statutory guidance to governing bodies of maintained nursery, primary, secondary, middle, pupil referral units (PRUs), and special schools and local authorities in Wales. It is also intended for use by the range of partners who work in and with schools to support the emotional and mental well-being of learners and staff. While written primarily for schools, much of the content and the focus on well-being is equally applicable in other settings such as childcare settings that deliver the Foundation Phase, further education (FE) and higher education (HE).
- 2.3 There are a range of health partners that work with schools including (but not limited to):
- Healthy Schools Practitioners;
 - Health Visitors;
 - School Nurses;
 - Community Nursery Nurses;
 - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS);
 - Speech and Language Therapists;
 - Physiotherapists;
 - Occupational Therapists;
 - Design to Smile;
 - Learning Disability Team;
 - Paediatricians; and
 - Community Paediatric Nursing Team.
- 2.4 The framework is aimed at the needs of school-age learners and the workforce supporting their learning and well-being needs. However, much of the content is also applicable in other settings that deliver education where children and young people require well-being support to fully engage in their learning and to develop.
- 2.5 The framework is intended to support schools, including PRUs and education settings, in reviewing their own well-being landscape and in developing plans to address their weaknesses and build on their strengths. It recognises that the school alone cannot meet all the needs of a complex population of children and young people, and sets out the role of regional bodies, the NHS and others such as the third sector, in supporting the school. It is meant to support and complement the Curriculum for Wales and, in particular, the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience. <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/introduction-to-curriculum-for-wales-guidance/>
- 2.6 Schools and local authorities are required to have regard to this framework when developing action plans, strategies and other policies that impact on the wellbeing

of learners, staff and others working within the school environment. In addition, local authorities should have regard to this framework when organising or delivering education other than at school (EOTAS) provision.

- 2.7 The Health Promoting Schools workforce in Wales operates primarily through the Welsh network of Healthy Schools Schemes and play a crucial, structured role in supporting Bridgend schools to implement Welsh Government's whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing.
- 2.8 The Health Promoting Schools workforce support and guide schools to undertake a thorough self-evaluation process using a recognised self-evaluation tool. Following the self-evaluation process, the Health Promoting Schools workforce assist schools to identify priority areas that require action across the school community. An action-planning process follows, and includes support and guidance from the Health Promoting Schools workforce (Table 1).

