
Knowing your children – supporting pupils with adverse childhood experiences (ACES)

January 2020

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Introduction

This report is published in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2018-2019. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, schools, local authorities and regional consortia, and may also be of interest to other public services such as the police, health services and social services.

The report evaluates how well primary and secondary schools in Wales support pupils with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). It also looks at the effectiveness of the collaborative work between education and other public services in supporting these pupils and their families.

The report considers school strategies to support pupils who are currently experiencing or have experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences. Case studies exemplify how providers have developed ACE-informed practice to support these pupils, as well as to build resilience and emotional strength in all pupils in their schools.

Inspectors visited a sample of maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools across Wales in terms of size, levels of social deprivation, language medium and location. In addition, 19 Welsh local authorities completed a survey about their collaboration with other public services and their work to support schools. Other public services and organisations also provided information. The findings of the report draw on the evidence listed in Appendix 1.

Background

Public Health Wales (2015) defines ACEs as traumatic or stressful experiences that occur during childhood that directly harm a child or affect the environment in which they live and are remembered throughout adulthood. An ACE means exposure to one or more of these factors:

- Verbal and or mental abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Hostile parental separation
- Domestic violence
- Parental mental illness
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug use
- Neglect
- Parental incarceration (Public Health Wales, 2015)

Public Health Wales research

In 2015-2016, Public Health Wales published a series of reports about the extent of ACEs experienced by the Welsh adult population (2015, 2016a, 2016b). These studies found that almost half (47%) of adults in Wales have suffered at least one ACE (Public Health Wales, 2015, p.3). Fourteen per cent of adults in Wales suffered four or more ACEs (Public Health Wales, 2016b, p.2). Of these adults, 41% of them are now judged to be living with low mental wellbeing (Public Health Wales, 2016b, p.2). The reports conclude that adults who have experienced four or more ACEs have an increased uptake of health-harming behaviours such as smoking, high-risk drinking, or drug use, as well as reduced mental wellbeing (Public Health Wales, 2015, 2016b). One report highlights how experiencing abuse or other problems in childhood are linked with increased levels of chronic disease in adulthood and increased use of healthcare (Public Health Wales, 2016a).

An article by Bellis et al. (2018) and a Public Health Wales report (2018d) were published in 2018 to coincide with the launch of the ACE Support Hub. These works highlight the negative impact of ACEs on child health, including mental health, social engagement, attachment, behaviour and school attendance. The authors conclude that children with high levels of 'toxic stress' or childhood adversity are seven times more likely to absent from school for more than 20 days a year (Bellis et al., 2018). The studies also identified elements that help protect children from harmful outcomes. The influences of friends, trusted adults, communities and schools can help children build resilience and the ability to overcome severe hardships (Bellis et al, 2018). The report also highlights the role of sport in building resilience in children and young people (Public Health Wales, 2018d). For some children, the school may be the only source of access to sport. This research suggests that the greatest protection from the negative impact of ACEs is having at least one positive and consistent relationship with a trusted adult. As well as better overall childhood health, individuals with access to more sources of resilience were less likely to report frequent school absenteeism, headaches and digestive problems (Bellis et al., 2018).

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of people living in Wales. The Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty and health inequalities (National Assembly for Wales, 2015). The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals and makes it clear that listed public bodies must work to achieve all of the goals. Each local authority must have a Public Service Board (PSB) to improve joint working across all public services within the authority. Each board must carry out a wellbeing assessment and publish an annual local wellbeing plan, setting out its local objectives and the steps it proposes to take to meet them. The Well-being of Future Generations Act, together with the [Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014](#), places an increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention services, and has helped to raise the priority of wellbeing for local authorities and their partners. Recently, the Commissioner for the Well-being of Future Generations has dedicated more resources to a few areas in more detail in order to have greater impact. Supporting the ACE agenda and

promoting collaborative work between public services in Wales comprise one of these areas.

Cymru Well Wales

Cymru Well Wales was established in late 2016 and brings together organisations that are committed to working together and aligning activity and resources to secure better health and wellbeing for the people of Wales. Partners include the Welsh Government, Gwent Police and the Welsh Local Government Association. Cymru Well Wales is guided by a strategic group of senior decision makers who consider all available evidence to decide upon key priority areas for collaborative action. It has five guiding principles:

- 1 Acting today to prevent poor health tomorrow
- 2 Improving wellbeing by harnessing activity and resources to amplify our collective impact
- 3 Thinking and working creatively to tackle health inequalities
- 4 Empowering our communities in all that we do
- 5 Learning from others to design innovative action for the future (Public Health Wales, 2016c)

Cymru Well Wales' focus is in two main areas. One of these is the 'First 1000 days' Collaborative, which is focused on bringing together partners drawn from across public services and third sector organisations to support families at this pivotal time in children's lives. The other is addressing ACEs and their impact. Cymru Well Wales aims to achieve this firstly by making all public services in Wales able to respond effectively to prevent and mitigate the harms from ACEs. Its second aim is to build protective factors and resilience in the population to cope with ACEs that cannot be prevented.

In January 2017, the then Cabinet Minister for Communities and Children and the Cabinet Minister for Education announced £400,000 of Welsh Government funding to support Cymru Well Wales to set up an 'ACE Support Hub' to address the negative impact of ACEs. The Ministers for Social Services and Public Health also provided £50,000 for further ACE-related research. The ACE Hub was also supported by some resources in kind from some of the Cymru Well Wales partners, significantly Public Health Wales.

The ACE Support Hub

The ACE Support Hub was launched in January 2018. Its aims are to help create the environment for change and to support individuals, communities and organisations to help create an ACE aware society. It aims to make Wales a world leader in preventing, mitigating and tackling ACEs by:

- preventing ACEs from occurring in children's lives
- supporting early intervention when children are experiencing ACEs to minimise their impacts
- building resilience in adults who have experienced ACEs to stop them being passed on through generations (Public Health Wales, 2018a)

An ACE Skills and Knowledge Framework has been developed, which describes the knowledge and skills the different levels of the workforce needs in order to be ACE-informed, ACE-skilled and ACE-influencers. The ACE Support Hub offers free training at three levels to schools. The first level of training is an ACE awareness course suitable for all staff involved with children and families. The second level of training covers basic trauma informed practice with an element of emotion coaching and focuses on the importance of the ‘trusted adult’ to vulnerable pupils. The third level of training is still at planning stage. It is envisaged that this training will focus on enabling leaders to develop strategic action plans in order to ensure long term sustainability of a whole-school approach to supporting vulnerable pupils.

Main findings

- 1 Many leaders, teachers and support staff now have a better understanding of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children and young people, partly as a result of training by the Wales ACE Support Hub, and some staff invest considerable time into researching wellbeing matters. This greater awareness of ACEs has helped many schools to adopt a whole-school approach, involving all their staff, to support vulnerable pupils.
- 2 The schools that best support pupils with ACEs and other vulnerable pupils know their pupils well, and provide a safe and nurturing environment where all pupils can feel happy. Staff in these schools work closely with families in a non-judgmental way. They establish a culture of trust where parents are comfortable in sharing information and staff can direct them to sources of possible support. Leaders in these schools support the wellbeing of their staff and provide them with training, because they recognise that working with pupils and families in difficult circumstances can be emotionally demanding.
- 3 The quality and impact of support for pupils with ACEs tend to be better in the primary schools visited than in secondary. In many primary schools, teachers provide daily opportunities for pupils to talk about their feelings and share their worries. They offer practical help and moral support to vulnerable families and maintain a positive relationship with them. Although some secondary schools have strong processes to ensure that they gain accurate information from families, many have not established a close, trusting relationship with them.
- 4 In the best cases, schools focus on improving the wellbeing of all of their pupils. While there is targeted and specialist support and interventions for those that need it most, there is also well-considered universal provision for building pupils' resilience and strengthening their emotional intelligence. This is important as children and young people's ACEs may be well hidden.
- 5 Pupils who live in difficult circumstances often have reduced opportunities to socialise and may lack confidence when trying to make friends. A majority of primary schools run targeted friendship clubs for pupils. A few schools use their Pupil Development Grant (PDG) to fund targeted support such as nurture groups, where pupils learn how to socialise and learn coping strategies. These pupils often have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, but make good progress in this type of learning environment.
- 6 Many schools have trained some staff to deliver social and emotional intervention programmes for vulnerable pupils, including those with ACEs. In many cases, support assistants have received specific training to support pupils with ACEs and other vulnerable pupils. As a result, they understand the impact of trauma on children and young people and the importance of attachment¹ in supporting their psychological development and mental health. In many primary schools, all staff

¹ See glossary

have benefited from training, but fewer have in secondary schools, which limits the opportunity to develop a whole-school approach.

