

What should schools and local authorities do to ensure the well-being of their pupils?

This assignment will explore the well-being related policies of a Welsh secondary school, examining the strategies that should be adopted to ensure the well-being of pupils as outlined by the relevant local authority. It will look at the recommended approaches schools should be taking, how policy is interpreted, what support measures are in place, and how guidelines for best practice are implemented. This essay will also refer to Government Acts that incorporate the issues of health and well-being and underpin local authority policies, within the bounds of legislation. To provide some context, this assignment will also compare the policies of the chosen school with the corresponding policies of another school within the same local authority.

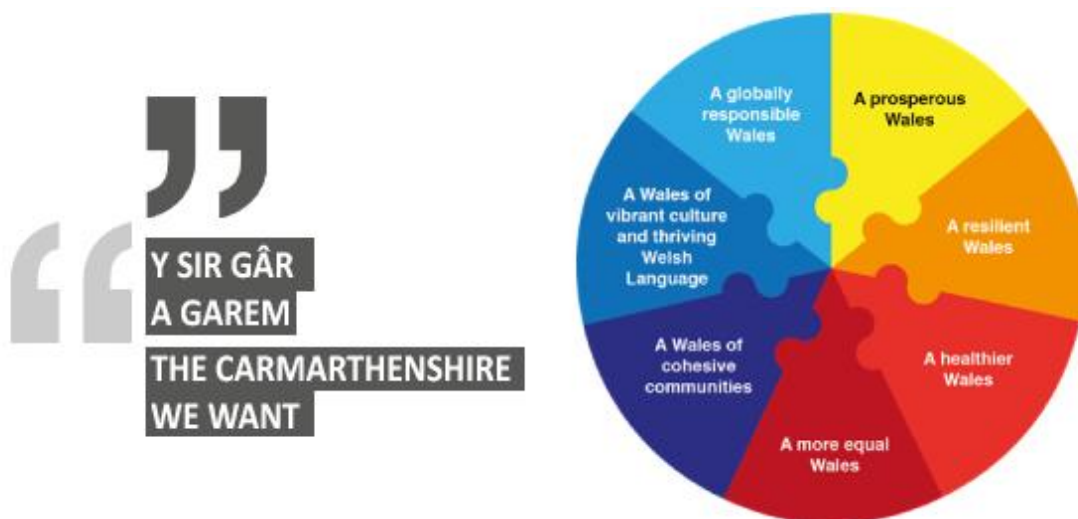
The Welsh Assembly Government published best practice guidelines and strategies for the promotion of health and well-being in schools and early year's settings (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). The guidance was aimed at a target audience of amongst others; schools, local authorities, pupil referral units, health boards and in particular the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The publication described as a 'good practice' document was intended to highlight the vital role education staff play in signposting services and support available to young people suffering from mental health problems. It acknowledged the importance of employing a joined-up approach involving not only staff and parents, but also carers, extended family and voluntary organisations.

Building on previous policies, the introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WBFGA), saw the issue of well-being brought firmly to the forefront of the Welsh Government agenda. For the local authority of Carmarthenshire this is no exception and the objectives for improving the well-being of Carmarthenshire young people, from school until adulthood with their well-being objectives of; start well, live well, and age well, in a health and safe environment (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017a). Recognising the importance of pupil well-being, the Carmarthenshire local authority have committed to ensuring that pupils are given the best possible educational opportunities, whilst improving their pupil attainment figures (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2018a).

Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole (New Economics Foundation, 2012, p.6).

Well-being can be extremely difficult to define, not least because it is not only notoriously ambiguous but highly subjective. For the purpose of reporting, measuring well-being can be equally challenging. In an effort to overcome this, the Welsh Government has compiled a comprehensive list of national indicators to aid the measurement of well-being. The goals and objectives can be reviewed and amended as required, allowing them to remain relevant to current issues and respective authorities. There are seven well-being goals in the WBFGA, and these form the cornerstone of policy creation (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). The act requires all public bodies to set well-being objectives and commit to a collaborative approach as part of the ‘five ways of working’, for a long-term and sustainable approach.

The seven well-being goals of the WBFGA



(Image 1)

The Carmarthenshire Well-Being Assessment 2017 acknowledged the challenges facing young people in a difficult period when making the transition from child to adolescent. At a time when children are forming new relationships, seeking identity, experiencing new opportunities and undergoing changes hormonally, the additional pressures of education can have a significant impact great on a young person’s well-being (The Carmarthenshire We Want, 2017, p.23). They draw attention to figures published by the School Health Research Network (SHRN) from a survey of secondary school children from years 7 and 9 in

Carmarthenshire. The report collected primary data on health and well-being and the findings suggested 82% of boys and 85% of girls respectively were satisfied with their life.

