

What should schools and local authorities do to ensure the well-being of their pupils? Referring to theory policy and practice.

The concept of wellbeing, has in recent years, become increasingly recognised by governments, policies and agendas as a notion which is an important factor in child development, significantly in school (Watson *et al*, 2012). According to Adrianopoulos (N/D) in Wise Up's 'Prioritising wellbeing in schools' publication, the purpose of a school is much greater than the simple concept of education in regard to learning. Explaining that, around three children in each classroom suffer from a mental health problem. This means in classrooms across the UK there is a general lower level of wellbeing in children. Adrianopoulos (N/D) then goes on to reveal the education system and schools independently need to balance emotional support and academic learning in order to help the children and adolescents of today succeed and prosper, emphasising that this is not only a want but a need. When schools can successfully support the emotional, cognitive, intellectual and physical health of children, it allows the opportunity to create confident and resilient individuals.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) focuses on improving Wales, in order to create a sustainable Wales for those in the future, in regard to the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the country. A focus under this law is ensuring a balanced approach in education such as schools and colleges, with the intention of creating a generation of happy individuals who display a positive state of wellbeing. In order to do this education systems and local authorities must work together (Welsh Government, 2017). This essay aims to assess what schools and local authorities should be doing in order to ensure the well-being of pupils. The essay will explore what is the most effective practice in promoting wellbeing in schools and local authorities. With the focus being on the Pembrokeshire county council authority, and Henry Tudor school (HTS), formally, Pembroke Comprehensive school until September 2018, the conclusion will then assess the effectiveness of Pembrokeshire and HTS's attempt to promote well-being (HTS, 2019, A).

The fact that mental health and wellbeing support is currently at the forefront of policies in not only schools but all areas and sectors, proves the fact that mental health problems are an issue, and wellbeing is not to the standard that it should be, emphasising the need for more provision (Weare, 2015). With one in ten children being diagnosed with clinical mental health problems, suicide being one of the most common causes of youth deaths and self-harming and eating disorders being an increasingly growing concern, schools are developing plans and policies in order to avoid or lessen the chance of these problems occurring (Weare, 2015). Partnership for Well-being and Mental Health (PWBMH) in schools have created a framework and identified some effective approaches, and identified well-being good practice which can be adopted in schools (Weare, 2015).

PWBMH believe that adopting a whole school approach is essential and good practice in promoting well-being. This means that all components within a school must work together, adopting a multi

component approach in order for high quality well-being to be achieved, with research proving this approach to be more effective than others which focus more in depth with one, two or only a few areas of a school (Weare, 2015). Along with this, it has been addressed that having a better focus on promoting wellbeing rather than the more negative connotation of focussing on Mental health illness. This approach works towards helping to eliminate stigmatisation of mental health problems with the focus being on positive wellbeing, but encouraging the invitation to ask for help and then for teachers or staff at school having the understanding into how and where they can acknowledge difficulty or problems arising, and knowing what it is they can do in this instance (Weare, 2015).

Early intervention is also identified as an essential to ensuring well-being. In practice this means changes in behaviour, attendance or attainment, should be identified by staff at the earliest stage possible, in order to prevent the problems from exacerbating. It is essential that staff are provided with the correct and highest quality of training in identification and intervention methods (Weare, 2015). A staggering 80 percent of teachers report experiencing mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, even more identify themselves to experiencing feelings of severe stress. Promotion of the wellbeing of the teachers and staff themselves has also been identified by Partnership for Well-being and Mental Health in Schools and Weare (2015) as good practice in promoting well-being in the school environment. Weare (2015) emphasises the fact that it is more difficult for a teacher or member of staff to be genuinely concerned and involved in the well-being of others, when their own is at a low standard. In order to avoid this, schools can provide measures such as counselling and stress relief services available both for pupils and for staff, which can promote resilience and relaxation skills (Weare, 2015).

Pembrokeshire County council is the local authority area in which HTS falls within. In Pembrokeshire a great deal is currently being done in order to promote wellbeing within the county (Welsh Assembly Government, (WAG) 2010). Support systems are being provided for all different well-being needs, for example the Squash Blues project, which focussing on supporting children suffering with stress (WAG, 2010).