- 7 In primary schools, there are usually strong arrangements to ensure that children with ACEs and other vulnerable pupils have calm, nurturing and supportive spaces to go to when they are feeling anxious or upset. While secondary schools may also provide similar spaces, they are mainly used by the youngest pupils or those with special educational needs.
- 8 Most pupils say that they have suitable adults in school whom they trust and feel safe enough to discuss problems with and believe that they will help them. In the schools visited, many secondary pupils say that, although they know of staff that they can approach, they feel that not all their teachers will know how to offer them support.
- 9 Arrangements to monitor the wellbeing and progress of vulnerable pupils and those who have ACEs are appropriate in most schools. Welsh Government guidance makes clear that it is the impact of ACEs on children and young people that is important, and not counting the number of ACEs. Schools often focus on improving the wellbeing of all pupils through providing different levels of response according to pupils' needs. In the best schools, teachers use a comprehensive range of tools and questionnaires to assess and track pupils' wellbeing and identify their strengths and areas of potential difficulty around self-esteem or social confidence.
- 10 The wellbeing of Welsh citizens, including children and young people, is high on the agenda of all local authorities and is one of the main priorities in their corporate strategic plans. Many local authorities make a clear commitment to the sharing of information through the 'Public Protection Notice' process or 'Operation Encompass', which means that schools should receive near immediate notice of police involvement with families with school-age children. All local authorities have signed the Wales Accord for the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) that helps them to share personal information effectively and lawfully, and allows services to work together to support people. However, the use of information sharing protocols (ISPs) between local authorities and other services and outside agencies is inconsistent. School leaders say that they do not always find out about important developments in children's lives in a timely way. In some cases, this means that children can arrive at school following a significant, traumatic event that the school is unaware of and this prevents the school from preparing appropriately.
- 11 All local authority education services have arrangements to discuss children and young people through multi-agency planning meetings or 'team around the family' meetings. These are generally effective in identifying and supporting pupils with ACEs. Multi-agency meetings organised by schools or local authorities are a valuable means to plan support and interventions. When these meetings are regular and well attended, they can be purposeful and effective. However, in too many cases, case workers from other agencies do not attend these meetings regularly enough.
- 12 A few local authorities have developed their Families First service to create 'Early Help' services or 'Early Help Hubs'. These hubs include police, education and voluntary agencies. They are intended to support families who may not qualify for

statutory services. These are particularly useful in supporting children and young people who have experienced ACEs. In many local authorities and police force areas, health, education and police services are working strategically through the Early Action Together Programme. This programme, while at different stages across Wales, brings partners together to plan early intervention and is showing promising early signs.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 Provide both whole-school and targeted support for vulnerable pupils, in partnership with other services, based on an understanding of the impact of ACEs on children
- R2 Prioritise building trusting and positive relationships with families that encourage them to share important information with the school
- R3 Ensure that there is suitable access to calm, nurturing and supportive spaces for all vulnerable pupils, including those with ACEs, and particularly for older secondary pupils
- R4 Provide training and support all secondary school staff, not just those involved in pastoral work, to understand their role as a potential trusted adult for vulnerable pupils
- R5 Establish mechanisms to share information about vulnerable pupils and families confidentially and sensitively with relevant staff

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R6 Share relevant information about vulnerable pupils and families promptly with schools
- R7 Assist schools to develop ACE-informed strategies to support vulnerable pupils

The Welsh Government should:

- R8 Promote the WASPI and encourage the timely sharing of information about vulnerable pupils and families with schools

1 School support for pupils with adverse childhood experiences

Leadership and a whole-school approach

- 13 Schools that best support vulnerable pupils, including those with ACEs, place the wellbeing of every child at the forefront of their work. In these schools, there is a strong focus on providing a safe and nurturing environment where all pupils and staff feel happy. Leaders in these schools know their pupils and families well, and work openly, positively and productively with them in a non-judgmental way. They understand the barriers facing pupils who have experienced trauma and harmful experiences and recognise the challenges these pupils need to overcome to become resilient, well and happy. Governors in these schools ensure that school policies promote equality for all, including positive discrimination. They recruit staff who share their school's vision of nurturing pupils and building positive relationships with families and the community.

Mount Stuart Primary School serves the Butetown area of Cardiff and is in an area of high deprivation. There are around 500 pupils on roll, which includes a nursery unit. The school is a diverse community with 94% minority ethnic pupils, 73% of whom speak English as an additional language with 28 different languages spoken. The school community is well-established and rich in culture and heritage, with the main ethnic groups being of Somali, Indian, Yemeni and Arabic heritage. There is also a growing community of families from the Indian sub-continent.

The school aims to provide a caring and nurturing environment to support pupils and families to thrive. The school places a strong focus on parental engagement and on supporting the whole family. This has a positive impact on pupils' attitude to learning, outcomes and wellbeing.

The background of the school presents a number of challenges and opportunities. Many parents speak limited English and the school works hard to ensure that the staff employed at the school can speak the main language groups. Leaders are highly visible around the school and ensure positive relationships through a truly open door policy. They ensure that parents with concerns are seen immediately and the school team work relentlessly to ensure a welcoming and supportive ethos.

A 'Family Engagement Teacher' develops positive relationships with parents through weekly coffee mornings where parents come to discuss a range of school and community issues. The Parent Council meets with the Family Engagement Teacher on a half-termly basis to discuss issues around the curriculum and concerns from parents. The Family Engagement Teacher ensures that parents have access to a range of courses and training that all take place at the school. These include regular English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, IT classes, positive behaviour courses and welfare courses. These courses are at the request of the parents. The Family Engagement teacher also co-ordinates a range of work with parents and pupils. For example, there is a successful family literacy programme where parents come into school to work alongside their child once a week together with other parents and their children.

The school's rights respecting ethos and restorative practice have a positive impact on staff and pupil wellbeing. The restorative approach work is embedded across the school. Teachers and support staff place a great importance on building, maintaining and repairing relationships during circle time. When issues arise, they are dealt with in a restorative manner by all members of staff who have all received extensive training.

Professional learning is at the heart of the inclusive ethos of the school. All staff have received ACE training and have time to develop and practice their skills in supporting children. Opportunities for staff to develop and share expertise across the school have impacted positively on pupils, staff and parents.

- 14 In the best schools, staff at all levels model positive behaviour and apply a consistent, restorative approach when responding to challenge. Although there is very strong practice in a few secondary schools visited as part of this review, strong leadership in supporting pupils affected by ACEs is more prevalent in primary schools.
- 15 In a minority of the primary schools, senior leaders and teachers invest time into researching wellbeing matters. They know about the impact of trauma on children and use personal time to research and plan provision. For example, one teacher developed an understanding of alternative approaches, such as the use of music to promote positive mental health, and created a programme for her class. In a few primary schools, leaders make use of local grant funding to collaborate with higher education institutions to provide evidence for clinical research. In return, staff receive advice and guidance to support them in providing social engagement programmes. Moorland Primary School worked with a family law company and a charity to create and publish a book with quotes from pupils about their feelings on divorce and separation, 'Splitting up – a child's guide to a grown up problem' (Mischon de Reya and Place2Be, 2016).

At Bodnant Primary School, the headteacher understands and supports the importance of positive emotional wellbeing and puts this high on the school's agenda. All staff are aware that children who have experienced ACEs and emotional difficulties relating to home often have difficulty engaging in school, which has a negative effect on behaviour, attendance and their ability to focus on learning and use their self-help skills. The school adopts a family ethos and works continuously to develop positive relationships with parents and carers.

The school aims to promote resilience, positive mental health, self-worth and self-esteem through a range of activities including pupil support groups, nurture groups, individual counselling, mini yoga, playground buddies, anger support, and an anti-bullying peer group in collaboration with Bangor University. The school is also one of the first schools in North Wales to take part in the Prince William Award, which offers weekly team building and life skills activities over a school year for looked after and vulnerable pupils.

The school employs a counsellor who is trained to use a wide range of therapeutic approaches with individual pupils. The counsellor, family liaison manager and

special educational needs co-ordinator, with the support of the headteacher, work closely together to support parents and pupils both at home and through the transition into school. The school has invested in training of teachers and support staff in trauma and attachment to understand the need to promote healthy relationships in pupils.

