



Report of the Education and Skills Policy Development Committee

16 February 2022

Education Response to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

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| Purpose: | The report presents the positional statement of the Education Directorate on the response to research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and its effects within education. |
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| For Information | |

1. Background

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which covers its definition, purpose, as well as providing a local picture of need. It also outlines for the committee a detailed picture of how the Education Directorate is providing support to ensure the cycle of ACEs is prevented.
- 1.2 ACEs are described by Ace Aware Wales as traumatic events, particularly those in early childhood that significantly affect the health and wellbeing of people in Wales, the rest of the UK and the world.
- 1.3 Public Health Wales undertook an ACE Study for Wales in 2015 of over 2,000 adults aged 18-69 years who provided anonymous information on their exposure to ACEs before the age of 18 years and their health and lifestyles as adults. The survey showed that suffering four or more harmful experiences in childhood increases the chances of high-risk drinking in adulthood by four times, being a smoker by six times and being involved in violence approximately 14 times.

- 1.4 The report also estimates the burden of health-harming behaviours on the NHS that could have been avoided if Adverse Childhood Experiences were prevented across Wales.
- 1.5 In Swansea we know that many of our children will have experienced multiple ACEs in their young lives. In comparison with other local authorities, we have significantly higher numbers of care experienced children, children on the child protection register and a high number claiming free school meals.
- 1.6 Many health reports claim that throughout the Covid-19 pandemic children and families have experienced increased anxieties, altered routines, jeopardised finances, and the sickness and deaths of loved ones. This is concerning, because children are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of an overactive stress response due to the fact that their brains and bodies are still developing. This is especially true for those who already have a history of ACEs, and may already be sensitive to life stressors as a result.

2. Education response to ACEs

- 2.1 Our schools in Swansea have always been quick to respond to the needs of its learners, Estyn reports from 2017 to 2020 show that 97.3% of schools received excellent or good outcomes to Wellbeing and attitudes to learning, with no schools receiving unsatisfactory outcomes. Similarly, 97.4% received excellent or good outcomes to Care, Support and Guidance, with no schools receiving unsatisfactory outcomes.
- 2.2 In response to raising vulnerabilities among children and young people within our Swansea schools, the Education Directorate has provided a coordinated approach to providing support to schools
- 2.3 The Education Directorate liaised with ACEs Hub Wales whose aim was to support in creating changes that make Wales a leader in tackling and preventing ACEs. Their mission is to share ideas and learning, and to challenge and change ways of working so together, we break the cycle of ACEs. ACEs Hub Wales, now known as Ace Aware Wales were given funding by Welsh Government until April 2021 to deliver a trauma informed training package available to all school settings to raise awareness around the long term impact of ACEs and ensure all staff are fully informed of the recent findings from the Welsh ACE Study conducted by Public Health Wales in 2016.
- 2.4 With the new emphasis on Health and Wellbeing as a key area of learning in the Successful Futures Curriculum this allows schools to ensure they are able to identify and support vulnerable pupils appropriately in preparation for the changes. Over 40 schools benefitted from this free training, and ACEs Hub Wales also provided training for governors and local authority officers.