Of the pupils surveyed however, a little over 10% experienced mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and depression. The Carmarthenshire Well-being Assessment also referenced an inquiry by the Children's Society from 2008 that suggested that 70% of young people experiencing mental health issues lacked suitable early intervention and support. Despite the SHRN survey being aimed at years 7 and 9, they also stated that stress levels appeared to peak at year 10, citing issues of school work pressures and exam stress.

Although the traditional stress of exams and the increased levels of school work play a significant part in the increased pressure on pupil well-being, there are other factors that can have a major effect on the well-being of young people. Carmarthenshire County Council (2018b) introduced a 'positive behaviour' policy to ensure that all students have the right to learn without fear of being bullied. The focus is to promote a culture of positive behaviour and pupil well-being with a holistic approach for children of all ages and backgrounds.

The Council's report also reiterates the belief that any strategy for successfully managing behaviour should revolve around clearly defined policy, as outlined in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, stating, "The governing body of a maintained school shall ensure that policies designed to promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of its pupils are pursued at the school." (UK Government, 1998).

The involvement of School Councils also play a useful role in not just tackling bullying and supporting positive behaviour through pupil engagement, but are also a requirement of the Schools Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005, for all maintained primary, secondary and special schools in Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2005). A relatively new strategy of 'restorative practice' has been introduced to encourage individuals to take ownership of their behaviour, engaging with all parties that are directly involved in a less punitive approach as opposed to a traditional third party intervention. Other strategies outlined for managing behaviour included the implementation of 'reward systems'. Rewarding positive behaviour is believed to facilitate an improvement, not only classroom behaviour, but also attendance and homework statistics (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2018b).

School A in Burry Port, Carmarthenshire use achievement points to reward pupils for a range of behaviours such as attendance, returning homework on time, good behaviour and

contributions to class discussions. Students who accumulate the highest number of achievement points are awarded the 'learner of the month' and promoted on the school website (Glan-y-Môr, 2019a). The school council has a strong presence and as well as supporting and advocating for fellow students, they also act as ambassadors to represent and promote the school at local events (Glan-y-Môr, 2019b).

As well as support from the school council and teachers, there is a number of staff appointed in non-teaching roles to ensure the health and well-being of pupils. These include a dedicated Inclusion Support Officer and a Behaviour Support Assistant (Glan-y-Môr, 2019c). Face-to-face support for some students can be a daunting prospect, especially around deeply personal issues and in recognition of this, the school signposts national support services such the NSPCC and Childline so that pupils can access support in confidence (Glan-y-Môr, 2019d). Pupils can also access Area 43 (The Independent Schools Based Counselling Service), with a link the school website (Glan-y-Môr, 2019e), either through speaking to a teacher, head of year or school councillor. If for any reason a student is uncomfortable accessing the service through their school, they can contact Area 43 directly through a free phone number. Area 43 offers the services of skilled councillors for all children and young people aged between 10 and 18, throughout Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion. As a member of the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP), Area 43 is committed to Good Practice in Counselling through the use of the industry's Ethical Framework (Area 43, 2019).

The Welsh Government (2015) published guidance for practitioners in respect of the use of Pupil Deprivation Grants (PDG). The document contained a number of interventions for schools to consider when supporting pupils that are either in receipt of free schools meals or are classed as looked after children (LAC). Children are considered LAC if they have been in the care of the local authority continuously for a period of 6 months. The last PDG statement published by School A (Glan-y-Môr, 2017) set out a comprehensive plan that has been agreed and monitored by Carmarthenshire Council. Funding has been allocation for literacy and numeracy support and sustainable interventions aimed at improving attainment figures, by reducing the impact of poverty. Welsh Government (2016) well-being objectives highlight the importance of tackling poverty as part of their strategy for improving mental health in children and young people, acknowledging that poor mental health in early life is more likely to continue into adulthood.

The most recent report from the Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales (Estyn, 2017) found that there were a high percentage of pupils eligible for free schools meals, around 29% compared to an average of around 17.1% in the majority of Welsh secondary schools. They also noted a high percentage of children with special educational needs (SEN), approximately 50%, almost double the national average which was around 25.1% at the time. The support for SEN pupils was described as effective with 'thorough procedures to identify and meet specific needs'. The school budget per pupil was £5,432, the highest permissible budget per pupil in Carmarthenshire secondary schools.