- 16 A few secondary schools use evidence from research as a driver to reform their behaviour policy. These schools recognise a need to change how staff at all levels respond to pupil disengagement and poor behaviour. Educational psychologists provide professional development on the neurological impact of trauma and adverse experiences on children and young people. These schools adopt a policy of support and restorative approaches, which results in widespread improvement in pupil behaviour and attitudes to learning. In a few schools, where there is lack of vision to support pupils' wellbeing, leaders do not have a secure enough understanding of the challenges some of their pupils face or the difficult family situations in which they live. They are not proactive in seeking guidance on how best to support vulnerable pupils or build their resilience. In a very few cases, they show limited interest in pupils' home life and only focus on providing them with academic challenge.
- 17 Effective leaders place a significant focus on supporting and promoting the wellbeing of their staff. They recognise that working with pupils and families who are living in harmful, toxic situations or have experienced trauma can be emotionally demanding and stressful for school staff. They understand that if staff are aware of and look after their own wellbeing they will be better able to support their pupils' wellbeing. In these schools, senior leaders hold regular supervision and mentoring sessions for their teachers where they discuss ways of working with various children and their families. A few other schools hold mindfulness and fitness sessions for staff so that they have opportunities to improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

Millbrook Primary School is noted within the local authority for its nurturing approach and for supporting vulnerable pupils, enabling them to succeed in reaching their personal goals. The school's ongoing research and a strong focus on ACEs have been key to this success.

International research in the USA and research on a national and local level have shaped the school's vision and approach to supporting vulnerable pupils or pupils who may have experienced ACEs.

Staff at all levels have engaged in ACE-aware and trauma-informed training and research. Staff visited other schools locally, nationally and internationally. Research has been shared and training held on trauma-informed approaches. This has led to the development of a whole-school wellbeing charter, which supports all staff in ensuring that they consistently use the right approach for a child in need. For example, there is consistent use of positive language to engage pupils and support their emotions. Staff recognise the importance that positive relationships play in helping to mitigate the impact of trauma.

The school offers a bespoke, evidence-informed package of support for pupil and family wellbeing. Emotion coaching, emotional literacy support and guided early

intervention nurture sessions are a few of the activities that the school uses to support wellbeing. As a result, nearly all pupils feel well supported when they experience trauma.

The school embraces its partnership work with a range of agencies and includes them fully in ACE training and trauma-informed practices. This has ensured that consistent provision is available to families. The school places significant emphasis on its relationships with all stakeholders and with partner organisations.

Identification of pupils with ACEs

- 18 Differing professional views regarding the identification of ACEs and particularly the counting of ACEs causes a dilemma for schools. Public Health Wales reports (2015, 2016a, 2016b) focus largely on adults who have experienced four or more ACEs. The Wales ACE Support Hub, the Children’s Commissioner in Wales (2018) and others do not advocate using the number of ACEs as a criterion for receiving services and support. The Welsh Government makes clear that its priority is helping school staff to understand the long term impact of exposure to trauma, as well as other forms of childhood adversity. Generally, headteachers believe that seeking information from children and families about any harmful experience to score them in terms of the number of ACEs is unhelpful.
- 19 Estyn’s inspection guidance (2019a, 2019b) for primary and secondary schools sets out the aspects for inspection, which include how well schools promote the wellbeing of their pupils, provide good quality care, support and guidance and monitor the effectiveness of their work. Leaders should evaluate the impact of their work and governors should account for their use of resources. Good leadership means identifying weak practice, putting measures in place to ensure improvements, and sharing effective and strong practice. Without secure measures to identify, support, and track the progress of pupils with ACEs and other vulnerable groups, leaders will not be secure in their understanding of the effectiveness of their work.
- 20 In the best cases, schools focus on improving the wellbeing of all of their pupils. While there is targeted and specialist support and interventions for those that need it most, there is also well-considered universal provision for building pupils’ resilience and strengthening their emotional intelligence. This is particularly important as children and young peoples’ ACEs may be well hidden.

Ebbw Fawr Learning Community is a 3-16 all-age school in the heart of Ebbw Vale. There are around 900 pupils in the secondary phase and 300 in the primary phase.

After evaluating the new secondary behaviour policy, the school recognised that it was not working well for around 10% of pupils, who continued to display challenging behaviour and attitudes. These behaviours were often leading to confrontation and exclusion. Looking at the background of these pupils it became clear that they had all been exposed to trauma at a young age as a result of one or more adverse childhood experiences. A working party was formed to develop strategies and school systems to support these vulnerable pupils and others identified as being at risk of poor wellbeing.

The school created a detailed tracking system that identifies the adverse childhood experiences that individual students are coping with. Pupils are then placed into three groups, according to the number of adverse experience they have encountered, as the research shows clearly that the higher the number the greater likelihood of adverse effects.

The grouping, although controversial, enables the school to tailor support for pupils. Students considered as low-risk are generally coping well within the normal school systems but need a watchful eye. Form tutors are asked to keep a close eye on these students. They are encouraged to attend activities such as the school-based mindfulness programme run by a trained member of staff. Medium-risk students are often at risk of exclusion. School staff who have volunteered to act as personal mentors provide one-to-one sessions for these pupils on a weekly basis. Staff at the on-site Wellbeing and Achievement Centre support high-risk students with multiple ACEs who are at risk of exclusion and permanent exclusion. Support includes anger management sessions, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) sessions, homework sessions, a keeping healthy programme, a revised timetable and study towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Senior leaders recognised that school-based support was not providing the comprehensive care package needed by its medium and high risk pupils. It has therefore developed enhanced multi-agency partnerships with external partners to ensure a more rounded approach to support. The school now works closely with the police, the youth service, Families First, Blaenau Gwent Inspire, Public Health Wales, Coleg Gwent, Blaenau Gwent Communities Trust, Careers Wales, the local authority Education Welfare Service and the School-based Counselling Services.

The implementation of this tiered approach to support has resulted in a positive impact on standards of wellbeing. Exclusions have fallen for the identified students. There have been no permanent exclusions at Ebbw Fawr School for the past two years. Attendance has risen for the identified students. The results from the Pupils' Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) survey have considerably improved for 85% of identified students. Attendance at parents' evenings for identified students has improved. In addition to improvements in these students' wellbeing, there have been substantial improvements in their performance at the end of key stage 4.

- 21 Primary schools tend to be in a better position than secondary schools to gather information about family life directly from parents as they benefit from more regular contact with them. Generally, primary school staff know their families well. Many primary schools who took part in the survey say that they often receive helpful information about domestic situations, as parents feel confident enough to approach staff to inform them or to discuss important changes. They also note that they are able to identify times of domestic stress or hardship swiftly when parents disengage with school life, when children suddenly become quiet or when they display sudden changes of mood.

- 22 Large and medium-sized primary schools in many deprived areas employ family engagement officers, attendance officers or support workers. These staff members often make an initial visit to the family home prior to a child starting in nursery class. This enables schools to identify any potential issues and discuss their concerns with parents and carers at an early stage.
- 23 A minority of secondary schools have established creative ways to gather timely intelligence on families and domestic situations by inviting families into school for informal chats and coffee mornings. A few secondary schools do not develop these trusting relationships with parents well enough. They sometimes have an unrealistic expectation that pupils will approach staff with information or rely on other agencies to share information. In addition, they rely on information gathered from primary schools and do not build on this information as these pupils progress through the school.

Tracking and monitoring

- 24 Nearly all schools identify, track and monitor common groups of pupils such as those eligible for free schools meals and those who are looked after. Generally, they track standards of achievement, attendance and behaviour of these pupils as they do for all learners. Most primary schools and the majority of secondary schools make use of a range of suitable assessment materials to identify pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs and support their pupils to become more resilient, independent and capable learners.
- 25 A majority of secondary schools use surveys such as the Pupil's Attitude to Self and School (PASS) to identify issues around self-esteem and social confidence. In most cases, a whole-school report is produced that identifies areas of weakness in cohorts, year groups or the whole school. This allows leaders to plan strategies and interventions. When a successful school identifies a new need but currently does not have the resources to address it, it diverts resources, re-prioritises support or works with external partners to make sure that the need is met. Weaker schools often do not respond directly enough to findings from surveys and do not plan relevant resource or support.
- 26 The majority of primary schools make productive use of bespoke tools to assess pupils' social and emotional strengths, such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire² (SDQ) or the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale³. Normally, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) receive training to use these. In addition, schools may use purposeful assessments and social intervention programmes available that are endorsed by local authorities' education psychology service. These include the NBAR (National Behaviour and Attendance Review) assessment, Boxhall profiling, Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), and Thrive⁴ assessments and programmes.

² The Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire for children and young people. It exists in several versions to meet the needs of researchers, clinicians and educationalists.

³ Spence Anxiety Scale (developed by Spence in 1998) is a psychological questionnaire designed to assess the severity of anxiety symptoms in children.

⁴ The Thrive Approach has been developed by four professionals with backgrounds in social work, psychotherapy and education, and is grounded in established neuroscience and attachment theory.