- 2.5 The regional professional learning offer for wellbeing has always been an excellent source of training which many of our schools have benefitted from. As ERW and now Partneriaeth, regional staff recognised that trauma and attachment were huge barriers to learning at an early stage, and were one of the first regions to introduce an Attachment Awareness pilot scheme. They have consistently sourced excellent training on which attendance from Swansea schools high.
- 2.6 As well as being communicated to headteachers from the region itself via its Partneriaeth newsletter, the Education Directorate includes any regional training in its weekly education newsletter.
- 2.7 The Looked After Children (LAC) element of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is a school improvement grant issued by Welsh Government to be used as a school improvement grant, to “disproportionately advantage” care experienced children. Schools have used their allocation of PDG LAC to purchase Nurture and Wellbeing facilities and equipment, such as the resilience toolkit, programmes to support mental health through meditation and mindfulness. Using the funding to upskill staff through training is also a key theme for this grant. Some schools have used this to attend CRUSE bereavement training and others to improve their understanding of the trauma experienced by their adopted learners.
- 2.8 The Education Directorate has built up excellent working relationships with other departments within Swansea council and external services. An integrated approach to tackling the issues stemming from ACEs has been undertaken through a variety of strategies:
- 2.8.1 The Emotional Health and Psychological Wellbeing Group (EHPW). The purpose of Swansea’s Emotional and Psychological Well-being Strategic Group is to take a co-ordinated partnership approach to understanding the needs of its children and young people’s mental and emotional health needs and ensure that the partnership develops services that provide the right support at the right time to best meet those needs.
- 2.8.2 Contextual safeguarding is a new and innovative approach to safeguarding children that directs a focus onto extra familial harm. A Pilot has been running in a selection of secondary schools in the city and the approach is now ready to be expanded. Contextual safeguarding allows officers to focus on risky situations, places, networks and peer groups rather than considering individual children and their individual circumstances. It does not replace child protection processes or care and support safety and wellbeing planning but enables agencies to work together more holistically to respond to contexts in which children and young people could be exposed to risk, in particular risk to exploitation. A self-assessment tool

has been developed to support schools in responding to extra familial harm which should be encouraged to review and identify areas of improvement in responding to behaviour in a contextually safeguarding manner.

2.8.3 Post Covid we have seen a rise in exclusions, especially those which are permanent. A strategy to reduce exclusions has been initiated, and has been well supported, which brings together themes which have been identified as action plans. Smaller working groups have now been established to research and deliver guidance based on firstly, our data needs to explore trends and will feed into the contextual safeguarding work. Secondly, to bring together the training offer for schools and local authority officers and to explore alternatives to exclusion. The third action point is access to the curriculum, which is split into two strands, supporting language needs and social communication and exploring offsite education to promote a curriculum fit for every child's need. The last strand is ensuring wellbeing of staff and learners.

3. Examples of good practise and forward look

- 3.1 Cefn Hengoed Community School, use their EOTAS devolved funding to deliver an on-site provision named CHACE. Through building strong relationships with the young people and using trauma informed strategies, they have ensured engagement and are preventing the cycle of ACEs. They ensure the learner has off site educational experiences which give the learners a different perspective of education.
- 3.2 Additionally, they also use Emotion Based School Avoidance (EBSA) to aid in their post Covid recovery strategy. By using data they have identified those learners with low engagement and high anxiety, as a direct consequence of the pandemic. The EBSA toolkit, allows a collaborative approach with families and schools to builds relationships and trust.
- 3.3 Plasmarl Primary School have embedded Trauma informed strategies, including employing a wellbeing lead who has a diploma in trauma informed practises. They have embedded the principles of ACEs, including purchasing a therapy dog, to create a unique package of support which has benefited all learners. This is supported by the fact that they have not issued an exclusion since 2012. They are currently being assessed by Trauma Informed School (Wales) to be presented with the Trauma informed and mentally healthy schools award. If successful will be only the second school in South Wales to be issued with the award, and the first in Swansea.
- 3.4 As an Education Directorate we are constantly looking at new ways to improve, and are currently pursuing a number of options.

- 3.5 Further exploration of bespoke educational packages to support vulnerable learners. The aim is to provide educational experiences that suit the child and their life experiences. Many children who have experienced prolonged trauma are living in a situation of toxic stress, and need support away from the classroom to be able to learn. We are currently working with our external funding department to explore ways in which these can be provided.
- 3.6 Further partnership working with the contextual safeguarding team. They are currently working in collaboration with a number of schools, to explore the “what matters” conversation with the children associated with risky behaviour. They can provide support and training for staff.
- 3.7 We have made excellent progress in this area but are always keen to explore new ideas to ensure our children and young people have the best educational experience we can possibly provide. Ace Aware Wales are very keen to work with us to become an ACE aware Council, using their TrACE Toolkit, they look at ways to do things differently and advocate kindness to break the cycle of ACEs.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 4.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 4.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the ‘well-being goals’.

4.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

4.2 This report is for information only.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this report, it may lead to decisions being taken later that may have costs attached. Any such costs will need to be managed within departmental resources at that time with due regard to the Council's medium term financial plan.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None