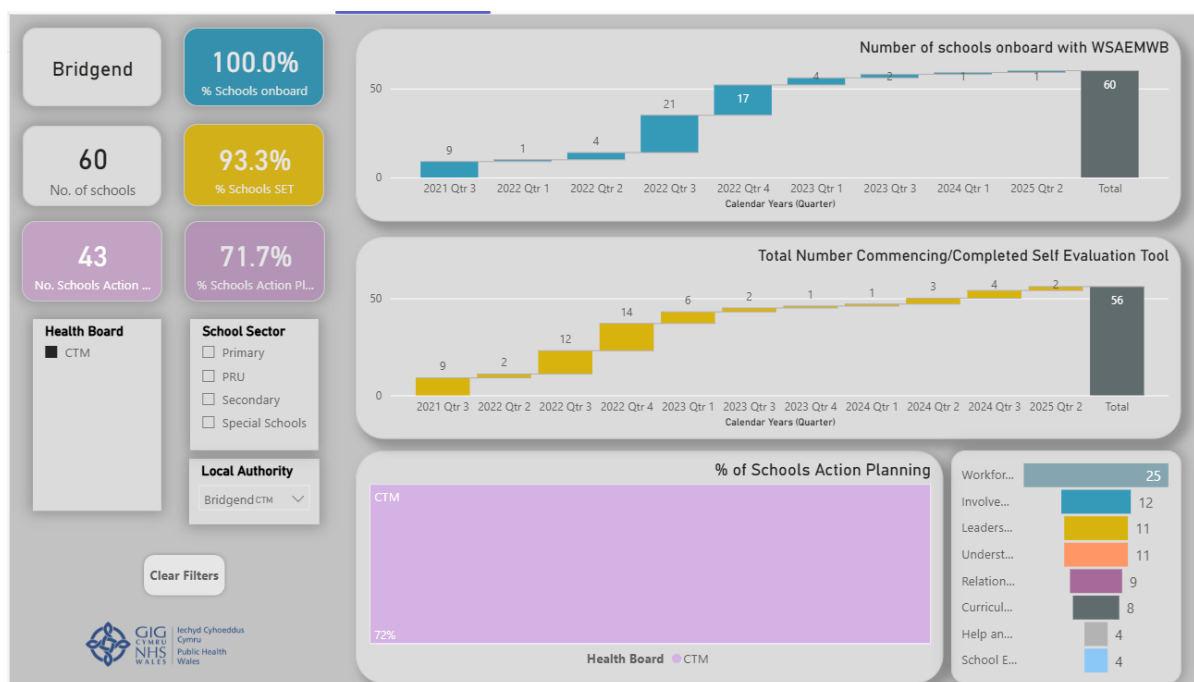
Table 1



- 2.9 The statutory framework recognises robust and effective self-evaluation is central to creating a school as a learning organisation and a mechanism to support improvement. (Point 6.1 of the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing). The statutory framework requires schools to undertake self-evaluation and encourages the use of the national self-evaluation and resource developed by Welsh Government. (Point 6.1.1 of the Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing).

- 2.10 In Bridgend, 56 schools use the national self-evaluation tool resource. 4 schools use a third-party self-evaluation tool. Healthy Schools Practitioners support the school senior leadership team to undertake the self-evaluation process. Healthy Schools Practitioners are constantly capturing school progress and updating the national monitoring tool following meetings with the school. School progress information including self-evaluation, action planning and priority areas, are inputted into the national monitoring tool. The national monitoring tool creates a national dashboard to provide a current position of every school's progress in Wales.
- 2.11 Monthly progress reports, drawn down from the dashboard, are reported to the Authority lead for wellbeing. Priority areas identified across Bridgend, as a result of self-evaluation, are included in the dashboard.
- 2.12 From September 2025, the local authority can access individual school-level progress information from the Public Health Team (see Table 2). This is as a result of the updated information sharing guidance document from Public Health Wales.

Table 2



- 2.13 Success is dependent on the following:

- schools including wider stakeholders in the self-evaluation process;
- learner voice and participation;
- data collection and scrutiny (for example, School Health Research Network (SHRN)/Healthy Actions Poor Health (HAPPEN)/Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) PERMA);
- commitment from the school leadership team and governors;
- support from the local authority;
- curriculum integration;
- policies and practices that reflect the framework;
- the accuracy of reporting onto the national monitoring tool;

- collaboration with the Healthy Schools Practitioners; and
- monitoring, evaluating the effectiveness of strategies and interventions and continuous improvement.

- 2.14 Council approved a budget reduction of £50,000 for 2025-2026 within the counselling services for children and young people budget. Due to the increase in demand for counselling services in the school year 2024-2025, the directorate has utilised grants differently to maintain and increase counselling resources for children and young people for the school year 2025-2026.
- 2.15 The Educational Psychology Service continues to work at different levels to support the mental health and wellbeing of our children, young people, school staff and families across the borough. Wellbeing and good mental health continue to underpin all consultation and intervention work.

3. Current situation/proposal

- 3.1 In January 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Education requested Public Health Wales undertake a deep dive audit of all schools to capture the number action planning. Data for Bridgend schools captured in December 2024 showed that 43 of 60 schools (including the PRU) in Bridgend were action planning.
- 3.2 In March 2025, Public Health Wales informed CTMUHB that grant funding to support schools to embed the statutory framework for the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing would end on 31 March 2026.
- 3.3 In April 2025, Public Health Wales advised CTMUHB of the key ambitions for the 2025-2026 financial year:
- By the end of March 2026, 100% of maintained schools (primary, secondary, special schools and PRUs) will have an emotional and mental well-being action plan in place to embed the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing framework.
 - Implementation co-ordinators to support schools to recognise the importance of relationships and school connectedness in underpinning good emotional and mental wellbeing.
- 3.4 Public Health Wales advised that the national monitoring tool for the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing, will be updated to capture schools progress in prioritising relationships and school connectedness. The new monitoring tool launched on 1 September 2025.
- 3.5 In May 2025, headteachers across Bridgend were informed of the end to grant funding. The implementation lead encouraged school leaders to reach out and access the support available to them from the Health Promoting Schools workforce, to support schools with self-evaluation and action planning.
- 3.6 In Bridgend, 100% of secondary schools, the PRU and special schools are action planning. However, only 64.6% of primary schools are action planning.