- 27 Arrangements to monitor the progress of vulnerable pupils, including those who have ACEs, vary from school to school but are generally sound. In many secondary schools, pastoral leaders hold weekly meetings with school support staff to discuss individual pupils' wellbeing. These meetings, in many cases, focus primarily on behaviour and attendance only.
- 28 In many primary schools, leaders hold regular or half-termly monitoring and accountability meetings with class teachers to discuss pupils' wellbeing as well as their academic progress. Line management meetings between pastoral senior and middle leaders in secondary schools also include discussions on pupils' achievement and wellbeing, but tend to focus on groups of pupils rather than individuals.
- 29 A few secondary schools use pupil Pastoral Support Plans (PSPs) well to support vulnerable pupils. Although Welsh Government guidance (2015) suggests the creation of PSPs for pupils who are at risk of exclusion, a few schools have made proactive use of PSPs to support their most vulnerable pupils who may not have any behavioural difficulties.

Prestatyn High School uses PSPs productively to support pupils with ACEs and other vulnerable pupils. PSPs contain comprehensive information that support the pupil, staff and often parents. They include background information, areas of strength, and areas of concern including descriptions of how problems appear, together with guidance on how to deal with common situations and strategies for staff on how to avoid conflict and potential problems arising. Targets are sensible and appropriate and review dates are consistent. Parents and many relevant agencies are involved in the creation and ongoing review of the PSP. This has resulted in fewer exclusions and improved engagement with learning among vulnerable pupils.

Information sharing and joint working arrangements

- 30 Many headteachers interviewed noted inconsistencies in the way other services share information with them about vulnerable children and families. They feel that procedures linked to Operation Encompass and the issuing of Public Protection Notices are not reliable enough. Children's social services generally have regular contact with schools who have looked after children or pupils on the child protection register. They are required to request information on a child's academic achievement and wellbeing when families are undergoing statutory assessment. However, many schools note that there is little contact with schools beyond these statutory activities. Similarly, although health professionals may gather a lot of information about children and young people as part of their assessment procedures, for example through the child development team, schools say that they do not share important information regularly enough with them or maintain contact with them while providing therapy or interventions to their pupils. Senior leaders are often unaware that their pupils are receiving support for mental health issues.
- 31 Where there is an effective service within a local authority that supports pre-school children and families, primary schools benefit from receiving a 'pupil assessment vulnerability profile' for their new starters in the nursery or reception classes. The

vulnerability profile is a tool that scores pupils on a range of health and wellbeing indicators. The higher the score, the more vulnerable the pupil. This helps teachers to plan appropriate provision for these young children on entry to education.

- 32 The majority of schools have suitable opportunities to discuss and plan support for pupils with ACEs through cluster multi-agency planning (MAP) meetings. Membership usually includes representation from the local authority's social services, education welfare service, youth service and education psychology service as well as representation from the school nursing service, Careers Wales, the police and other relevant agencies. However, there are inconsistencies in how often these meetings take place and in how successful they are in improving support for pupils with ACEs. Often, the time gap between meetings is too long and representatives from key agencies do not attend. Schools do not always receive important and timely information. This limits the schools' ability to plan suitable interventions and support for their pupils. Schools often feel that they are working with families without enough support and guidance from other experts.
- 33 The most successful MAP meetings are regular events, typically fortnightly, with consistent attendance of relevant frontline staff from a comprehensive range of agencies and services. Strong schools insist on regular sharing of information between those involved and with their cluster partner schools. They ensure that there are clear actions from meetings and that all agencies understand what they are required to do before the next meeting.

Ysgol Rhosymedre has a history of working effectively with other public services and outside organisations to support vulnerable pupils and families. The senior leadership team has established a vision of care and nurture for all pupils, staff and families and the belief that everyone deserves the best opportunities regardless of their background and circumstances.

Staff are proactive in seeking advice, support and ideas from each other and other agencies. Weekly staff meetings focus on the holistic needs of pupils and, often, their families. The school makes appropriate referrals to children's services, the school nurse, health services or outside agencies such as Action for Children. These services, in turn, support the school in meeting the needs of vulnerable children, and often their families.

Senior leaders and key staff have established honest communication pathways with all outside partners by challenging procedures, questioning decisions and highlighting necessary improvements. Relationships with these partners are based on a proven track record and are built on the firm expectation of equal effort and responsibility from all.

Professional learning

- 34 Many headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants have either received ACE awareness training either directly through the ACE Support Hub or through senior officers or educational psychologists in their local authority or regional consortium. Staff value this training as it helps them understand how trauma affects children and young people. In a few cases, governors and parents have also received ACE awareness training.

At **Aberdare Park School**, there is a whole-school vision to identify and address the difficulties of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, including those who have suffered trauma or ACEs. The headteacher researched the impact of ‘toxic stress’ on children and led training for all staff and governors. This led to staff developing a greater ability to:

- identify signs of toxic stress in children
- support and provide for children affected – ensuring that strategies identified as effective for children with ACEs are used
- develop the all-important adult-child relationships and resilience children will need to overcome adversities

The school has a culture of support for its pupils, ensuring a stable, safe and nurturing environment to alleviate the effects of ACEs on children. This includes activities to build resilience and positive mental health, such as music therapy and mindfulness.

- 35 In many primary schools, senior leaders, teachers and learning support assistants have the knowledge and relevant qualifications to support vulnerable pupils. A majority of primary and secondary schools have members of staff trained to deliver support for vulnerable learners through bespoke programmes of support. In a few schools, learning support assistants undertake professional development to enable them to run specialised programmes such as art, music or play therapy. A few schools benefit from the knowledge of support assistants who have degrees in areas such as inclusive education, child development or psychology.
- 36 Most school staff feel that professional learning sessions on attachment issues and attachment disorder are useful. They also value the professional learning opportunities on emotion coaching with children and young people. They feel that professional learning in these areas enables them to understand better why children behave and react as they do and helps them to change their strategies when their pupils misbehave, or are withdrawn or disengaged.
- 37 Generally, teachers and support staff across primary and secondary schools have suitable knowledge and experience of working with vulnerable pupils. Primary school staff often have a wide range of professional learning opportunities to help them provide support to pupils. Only a very few staff in secondary schools are suitably trained or qualified in this area. This is because there is a tendency in secondary schools for only pastoral staff to attend professional learning events relating to vulnerable learners. This increases the capacity of a very few staff to deliver

interventions, but limits the opportunity to develop a whole-school approach. Staff in secondary schools who do not have a specific responsibility for the pastoral aspect of school life sometimes see their role as one of academic educator only. Limiting professional learning opportunities about supporting vulnerable pupils to a very small number of staff exacerbates this situation.

- 38 Many organisations that work in areas associated with ACEs support schools well. School staff benefit from training by specialist agencies and organisations, although access to such support varies across Wales. Hafan Cymru's Spectrum initiative provides resources and guidance to schools to support them in delivering a whole-school approach to tackling domestic abuse and promoting healthy relationships. Welsh Women's Aid also provides useful free professional development to schools. School staff can access the two-day STAR Programme training, which helps them to deliver lessons around abusive relationships. Stonewall Cymru provides teachers with professional development opportunities around diversity issues. The Wales Action for Children charity provides professional development for relevant staff in secondary schools to help them screen and identify young people who have low self-esteem and mild mental health difficulties. A few secondary schools deliver Action for Children's 'Blues Programme'. This programme aims to reduce the signs of adolescent low mood and negative thoughts and promote prevention. Other programmes and support, such as that provided by the Families Affected by Imprisonment (FABI) service and Barnardos Cymru's 'Hidden Walls' programme, help schools plan valuable interventions for children and young people of incarcerated parents.

Universal support for wellbeing

- 39 There are fewer opportunities in the majority of secondary schools than in primary to support wellbeing through the curriculum. Outside of specific personal and social education (PSE) lessons, assemblies and the occasional presentation from outside agencies and charities, pupils do not have regular enough opportunities to develop their mental wellbeing or to discuss social and emotional matters on a regular basis. Although there may be valuable and supportive universal provision, such as breakfast and homework clubs and a room for pupils to go if they do not wish to spend breaks outside, secondary pupils often feel that they are mainly for younger pupils, and sometimes only for Year 7 pupils. There are not enough quiet zones or comfortable areas for older pupils in secondary schools to use. A majority of schools have suitable quiet spaces for pupils with a special education need such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). However, there is limited space or appropriate provision for other vulnerable pupils, in particular those who live in toxic and harmful environments, where they can relax and feel safe.
- 40 In many primary schools, class teachers adopt a universal approach to promoting emotional resilience and positive mental health. They use their knowledge, skills and understanding well to plan enriching experiences for their pupils. They carefully select aspects of targeted interventions programmes in their lesson planning. They use materials linked to the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme skilfully to promote learning and pupil engagement and to support pupils' social and emotional development.

- 41 Many schools that have undertaken professional learning on therapeutic activities such as mindfulness and promoting a growth mindset have a whole-school policy around their delivery. In these schools, pupils from nursery to Year 6 take part in sessions where they learn about relaxation techniques and how to relieve anxiety. The impact of these activities on pupils' mental wellbeing normally depends on the skills and understanding of the adult leading the activities.