The Squash Blues project has been set up in Pembrokeshire with the intention of providing attention and support to children in Pembrokeshire who are dealing with stress. This project has a strong focus on ensuring help and support is available for those who are struggling with pressures and stress as a result of upcoming exams and coursework (WAG, 2010), which is a very common cause of a low sense of well-being and mental health problems among young people (Mental Health Foundation, 2018). The project also offers support regarding issues such as bullying, peer pressure, and issues faced outside of the school environment such as home-life. This project is provided to all secondary schools within the county, and was set up as a response to information received in an emotional health

consultation with young people. Along with the squash blues project, there are other services in place for children experiencing bullying within Pembrokeshire (WAG, 2010).

An anti-bullying officer is in place within Pembrokeshire to offer a support network for bullying and bullying prevention. This service is provided for pupils, parents and guardians. This service works closely with both primary and secondary schools within Pembrokeshire to ensure bullying is addressed and prevented to the best possible standard, moreover ensuring the wellbeing of pupils within Pembrokeshire schools. With this, Pembrokeshire is also working to support the wellbeing needs of those experiencing bullying due to sexuality. A support line has been put in place in conjunction with these services and with Youth Zone, to expand on the sources of support available to young people encountering these issues (WAG, 2010).

Due to counselling in schools being a government priority, due to recognising the crucial role in which schools play in identifying and recognising mental health, and well-being issues (Department for Education, 2016) Counselling services are also provided in all Pembrokeshire schools, with high quality counselling service available to all pupils in need (WAG, 2010). Counselling services in schools can have great benefit and have the ability to discuss issues that cause them significant, stress, anxiety, or sadness. In practice the support of a councillor allows the opportunity for one to develop resilience and understand and overcome these issues, that they may not have had the ability to overcome independently. Allowing children's well-being to be at a more positive level (Department for Education, 2016).

In addition to this all schools in Pembrokeshire work closely with a pupil support officer (PSO). The role of the PSO is to ensure a link is provided within the school to parents, or any services needed to ensure the wellbeing of individuals. PSO's roles also include ensuring social or welfare issues that are identified with a pupil is addressed in a serious manner, and referred to the appropriate services or individuals to ensure all issues are resolved positively to the best interest of the child (WAG, 2010).

The Well-being Plan for Pembrokeshire states that the councils and community are also, currently working together to ensure a healthy and positive future. An aim within this plan is ensuring that everyone within the community's voice is heard and respected, stating that young people in the community are at the centre of the attention in this aim, focussing on schools and youth groups (Pembrokeshire Public Services Board, 2018). The Well-being Plan as a whole however, focusses very sparsely on schools, colleges and Young People, creating the impression that Well-being of young people is not a priority within the plan.

A majority of the information gathered regarding the efforts being made to achieve positive well-being in Pembrokeshire has come from the Welsh Assembly Government 'Thinking Positively' document which was published in 2010 (WAG, 2010), this information may seem rather outdated, however this is the most recent document of its kind, and is extremely informative, and subjective

regarding the topic of wellbeing in Wales, with a generous amount of information praising the positive services in place in Pembrokeshire which is in turn, working towards healthy wellbeing for pupils in Pembrokeshire (WAG, 2010). It can be said that there is massive amount of positive and effective services in place in Pembrokeshire as a whole, and the next section of this essay aims to explore whether this is being reflected in HTS, Pembroke.

HTS, is a secondary school based in Pembroke. The school falls in the red support category, meaning the school is in extreme need for support. The majority of pupils studying at HTS are from Pembroke Dock, Pembroke, Pennar, Lamphey Angle and surrounding areas. Pembroke and Pembroke Dock and some surrounding areas are ranked as highly deprived areas in Pembrokeshire. Approximately twenty five percent of HTS's pupils live in these most deprived areas, with around twenty six percent being eligible for free school meals, which is also used as an indicator of deprivation (Estyn, 2018). Deprivation can often have an effect on well-being and can also often be a trigger cause to mental health issues, with disadvantaged areas having the highest levels of such issues. Areas of disadvantage can often also have an effect on education, and those living in these areas can often have a poorer education and poorer employment (NHS Wales, 2012). This could, at the forefront suggest that the well-being of HTS could be at a lower level.