- 3.7 In order to meet the expected target of 100% of schools action planning by April 2026, 17 primary schools in Bridgend will require an action plan.
- 3.8 In July 2025, Public Health Wales updated the information sharing guidance which now allows Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Health Team to share school-level progress information to the local authority.
- 3.9 Health Promoting Schools practitioners provide a termly information and guidance session for school leads to support with the completion of self-evaluation and action planning. These practitioners provide regular support to schools across Bridgend.
- 3.10 The Educational Psychology Service has undertaken an Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) Project. The project started in October 2024 and was initially evaluated at the end of the summer term 2025. The pilot project involved an educational psychologist, school-based additional learning needs (ALN) staff and 4 pupils, who were experiencing EBSA at a secondary school.
- 3.11 Using the good practice identified in the EBSA booklet produced by the Educational Psychology Service, the goal was to identify strengths and difficulties at the pupil, school and family levels to support a plan, that would lead to improved attendance. Three of the four pupils in the pilot had improved outcomes and attendance, with the fourth identified as requiring escalation of mental health support from specialist CAMHS.
- 3.12 This pilot will now be rolled out by the Educational Psychology Service and established in all secondary schools during autumn term 2025 as part of the service delivery offer to schools.
- 3.13 Bridgend Educational Psychology Service, in partnership with services across the region, continues to train 150 Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) in our schools each year. ELSA training was introduced into Wales by Bridgend Educational Psychology Service. All schools have taken up the offer of having staff trained as ELSAs and 58 of Bridgend's 60 schools (including the PRU) currently have active ELSAs trained to deliver emotional literacy and wellbeing programmes. There are protected places for Bridgend schools to train further staff throughout the year.
- 3.14 The Educational Psychology Service continues to provide ongoing supervision sessions for all trained ELSAs across schools and specialist teams. Research continues to support the benefits of ELSA for pupils and schools, in improving wellbeing and mental health, through the delivery of onsite ELSA programmes. ELSA training and ongoing supervision remains a key component of the Educational Psychology Service school offer.
- 3.15 Alongside strategic and school input, the Educational Psychology Service responds to requests for support and develops bespoke solutions for children and young people.

Recent work undertaken includes:

- individual and group wellbeing sessions;
- whole-school/setting, groups and individual bespoke training;

- counselling and therapeutic sessions for pupils;
- staff and parent consultations;
- loss and bereavement and sad event support for schools;
- loss and bereavement support for staff to support identified learners;
- solution-focused brief therapy for individuals;
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy;
- direct assessment work with individual pupils; and
- advice and support for a parents including strategies around supporting the complex mental health of their children.

3.16 The Educational Psychology Service is working alongside partners in the CAMHS Schools In Reach Emotional and Wellbeing Team, school nursing and Youth Justice Service to develop and pilot a monthly multi-agency forum specifically to discuss the emotional wellbeing needs of learners at an identified secondary school.

3.17 The Shine Project in CAMHS, Wales, is a School In-Reach service that partners with schools to implement a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health for children and young people. It provides direct support, training for staff, and resources for parents to improve young people's well-being. The project aims to build capacity within schools and to provide early intervention, connecting students with various support services and resources.

3.18 In the last school year The Shine Project worked with 45 schools in the Bridgend area and has completed the following activities.