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd wanted to give its pupils strategies to identify features of positive and negative mental health alongside the ability to discuss and respond to their emotions in a more positive way. This happened as the result of a NHS Wales report that stated that a quarter of the population would experience mental health-related problems at some time during their lives. The school has experimented with a range of ways to promote mental health and is now integrating some of the most successful activities into the curriculum.

Early in Year 7, pupils learn the principles of mindfulness and the benefits of mindful activities that are then implemented as part of every timetable cycle. This provides learners with opportunities to develop techniques and encourages them to use them beyond the classroom to promote positive mental health.

- 42 In many primary schools, teachers provide daily opportunities for pupils to talk about their feelings and share their worries. This is often done well through circle time activities. In a few schools, pupils put their names against feelings on boards at the start of the day, and then support staff monitor this and respond accordingly. Younger pupils are often encouraged to share their worries with the 'Worry Monster' or the 'Bwgi Becso' puppets, and older pupils understand that they can share their problem by putting a written note in the 'Whisper Box'.

Ysgol Llandinam is a small, three class rural school that runs the Peaceful Schools Programme. The programme aims to increase awareness and understanding in pupils of the causes and effects of conflict in their own life experiences and enable them to develop the confidence and strategies to cope with their own feelings and those of others. Through the programme, pupils develop skills in problem-solving, conflict-resolution, co-operative working and mediation, and learn about children's rights. The sessions are delivered by a team of trained volunteers through circle time, games and activities. The sessions support the work of the school's Super Ambassadors (trained through the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Children's Ambassador scheme) on the United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). These sessions culminated with a visit from a refugee who dispelled some myths about refugees and helped develop pupils' empathy.

- 43 There is an increasing number of schools across Wales that are using the UNCRC to promote children's human rights or to become gain the Rights Respecting School Award. At present, 67 schools have gained the silver award and 37 have gained the gold award. Many of these schools use the Convention articles to inform lesson planning.

Garth Primary School is a Rights Respecting School where pupils have a strong voice. The school has a strong inclusive person-centred approach to meeting the wellbeing needs of all pupils to help them overcome barriers to learning and realise their full potential. The school is successful in raising the attainment of all pupils, particularly those children who are at a disadvantage through their experiences of social and economic deprivation and ACEs.

The school community works hard to create a climate in which all children thrive and where inclusion, participation and engagement of vulnerable pupils are integral to raising the attainment of those pupils and to improve their life chances beyond school.

To help achieve the vision of supporting the wellbeing of all pupils, the school employs a wellbeing leader who is also the additional learning needs and inclusion co-ordinator.

The school has established a universal approach to wellbeing through working in partnership with a number of external statutory and charitable organisations. These partnerships have helped to upskill school staff to support vulnerable pupils throughout the school day. The school community has engaged in extensive professional learning around attachment, the impact of trauma and emotional coaching. Teachers and support staff use the knowledge and skills they have acquired when they work with and respond to pupils, especially if they show signs of distress, anxiety or trauma.

As a Rights Respecting School, supporting the UNCRC is at the heart of its ethos and permeates all aspects of school life. Articles from the UNCRC are promoted through a school mascot, through displays, links with areas of learning in the curriculum and in school assemblies. The embedding of children's rights empowers pupils across the school by teaching them to constantly question the status quo. This enables them to reflect differently on their personal circumstances. Pupils have a greater sense of security knowing that there are adults in the school who will find time to listen to them, show empathy towards them and give them support or guidance.

As a result of the school's approach, pupils now have higher levels of self-esteem and are more confident and resilient. Their attitudes to learning are more positive and they are readily taking responsibility for themselves and their actions.

Targeted support and intervention

- 44 Schools that best support pupil with ACEs have secured funding arrangements to provide extra resources and social interventions. A few schools use their PDG to run nurture groups. These groups are held in separate classrooms that pupils usually attend for half the day for periods of between eight weeks and six months. Pupils learn how to socialise, build resilience and learn coping strategies. Activities include cooking, gardening and organising social events where pupils invite their friends and parents for tea. Pupils identified for nurture groups often have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and they normally make good progress in this type of learning environment.

Oak Field Primary School is an English-medium 3-11 school maintained by the Vale of Glamorgan local authority. It serves the community of Gibbonsdown and the wider area of Barry. There are 193 pupils on roll. Around 52% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average. Around 31% of pupils have been identified by staff as suffering from at least two ACEs.

Oak Field provides pupils who need extra support with their emotional and social development, intervention within the provision called 'Nurture, Emotional, Wellbeing and Skills' (NEWS). This provision runs tailored and individualised programmes that improve pupils' self-esteem and social skills over time and enable them to access mainstream learning successfully. The school's New Routes Programme was designed and developed to meet the needs of those identified vulnerable pupils, many of whom have experienced a number of ACEs.

The New Routes Programme is managed by two members of staff who have each received specialist training. Small groups of pupils engage in a bespoke programme of activities, targeted at developing specific life skills such as collaboration. Many of the activities are aimed at improving pupils' confidence and self-regulation abilities. Activities include indoor climbing, basic cookery courses, orienteering and team building tasks. These activities are coupled with weekly discussion sessions where pupils have opportunities to reflect upon progress made.

Leaders track individual pupils' development carefully using teacher assessments, pupils' self-assessments and wellbeing questionnaires before and after intervention. The programme has substantially developed pupils' social skills. All pupils who have accessed the programme have shown an improvement in motivation towards achieving set goals. Many pupils have improved self-regulation skills, allowing them to engage better in mainstream learning.

- 45 Learning support assistants are often able to provide bespoke and targeted therapeutic-style sessions for pupils who have experienced trauma. There are an increasing number of schools that commission qualified therapists to provide specialist interventions to small groups of pupils, such as canine therapy, equine therapy⁵ and art therapy. Prestatyn High School provides beneficial 'draw and talk' sessions for pupils who are looked after and organises daily informal check-ins with support staff for those with poor attendance. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in a few areas of Wales trains school staff to deliver bereavement counselling.
- 46 In a few secondary schools, leaders support pupils with ACEs through extra-curricular activities and opportunities to socialise with friends. For example, Pencoedre High School provides a group of vulnerable pupils with drumming lessons that strengthen their engagement with school.

⁵ Canine therapy uses dogs to promote mental health, equine therapy uses horses. Both these types of therapy can provide people with companionship, comfort and a strong sense of wellbeing

- 47 All local authorities provide schools with access to a school-based counselling service. Schools usually value this service highly but are concerned about declining availability and lengthy waiting lists to access school-based counselling.
- 48 Schools realise that pupils who live in difficult circumstances may have substantially reduced opportunities to socialise and may lack confidence when trying to make friends. A majority of primary schools run targeted friendship clubs such as a 'circle of friends' group. Forest Schools is an organisation that endorses schools to run clubs and learning opportunities that take place in woodland or natural environments to support the development of a relationship between the pupils and the natural world. In these clubs, there is usually a high adult to pupil ratio, which further supports a strong, nurturing ethos. A few schools make good use of their Forest Schools status to enable pupils who do not make friends easily to work and play together and build self-esteem.

St Mary's RC Primary School in Brynmawr, Blaenau Gwent identified a large cohort of boys in one year group with low levels of wellbeing through a regular survey the school uses. From class observations, social and behavioural issues were also identified. Staff decided that an intervention to build confidence and resilience through sport would be advantageous. The boys chose taekwondo as a weekly activity as it develops ideas such as discipline, commitment and self-defence.

These pupils repeated the wellbeing survey at the end of the school year. Pupils had improved self-esteem and were much more positive about their experience in school. Staff noted an increase in the boys' confidence and attention to work. Incidents regarding poor behaviour decreased and, overall, the boys' attitudes to learning have improved.

- 49 Larger schools and those with high numbers of pupils who are eligible for free school meals often use their PDG to employ staff to work with families to support their child's education. In some cases, these support workers focus narrowly on working with parents to improve their children's attendance. However, there are a growing number of schools with highly qualified or experienced family workers. They build strong relationships with families and work sensitively with them and make a positive difference to their lives.

Ysgol Gynradd Aberteifi has used PDG funding to create a Pupil Pastoral Worker (PPW) post to develop links with hard-to-reach parents. This person also co-ordinates staff training with a focus on pupil wellbeing, delivers a specific programme to target pupils' emotional needs and provides counselling sessions in the school for pupils and parents. The PPW works very closely with a wide range of specialist agencies and seeks expert external support where necessary.