HTS, as a whole had considerably low judgments in all areas of their most recent Estyn inspection. This has been a trending pattern for the school. In regards to Wellbeing, the school was rated unsatisfactory, which is in fact the lowest available rating, which raises concerns about the wellbeing of the pupils (Estyn 2018). It is also important to note, that in HTS's previous Estyn inspection in 2012, when the school was still named Pembroke school – the wellbeing rating was 'good'. This raises concern as to what has changed within the school in the past six years with regard to the wellbeing atmosphere within the school, and of the pupils (Estyn, 2012).

Some noteworthy events that have occurred concerning the pupils of Pembroke school, in the period of 2012 to 2018, suggest that the wellbeing of pupils within the school, was not to the standard it should be, and that not enough was being done within the school to prevent this. In 2013, fourteen-year-old pupil, Derek Brundrett, was found within the Pembroke school grounds woods, hanged due to suicide. Although it would be unfair to fully blame a school for this tragic event, it does indeed suggest not enough was being done to support this pupil, through whatever difficulties he may have been facing. Following this event counselling services were set up to support pupils which had been affected by the events (BBC, 2013).

Although it can be said that these events can be anomalous, another tragedy of an extremely similar nature occurred in the school, in 2016, where a fifteen-year-old pupil was also found hanged by suicide on the Pembroke school grounds (Fricker and Misstear, 2016). Again, this suggests a significantly low sense of wellbeing and also suggests mental health issues being displayed in pupils

of Pembroke school, with a lack of identification and intervention by the school, which suggests that staff at Pembroke School may not have been using what has been identified as the best practice for tackling mental health issues and promoting positive well-being in schools (Weare, 2015).

HTS do comply to Government guidelines in regard to ensuring that they have well written and informative policies and procedures in place and in the public domain, regarding a range of issues. This includes the schools safe guarding policy, which includes a variety of points regarding well-being, and what should be done to promote positive well-being, and adds that the local authority provide training for staff regarding well-being, suggesting the school and the local authority are working together in the attempt of producing positive results (HTS, 2019 B)

An anti-bullying policy is also available to the public, which was written in 2013, yet updated in 2018 which includes a detailed approach as to what the school is doing as a whole to prevent bullying and in turn maintain a high standard of well-being within the school. The policy also includes promotion of respect for all, regardless of, for example age, race, sexual orientation (HTS, 2019 c). The most recent Estyn report in contrast, suggests that the schools anti bullying policy is un-effective, stating 'pupils say that they experience bullying and a minority feel that the school does not deal effectively with this' (Estyn, 2018. Pg 6). With bullying being one of the biggest factors affecting the well-being of children and young people (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2017) this suggests that if the school is not doing all that they say they could be doing in their policy, the school is not, in fact doing what is expected in this area to promote positive well-being (Estyn, 2018. Weare, 2015).

To conclude, it is clear that in order for the best standard of well-being to be achieved, local authority areas, schools, and all services should work together to ensure the well-being of anyone in which they are involved with. Also, all that are involved in promoting well-being, such as school staff and teachers, should be provided with high quality training as to how and when to effectively ensure pupils are treated. (Weare, 2015).

The abundance of services and support that appears to be being provided under the Pembrokeshire county council suggests that this local authority area as a whole is doing all that they can, and should be doing in order to ensure the wellbeing of pupils. Policies such as the safeguarding and anti-bullying policies, suggest that an attempt is being made within HTS, and the safeguarding policy touches on the fact that the school and local authority are working together to achieve this (HTS, 2019 (B&A)). However, due to the results of HTS most recent Estyn reports, and the cases of suicide by pupils from the school suggests as a whole this is not being reflected in this school and more efforts, could in fact and should be done. It can be said that more time and attention could also be made within the school to provide support to more vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, along with this a better network of

support for those who are experiencing bullying. This may help to achieve the standard of wellbeing that is possible when it is prioritised within the school (Estyn, 2018).

It can be expected however, that because other areas of the school, such as ‘leadership and management’ and ‘care, support and guidance’ are ranked at a low level also, that the well-being of the school will suffer as a result (Estyn, 2018). As suggested, a school must work together as a whole, with all departments and all members of staff ensuring they are encouraging and promoting wellbeing at all times, without this in practice, wellbeing is unlikely to be achieved (Weare, 2015).

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