Pupil level	34 1:1 sessions were attended by pupils 503 group sessions were attended by pupils 278 primary pupils attended a whole class lesson 535 secondary pupils attended a class lesson 436 primary pupils attended a transition class
Training and advice	6 staff in a special school attended drop in sessions 138 school staff attended training 307 school staff accessed a drop in (either to discuss a pupil or staff wellbeing) 56 parents attended a workshop 78 parents attended a drop in
Wider community and parental events	3 parent engagement events 16 coffee morning/afternoon events 2 external events were attended by Shine 1 partner event
Advice requests received by the service	100 secondary school pupils requests 136 primary school pupil requests 21 school staff wellbeing requests 78 parent advice requests/drop ins

3.19 Counselling provision for children and young people ages 10 to 25 years in Bridgend is embedded in a network of safeguarding, early help, education, youth support services and youth justice. It aligns with Welsh Government strategy which promotes a mixture of school-based, community and specialist counselling, in partnership with other forms of support such a youth work, mentoring and safeguarding. Bridgend's model is adaptable to young peoples diverse needs,

however faces similar challenges nationally in managing rising demand and ensuring equity of access.

- 3.20 CAMHS is a core strategic partner within Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS), represented on the Management Board. The service provides a consultant one day per week, ensuring direct access to specialist clinical expertise. This enables BYJS to address the complex psychological and emotional needs often associated with offending behaviour and to secure timely referrals for children requiring targeted intervention.
- 3.21 Forensic Adolescent Community Treatment Service (FACTS) contributes additional specialist knowledge in adolescent health and well-being. FACTS professionals work collaboratively with BYJS practitioners to ensure that the health and mental health needs of children are fully integrated into their intervention and care plans, supporting more holistic and sustainable outcomes.
- 3.22 A significant enhancement has been the establishment of an in-house emotional health and wellbeing practitioner role within BYJS. This practitioner provides direct one-to-one support for children experiencing challenges such as anxiety, low mood, self-harm, or trauma-related difficulties. In parallel, BYJS staff receive training to identify early indicators of emotional distress and to adopt psychologically informed approaches which promote trust, emotional regulation, and resilience.
- 3.23 All children entering the BYJS are screened using validated assessment tools to identify emotional health and wellbeing needs at the earliest opportunity. Where support needs are identified, referrals are made promptly to appropriate services, including CAMHS, FACTS, and wider youth mental health provision. This structured approach has strengthened early identification and improved access to provision. Key Performance Indicator 4 (mental health and emotional wellbeing) of the BYJS operational plan demonstrates an upward trajectory, reflecting these improvements.
- 3.24 BYJS operates a multi-agency model in which intervention plans are tailored to the individual circumstances and needs of each child. These plans may include:
- therapeutic input to address trauma and mental health needs;
 - educational support and mentoring;
 - substance misuse interventions;
 - referral to specialist health services; and
 - restorative justice interventions.

Close collaboration with CAMHS, FACTS, education, and social care ensures that planning is co-ordinated and progress is reviewed jointly, facilitating consistent pathways into appropriate provision.

- 3.25 Despite considerable progress, challenges remain in ensuring that children who do not meet the threshold for specialist mental health services can still access timely and effective support. These challenges include children who are not accessing full time mainstream education, will not have regular access to mainstream mental health or wellbeing provision, there are waiting lists for alternative emotional wellbeing services and alternative assessment services such as neurodevelopment services. Where there is no provision for early intervention, unmet needs at this level may escalate, leading to increased vulnerability, risk-taking behaviours, or

offending. Strengthening lower-tier mental health provision and preventative services therefore remains a key development priority.