The PPW has established trusting relationships with parents and holds regular informal 'drop in' sessions for parents to discuss matters of concern or share information. In addition, the PPW makes regular home visits to parents who do not feel comfortable coming to school. The PPW has been trained to deliver a wide range of beneficial programmes to both children and parents such as coping with

bereavement, controlling negative emotions and dealing with domestic violence. The PPW also co-ordinates the delivery of a wide range of tailored intervention programmes that are delivered by other staff within the school. These include support for anger management, emotion coaching, play interventions and a programme for raising pupils' self-esteem.

The school has also provided training to all staff that enables them to use a range of strategies to promote positive engagement at class level. All pupils (including those with ACEs) benefit from consistent approaches to develop their resilience and positive mental health. Whole-school training in recent years includes training on attachment disorder, emotion coaching, restorative approaches, and supporting the children of incarcerated parents and those exposed to domestic abuse.

- 50 In very small schools and in schools where the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is low, there are often limited additional staff available to support vulnerable learners. The best small schools still enable a member of staff to support vulnerable families as part of their wider role. For example, Ysgol Pennal in Gwynedd uses the only support assistant employed at the school to support pupils with ACEs.

There are currently 18 pupils on roll at **Ysgol Pennal**. Pupils are taught in two classes by two full-time teachers. Seventeen per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Over half of the pupils receive additional support for special educational needs. Some 56% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes and Welsh is the school's everyday language. The school employs one teaching assistant who has undergone significant training to deliver a wide range of valuable interventions for vulnerable pupils.

The Talkabout Programme is delivered to small groups to encourage friendship and to develop pupils' ability to make friends and gain confidence. The learning assistant also provides programmes to manage pupils' anxiety and anger where necessary. The 'Datguddio' club raises pupils' self-image through art, while the Nurture club helps pupils to develop strong problem-solving skills.

Through these programmes of support and clubs, children at this very small school develop confidence and resilience, which prepares them well when they move on to the next stage of their learning.

- 51 Most primary schools have a comprehensive range of free enrichment activities available for all pupils during lunchtime and after school. These often include sports, creative arts, gardening, technology and cooking clubs. Secondary school opportunities are narrower and often focus around subjects, such as a history or computing, expressive arts or sporting activities. In many secondary schools, there are successful clubs for pupils with special educational needs, such as a games club or film club. These tend to be for younger pupils and usually not for pupils in key stage 4. Secondary schools who best support pupils with ACEs or those who have social and emotional difficulties encourage these pupils to engage in these enrichment activities and ensure that age-appropriate opportunities are available.

They also provide safe, quiet spaces for older pupils to sit and socialise. Most schools try to help parents with any costs for extra-curricular activities if they cannot afford to pay themselves. There is inconsistency in how well schools communicate with parents about this policy and in how well they administer it in a way that does not stigmatise pupils or parents.

A trusted adult

- 52 Public Health Wales explores the impact of adults on children and young people in the recent report on ACEs, [Sources of resilience and their moderating relationships with harms from adverse childhood relationships \(Public Health Wales, 2018d\)](#). The authors identify that ‘having at least one trusted, stable and supportive relationship with an adult is emerging in international literature as one of the most important aspects of childhood resilience’ (Public Health Wales, 2018d, p. 35). They state that:

‘ACEs can affect children’s trust, communication skills and self-esteem and such effects may hamper their ability to form positive relationships with both adults and peers. Schools and communities have essential roles in creating opportunities for children affected by ACEs to develop personal and relationship skills as well as positive friendships’ (Public Health Wales, 2018d, p. 35).

- 53 The ACEs Support Hub training places great focus on this notion and, through this, they encourage schools to ensure that all pupils have access to trusted adults, not just through the normal teacher-pupil relationship.
- 54 Nearly all schools have trained members of staff who are experienced in listening to vulnerable pupils and know how to react in sensitive situations and how best to support these pupils. In secondary schools, these staff are often teaching assistants, learning mentors or pastoral staff. In the stronger schools, pupils speak positively about how they can trust and approach their headteachers, teachers and support staff when they have difficulties. In primary schools, most pupils feel comfortable approaching and talking to a wide range of staff.
- 55 In secondary schools, there is inconsistency in how well leaders ensure that all staff adopt the notion of being a trusted adult. In a minority of secondary schools, pupils speak positively about having a good range of adults they can access during the school day and state that staff know them well, give them suitable time and listen to them. In other schools, pupils say that they can identify the staff whom they could trust and talk to but that they also reported which staff would not be able to support them. A minority of secondary headteachers say that, although they provide training and guidance to teachers on wellbeing matters, there are still teachers who do not see the importance of ensuring that they are approachable and available to their pupils for reasons other than academic support.
- 56 In a majority of secondary schools, teachers do not receive enough up-to-date personal information about their pupils. Support staff who work more directly and regularly with vulnerable pupils often hold more information about them than teachers. This is because leaders do not share regularly enough information about pupils with their staff or do not have systems in place to record and share information. They find it more difficult to share this information with a large group of

staff outside of using secure management information systems that may not be suitable for such information. In addition, leaders worry about confidentiality issues as they would be sharing information with all staff, regardless of whether they come into contact with the pupil or not. However, in some schools, information is managed well under a clear and precise Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) and governed by policy. These include guidelines around gaining consent to share information.

Family engagement

- 57** Schools that provide strong and consistent support for pupils with ACEs also often provide enriching activities for their families. In these schools, leaders work creatively to identify parental needs and interests. This is more prevalent in primary schools than in secondary schools. Estyn’s report on [Involving parents: Communication between schools and parents of school aged children](#) (Estyn, 2018a) finds that parents of secondary school children receive less communication from their child’s school than do parents of children at primary school. In addition, schools communicate with one parent only, usually mothers. Many schools do not involve mothers and fathers equally in their child’s learning. Many of the primary schools visited use creative ways to involve their parents. For example, a few schools hold weekly informal coffee mornings to engage parents who find attending school meetings or parents’ evenings a challenge. Other activities include special free events to draw families in, such as family pumpkin carving and Christmas decoration making sessions. Schools use such events well to build trusting relationships with families and provide informal opportunities for parents to meet and socialise with other parents and discuss any issues that are affecting them. One primary school identified families who never used the local library and then took them to the library every week after school and set up a rota of parents to run story reading sessions for the group.
- 58** Often in the primary sector, relevant school staff, such as family engagement officers, offer particularly valuable support to families on low incomes. They provide practical help with form filling and benefit applications, take parents to food banks and support them in providing Christmas gifts for their children. A few schools run their own credit union, which is particularly beneficial for low income families.

Moorland Primary School, Cardiff, places strong and consistent emphasis on engaging families to ensure better life conditions for its pupils. The school employs a family engagement officer who provides a range of practical support for families who are struggling to meet their children’s needs for a variety of reasons. This has resulted in a considerable improvement in standards of achievement and wellbeing of its pupils and in the engagement of parents in their children’s learning.

The school’s financial support and resources includes:

- issuing of food bank vouchers for families in food poverty
- sourcing food supplies through other charities and organisations within the local community
- setting up used uniform, coat and shoe rails for parents to access if needed
- providing a hygiene poverty basket for families to donate to or take from as required

- accompanying parents to benefit or debt advice meetings and then supporting them to budget and plan financially
- setting up a Credit Union in school and encouraging children and families to save regularly

The school also provides practical and social support including early morning phone calls to wake families up in the morning if requested and collecting children from home in the morning if parents or other siblings are unwell. Staff pair up parents who are new to the school with other parents who might speak the same home language. Staff also encourage parents in to school to volunteer so that they build up their skills and confidence to get back into the work place. They also provide stationery packs for families who would like to engage in creative activities at home but do not have access to the appropriate resources.

The school provides valuable educational support through a wide variety of programmes. These include the 'Families Learning Together' programme, which is a literacy and numeracy initiative for parents with children in the foundation phase. This course encourages parents to continue their own education in a local college once they have completed the course in school. The school also provides weekly English classes for families with little or no English. The school runs popular cookery classes for parents, which focus on how to make cheap but nutritious family meals. The school also holds a parent nurturing programme, which focuses on building positive relationships with children through play and a 'Families Connect' group. This is a Save the Children initiative, which focuses on helping parents to support their children to develop emotionally and academically.

These programmes of support substantially empower parents' confidence and ability to support their children's learning at home.

- 59 A few secondary schools provide worthwhile activities and services for families who are in need of support. For example, they may provide transport to enable parents to attend parents' evenings or hold informal events for parents of pupils with special educational needs. Ebbw Fawr Learning Community recognised the need for better family engagement and now provides a series of classes to suit parental interests, such as cookery, parenting and health and fitness sessions. Through these activities, staff can engage with families better and signpost them to a range of support services.