The report was very favourable and acknowledged significant improvement since it federated in 2014 with School B (Bryngwyn School, 2019). Estyn remarked that there were excellent prospects for improvement due to clear leadership and an extensive range of partnership arrangements. The report concluded that there were good levels of well-being, support and care, teaching standards were also good and standards and improvement was excellent overall. The school was described in the report as 'inclusive, welcoming and caring' and reference was made to equality and diversity through a variety of strategies such as a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) group. Attendance was noted as being consistently above predicted outcomes and pupil performances in Welsh language were significantly strong. Although leadership was described as excellent, this was one of only two areas highlighted specifically for improvement. The report recommended an improvement in line management rigour, in respect of middle leadership, which they felt was not held to account robustly enough. The other recommendation was to raise the levels of teaching and assessment so that all areas met the same high standards.

The My Local School website published by the Welsh Government (2018a) lists School A as having a Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) of 17.4, a level 2 attainment threshold at Key Stage 4 of 43.4% and an attendance rate of 92%. There were no current figures for exclusions published but the most recent reference to statistics in that respect appeared to be from a report by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (2003), which highlighted a substantial reduction in the number of pupil exclusions.

Ysgol Glan-y-Mor at Burry Port, Carmarthenshire, has been recognised by the Children's Commissioner for Wales as an example of 'good practice', in reducing its number of excluded pupils by 70%, largely through the success of its own 'on site' inclusion unit for pupils with disciplinary problems (Centre for Public Scrutiny, 2003, p.18).

Exclusion is a key indicator and is believed to have a serious detrimental effect on pupil well-being. A study by Ford et al. (2017) found a significant correlation between pupil exclusion and poor mental health. Data was analysed from the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys from 2004 and 2007 and demographics such as family structure, income, parental education, ethnicity and housing tenure were taken into consideration. Examining data across the time points of both surveys found a clear link between poor general health, learning difficulties, parental mental health issues and exclusions. A bi-directional association was detected between psychological distress and exclusion. That is to say children who are excluded are more likely to experience poor mental health, whilst children already experiencing poor mental health also face an increased likelihood of exclusion. The research concluded that early detection with intervention and support for young people suffering from psychological distress could play a significant role in reducing the number of exclusions and help to improve their mental health in the future.

Physical Education plays an important role the health and well-being students. School A (Glan-y-Môr, 2019f) published their physical education aims, stating their intention to provide the opportunity for all pupils to become 'Physically Literate' by the time they finish school. The aim is to promote the satisfaction and enjoyment of physical activity and thereby encourage students to enjoy a lifelong healthy and active lifestyle. The local authority has committed to designing all new schools with the ability to allow access outside of teaching hours to enable a more play-friendly environment and also carrying out work to enable the same opportunities for existing schools (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017b). An innovative Physical Literacy passport system is also being introduced to encourage activity, alongside initiatives such as pedometer challenges.

In conclusion, from the statistics and evidence available, it would appear that School A is making a concerted effort to meet the well-being needs of its students. Clearly defined policies seem to reflect the best practice recommendations of the local authority and this appears to be borne out by the encouraging report by Estyn. The website for School A does not display any well-being initiatives or strategies in respect of staff but although the Healthy Schools scheme has been running in Carmarthenshire since 2001 (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2017c, p.61), it does not appear to be a requirement to display information publically regarding staff well-being. Information from the Welsh Government (2018b, p.5)

suggests that ensuring the well-being teachers and other school employees is mutually beneficial to staff and pupils alike, as well as to the wider community.

The Wales' curriculum is currently undergoing its most radical transformation for several decades. Wales' teachers in consultation with the Welsh Government are redefining traditional subject boundaries to give teachers the opportunity to deliver subjects with a more creative and innovative approach (Pratt, 2019). Described as an 'exciting' time for education, the intention is the new curriculum will improve numeracy and literary standards and forge strong partnerships between schools and key stakeholders. The changes are being driven as much out of necessity as desire due the restrictive budget cuts passed down to the Welsh Assembly from Westminster. The effects of austerity mean creativity has to extend to not just to curriculum structure but also funding strategies. The need for sustainability is vital, meaning the well-being of staff is crucial at a time when workload and educational expectations are exceptionally high.

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References for Images

Image 1: Carmarthenshire County Council (2018) *The Well-being of Future Generations Act*. [online] Available at: <https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/consultation-performance/the-well-being-of-future-generations-act/#.XMmHdvZFxPY> [Accessed 1 May 2019].