- 3.26 Published data for Year 11 school leavers presenting as not in education, employment or training (NEET) for the school year 2023-2024 has seen an increase from 1.4% (23 young people) in 2022-2023, to 1.9% (31 young people).
- 3.27 When analysing the presenting issues of this cohort of school leavers, the top factor that contributed to them becoming NEET was health conditions (physical and pregnancy) and mental health issues resulting in them not being work ready.
- 3.28 The Youth Life Skills workers, part of the Youth Emotional Health Team (YEHT) within Youth Support, work closely with the Inspire 2 Work+ Team to support NEET young people to access and reengage with education, employment and training by delivering tailored one-to-one support or via the weekly drop-ins.
- 3.29 During the 2024-2025 financial year, the YEHT have received 37 referrals (equating to 25% of all referrals into the team) for individualised support for young people who are NEET.
- 3.30 The needs identified have been around improving emotional resilience, improving confidence, motivation, independent living skills and support around housing needs. The support we have been providing has been vital in breaking down the barriers some young people face in accessing or engaging in education, employment and training.
- 3.31 Of the 37 NEET young people that have been referred for support, 4 (10%) have entered education, 8 (21%) have entered employment and 17 (47%) have reported reduced barriers to entering employment or education.
- 3.32 Presenting issues that have been supported with the cohort above include emotional resilience (dealing with emotions and feelings), trauma, anxiety, homelessness and bereavement.
- 3.33 Despite an increase in the published data of Year 11 school leavers presenting as NEET, Bridgend's performance continues to be better than the all-Wales average of 2.4%. When compared against other local authorities, this figure places Bridgend in joint fifth with Wrexham, behind Newport, Vale of Glamorgan and Neath Port Talbot respectively.
- 3.34 The development of a Single Point of Access for Children's Emotional (SPACE) Wellbeing panel approach allows multi-agencies to discuss through a panel process those children, young people and families/carers that need enhanced emotional and mental health support. The panel will bring partners together working across organisational boundaries, reduce inequalities in service, avoid variation and create a 'common offer', for those complex cases by providing early help and enhanced support. A SPACE Wellbeing Coordinator will act as interface between the local authorities' Early Entry Hubs (or equivalent) and CAMHS/Health services, and arrange the effective multi-agency planning for the delivery of direct interventions to children and young people. It is hoped that the panel will be operation by March 2026.

- 3.35 In response to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024-2025, proposals to withdraw funding for Bridgend Music Service were met with significant concern from stakeholders including headteachers, parents, and pupils, leading to the withdrawal of the proposal following extensive public consultation and scrutiny committee recommendations. Many of the concerns expressed were in relation to pupils' wellbeing and ability to express themselves with the suggestion it is often helpful to children and young people who have difficulties with their mental health.
- 3.36 In line with the Estyn Inspection Framework, Bridgend Music Service directly supports key thematic areas including Equity and Wellbeing, Curriculum for Wales (Four Purposes), Progression and Learner Experiences, and Leadership and Management. It promotes inclusive provision that fosters engagement, confidence, and learner wellbeing through creative, high-quality music education. It actively contributes to the realisation of the Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, developing ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; healthy, confident individuals; and ethical, informed citizens. The model provides clear progression routes aligned with curriculum frameworks, while demonstrating strong leadership, governance, and strategic planning in line with Estyn expectations.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals and principles prescribed for within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 connect directly to the approach to supporting children, young people and their families. The approach is consistent with the five ways of working as defined within the sustainable development principle and more specifically as follows:

Long term	The whole-school approach focuses on building resilience and wellbeing infrastructure to ensure positive effect for future generations.
Prevention	The whole-school approach to supporting emotional and mental wellbeing focuses upon early identification of need and ensuring that there is appropriate provision in place to meet individual needs.
Integration	The need for a collaborative approach to supporting learners wellbeing ensures a coherent delivery of economic, social, environmental, and cultural outcomes whilst impacting other wellbeing goals and objective across public bodies.
Collaboration	A fundamental principal of the approach that focuses on improving collaboration and creating a unified system.

Involvement	Ensuring that children, young people, adults, and families are at the heart of the system and that needs are discussed in a person-centred way.
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6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 6.1 There are no climate change and nature implications resulting from this project. However, we are committed to supporting the implementation of the local authority's 'Bridgend 2030 – Net Zero Carbon Strategy' and Welsh Government's carbon reduction commitments.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 The directorate has a robust approach to safeguarding, and this is detailed within the directorate's strategic plan. The Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate Strategic Plan 2023-2026 is aligned with Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC's) Corporate Parenting Strategy.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications specifically relating to this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Education and Youth Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of the report and provides feedback.

Background documents

None