2 Local authority work with other services to support pupils with adverse childhood experiences

Corporate planning and leadership

- 60 All local authorities in Wales consider the work relating to improving wellbeing a high priority. This work is usually co-ordinated by a senior officer such as an assistant head of education, the principal educational psychologist or head of inclusion services. Many local authorities have wellbeing strategy boards or steering groups that sit below the Public Service Board. These are made up of representatives from school improvement, the educational psychology service, inclusion services and the youth justice service, as well as representatives from public health, social care and, in a few cases, the police. A few particularly effective boards also invite representation from third sector organisations, such as NSPCC and Spectrum Hafan Cymru. This supplements and enhances the knowledge and skills of the board and enables it to adopt a more joined-up approach. Work relating to ACEs is often co-ordinated in the wider context of a tiered approach to wellbeing within such strategy boards with a general focus on establishing an ethos of resilience and evidence-based wellbeing interventions and strategies. Generally, it is within these strategy boards that decisions about training and funding for support are made.

Flintshire is a pilot local authority for the innovative Early Action Together project led by Public Health Wales and North Wales Police. This is funded by the Home Office Transformation Fund to equip police and the statutory and voluntary sector workforce with the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively identify and help children, young people, families and adults affected by ACEs. In Flintshire, there is an overarching Early Action Together Board, bringing together statutory and voluntary sector partners to provide strategic co-ordination. The board has facilitated ACE awareness training and also played an important role in ensuring that ACEs were integrated into Flintshire’s multi-agency referral form for social services.

- 61 In a few local authorities, ACEs feature explicitly within the Public Service Board’s annual wellbeing plans. For example, the Vale of Glamorgan’s local wellbeing plan includes an action to ‘develop a better understanding of ACEs to take effective action to ensure people are protected, support systems are in place and the root causes of ACEs are prevented’ (Vale of Glamorgan Public Service Board, 2018, p.26). Monmouthshire’s Public Service Board has a specific step in relation to ACEs within the first objective of its local wellbeing plan, which is ‘Tackling the causes of ACEs and the perpetuation of generational problems in families’ (2018, p.20).
- 62 Many strategic plans within education services in local authorities include some degree of focus on vulnerability factors, even if they do not make a direct reference to ACEs. Within education and social services in local authorities, a very few strategic plans make explicit reference to ACEs. For example, prevention of the generational cycle of adverse experiences features in Conwy’s Social Care Early Intervention and

Prevention strategy and in the model developed for Family Support. A few other education services' strategic plans make reference to the four core purposes of the curriculum proposed in Professor Graham Donaldson's (2015) report 'Successful Futures', particularly the aim that children and young people will be 'healthy, confident individuals'. A very few local authorities do not focus enough in their strategic plans on supporting the wellbeing of vulnerable pupils.

Joint working arrangements

- 63 Local and regional safeguarding boards and corporate parenting panels include senior representatives from public health, the police and other services, such as probation, alongside education. They provide strategic drive to plan support for vulnerable young people. A few safeguarding boards have identified trends in local safeguarding cases and commissioned useful work-streams and preventative interventions to support vulnerable families. For example, Flintshire's local safeguarding board allocates resources and co-ordinates delivery of a wide range of activity, which ensures that the breadth of safeguarding issues remain in sight. They have provided schools with useful resources to support them in identifying potential child sexual exploitation and unhealthy relationships. The safeguarding board discusses recurring themes and issues and then plans relevant training for delivery staff across services.
- 64 All 22 Welsh local authorities have signed the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI). The Accord is a common set of principles and standards, which support the sharing of personal information to deliver services to the people of Wales. Signing the Accord demonstrates a commitment to apply those principles. This helps to develop a consistent approach and improve confidence that information is shared lawfully, safely and effectively. Accepting and signing the Accord is voluntary, but all public service providers are encouraged to join. Under the WASPI framework, there is guidance and encouragement for public bodies and organisations to create Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs), which support regular and reciprocal sharing of personal information for a specified purpose. A few local authorities have ISPs that directly target information sharing to support pupils with ACEs. However, only a few local authorities have productive ISPs that go beyond the statutory requirement around safeguarding and child protection under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures. In general, ISPs are only commonly in place in early years services, such as Flying Start, and where there are initiatives to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The **TRAC service** across the six local authorities in North Wales is a project aimed at reducing the number of 11-24 year olds at highest risk of becoming NEET. The project aims to do this through a range of interventions that complement but do not duplicate mainstream services.

Young people who are eligible for the project are identified through a learner profile tool that is run through schools and colleges. The tool uses information such as behaviour, attainment, attendance and exclusions in order to identify which young people are eligible. This information is then shared well between many relevant providers who plan support.

The interventions provided to eligible young people include:

- counselling from counsellors and mental health workers
- support for wellbeing and attendance by Education Support Workers
- support from youth workers
- support from sports workers
- support from Careers Wales

The project has various positive outcomes, such as work placements for young people, which have led to permanent jobs, unconditional offers of places in further education colleges and stronger family relationships.

- 65 Education services across Wales are expected to work in collaboration primarily with health and social care as part of the NHS Cymru Well Wales’ ‘First 1000 days Programme’. This programme aims to give every child in Wales the best start in life. The programme brings together partners from across public services, the third sector and the general public to support and challenge each other in thinking and working together differently. This includes the aim of ‘fewer children exposed to ACEs in the first 1000 days’ (Public Health Wales, 2018b). As a consequence of this, education services’ early years departments have begun to work collaboratively with local partners to create a vulnerability profile for each child within their local authority. The local authorities who shared information about their work with the programme all reported early indications of positive outcomes in terms of engagement and co-operation with young children and their families. Torfaen local authority has invested additional resource and training into its first 1000 days objective. All early years staff, including play staff and those in childcare providers, have received ACE training. A recent Flying Start conference for all early years frontline staff on ACEs provided workshops to show the impact of domestic violence, parental incarceration, drug and alcohol misuse and bereavement on young children.
- 66 A minority of local authorities have established an effective early help service or early help hub. Screening for early help is based on families who exhibit factors that may lead to ACEs, but that are below the threshold for statutory social services assessment. The prevalence of these harmful factors indicate the need for early intervention. These early help hubs share intelligence safely in order to offer all families affected by ACEs relevant information, advice and assistance bespoke to their needs. This early support is intended to prevent the need for statutory intervention at a later stage. Key partners include ‘Team Around the Family’, education services including early years services, youth services including youth justice, Families First, the police and local authority housing services.

Monmouthshire County Council's review of its Families First programme recognised the positive role of preventative work and early intervention in reducing the need for more intensive, and potentially invasive, intervention at a later stage. There was clear recognition that preventing the emergence of problems rather than tackling their consequences is more effective in terms of improving social outcomes and reducing costs. Monmouthshire wanted to improve support to children, young people and their families by ensuring that services worked better together in partnership. The overall aim being to ensure that help is provided by the right person at the right time.

The Public Service Board Programme Board agreed to reconfigure Families First funding to develop a 'Building Strong Families (BSF) team' with a key priority to avoid the need for statutory intervention. The BSF team enabled an effective referral and intervention pathway between all services with minimum disruption to families through an Early Help Panel. The aim is to ensure that families get the right support at the right time.

The development and implementation of the Monmouthshire's Early Help Panel has helped to create a transparent and equitable referral system, resulting in referrals for higher levels of support that are more appropriate, such as specialist services. The Early Help Panel consists of a broad range of Monmouthshire service providers who work with children, young people and their families. These services offer help and support to improve children's and young people's emotional wellbeing.

As a result of this service, there has been a reduction in the number of families requiring a higher tier of support or statutory intervention, and an increase in the number of families receiving appropriate early support. Consequently, there has been an increase in positive outcomes for families across Monmouthshire.

- 67 Work at a strategic level between public health, education services and the police is beginning to have a positive impact on bringing key partners together through the police-led Early Action Together Programme (EATP). The purpose of this programme is to focus on early identification and intervention for children and young people experiencing ACEs and the police's interactions with vulnerable people. Following the successful piloting of the EATP in a few local authorities, this programme is now being rolled out across Wales. Each police force area is operating a different delivery model and is at a different stage of progression. A few local authorities are beginning to hold discussions at strategic level with the police, whilst other authorities have made significant steps forward in working together. For example, the Vale of Glamorgan local authority has a community police officer, based in the intake and assessment team, to assess public protection notices (PPNs) for identification of ACEs, and using this information to trigger early support.
- 68 In many local authorities, there are agreed protocols with the local police force to share relevant information where a child is at risk with schools through PPNs. Gwent Police is piloting Operation Encompass with all schools within its area. In practice, this means that schools will receive an alert via a telephone call or email correspondence from the police if a child in a school has been involved directly or

indirectly with an incident of domestic violence the night before. It is intended that such contact with the school happens before the child arrives at the start of the day so that staff can make plans to support the child throughout the day. However, many schools report that this practice is not reliable enough. In a few areas of Wales, school leaders rarely receive PPNs from the police.

- 69 The majority of local authority education services have strong and effective collaboration with other services. In Torfaen, the youth support strategy includes projects that support young people with ACEs, such as the independent living club, a youth café and a young parents club. In Blaenau Gwent, the education psychology service has run a pilot programme with Families First, clinical psychologists and a primary school, using an attachment-based programme with parents of children identified as having significant ACEs. This programme helps parents to understand that their child's behaviours are often expressing relational needs. Newport local authority has secured funding for a new project focusing on homelessness and the prevention of NEETS. This project involves collaboration between education, youth and housing services. The aim of the project is to reduce the negative impact of ACEs on future young families as it recognises that those young people at risk of homelessness are likely to have had ACEs and are likely to be parents of children who may have ACEs in the future.
- 70 Local authority education services make regular operational arrangements to discuss children and young people through multi-agency planning (MAP) meetings or team around the family meetings. These meetings involve parents and sometimes their children and representatives from health, social services, youth services, housing, youth offending services, community policing and education welfare officers. These meetings discuss the needs of a child or group of children when it is recognised that no single agency response is likely to meet their holistic needs and a multi-agency response is needed. They are generally a means to discuss and implement reactive strategies and plans following events or difficulties at school or in response to poor attendance. Although schools value these arrangements, many feel that discussions are held at a very late stage and that there is a lack of planning for proactive strategies to support children and young people before situations worsen. In a few local authorities, MAP arrangements are not effective enough in ensuring improvement in school attendance or in reducing exclusions.

Professional learning

- 71 There is variation across the four regional consortia and the 22 local authorities across Wales in terms of take up of training by the national ACE Support Hub.
- 72 Both the Central South Consortium (CSC) and the Educational Achievement Service (EAS) have ensured that all senior officers, headteachers and relevant inclusion staff in schools have received the ACE awareness training directly from the ACE Support Hub. The education psychology services across these regions have taken part in the ACE Support Hub 'train the trainer' events. This means that they can disseminate the ACE-informed training to representatives from most schools during 2019.
- 73 The Education through Regional Working (ERW) consortium had already implemented a substantial strategy to train relevant staff in all its schools in

attachment awareness and in emotion coaching since 2015. Both these themes cover issues around trauma in childhood and adolescence and it was felt that school staff only needed a degree of refreshment. Consequently, the consortium has made suitable arrangements with the ACE Support Hub to train cluster ‘Leaders of Learning’ who have disseminated this within their clusters.

- 74 In the GwE region, local authority staff have completed an audit of need so that training requirements can be identified locally. This is because GwE recognise that a few local authorities and schools have already invested much resource into relevant training. For example, as part of its offer to schools, GwE delivers a course that leads to a diploma in trauma-informed practice. Staff from 23 schools successfully completed the diploma during 2018-2019 and a further 27 schools have enrolled staff to study for the diploma in September 2019.
- 75 The majority of local authorities provide appropriate training linked to ACEs, independently of the regional consortia. For example, they offer training on attachment issues, emotion coaching and supporting looked after children. Although local authorities often provide useful training to school staff and colleagues in other services, this training does not always cover suitably the detailed and highly informative findings from research by Public Health Wales (2015, 2016a, 2016b). The training provided by the ACE Support Hub ensures that trained school staff develop a strong understanding of ACEs through reference to the Public Health Wales research. This includes understanding the impact of toxic stress on the brain, the impact of trauma on pupils and an understanding of the power of the trusted adult and the significance of early intervention work. The ACE Support Hub states that findings from research should be used to inform planning for schools to deliver trauma-informed practice.

Supporting pupils at risk of exclusion

- 76 A few local authorities are proactive and creative in the way they collaborate with other services when planning managed moves and new placements for pupils who are at risk of or have been excluded. In Estyn’s (2018b) thematic review, [Effective use of managed moves in local authorities and schools](#), we find that a managed move is more likely to be successful when schools and local authorities work well with pupils and their families and use it as an early intervention strategy. Education services’ moderation panels or managed moves panels generally take pupils’ background into consideration when making decisions with regard to placements or alternative provision. The best panels have a strong understanding of the child’s context and the trauma experienced so they can tailor support to meet individual need. However, in too many cases, the managed moves protocol is not clear or comprehensive enough to ensure that the needs of children and young people with ACEs are met properly. As training in becoming ACE-aware and ACE-informed is rolled out across Wales, leaders and teachers are gaining a better understanding of attachment and trauma and its effect on vulnerable pupils. It is too soon to evaluate whether or not this training has helped to improve the early work with pupils to reduce exclusions or the support for pupils involved in managed moves.
- 77 PSPs are intended to support pupils who need additional support and provision. The aim of a PSP is to involve the pupil, family and a representative from the education

department in the shared challenge of improving academic attainment, social skills, behaviour and ensuring social and educational inclusion. The PSP should identify the precise support and interventions to prevent exclusion or the need to seek alternative provision.

- 78 Many local authorities do not provide clear guidelines for schools on how to use PSPs to support pupils, nor do they gather information from schools on their use. It is rare for a PSP to make reference to possible ACEs. In most cases, where PSPs are advocated by the local authority, their purpose is solely to improve behaviour. Only a few local authorities encourage schools to use PSPs as part of the menu of support for all vulnerable pupils who are exhibiting a range of social and emotional difficulties which is affecting their ability to engage in education. These few local authorities recognise that many of these individuals will have experienced ACEs and the PSP is seen as a proactive approach to support ongoing engagement with a range of educational and support services.
- 79 In the best examples, focused school-based pastoral support meetings involve schools, parents, staff from local authority inclusion teams and appropriate agencies working with the family or child. This is because PSPs are used as a proactive means to address issues such as ACEs and also wider or more complex influences on a child's development. In Swansea local authority, schools are encouraged to use PSPs as an appropriate strategy to support vulnerable pupils or those with ACEs. PSPs are tracked and reviewed by a local authority officer, who then signposts schools to appropriate support agencies.

Appendix 1: Evidence base

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on evidence from:

- a survey for all local authorities in Wales
- visits to primary, secondary and all-age schools, including discussions with key staff and small groups of pupils
- a study of social intervention programmes, nurture programmes and other intervention programmes offered by commercial organisations, voluntary organisations and charities
- interviews with representatives of regional consortia, public services in Wales, external support agencies and charities
- an ACE Support Hub Wales Expert Panel Meeting

Of the 11 primary schools, nine secondary schools and two all-age schools selected for visits, two were part of the ACE Support Hub pilot of the use of the ACE readiness tool. Four schools had been identified by HMI as having strong practice in provision for pupils with ACEs.

In these school visits, inspectors:

- reviewed policies, plans and documents to support vulnerable pupils
- met representative groups of pupils
- held discussions with headteachers and other senior leaders
- held discussions with leaders responsible for inclusion
- held discussions with learning support assistants

Schools visited as part of the survey were:

Primary schools

Garth Primary School, Bridgend
Ysgol Gynradd Aberteifi, Ceredigion
Bodnant Primary School, Denbighshire
Rhosymedre Community Primary school, Wrexham
St Mary's Primary School, Blaenau Gwent
Aberdare Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Millbrook Primary School, Newport
Oakfield Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan
Moorland Primary School, Cardiff
Mount Stuart Primary School, Cardiff
Ysgol Gynradd Pennal, Machynlleth, Gwynedd
Ysgol Llandinam, Powys

All-age schools

Ysgol Bro Idris, Gwynedd
Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, Blaenau Gwent

Secondary schools

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd, Bridgend
Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron, Ceredigion
Prestatyn High School, Denbighshire
Ysgol Rhiwabon, Wrexham
Ferndale Community school, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Monmouth Comprehensive, Monmouthshire
Pencoedtre High School, Vale of Glamorgan
Willows High, Cardiff
Caereinion High School, Powys

Information was also gathered through interviews and telephone contact with relevant agencies identified as having a strategic role in delivering services for vulnerable pupils. These include:

- Director of ACE Support Hub Wales
- Education Sector lead, ACE Support Hub Wales
- Welsh Women's Aid
- Policy Adviser for the Children's Commissioner for Wales
- Director North Wales FABI (Families affected by imprisonment)
- GwE regional school improvement service
- ERW regional school improvement service
- EAS regional school improvement service
- CSC regional school improvement service
- Director of the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme

Appendix 2: Evidence from research and policy on the impact of ACEs

Public Health Wales' research highlights the extent of the problem of ACEs in Wales, although the findings are based on adults who report back on their experiences as children. Other recent reports reflect the experiences of children today and evaluate the availability and quality of services to support children and young people who are currently experiencing ACEs or are in the care system as a result of being exposed to ACEs.

There were 6,846 children looked after in Wales (a rate of 109 children looked after per 10,000 children aged under 18) at 31st March 2019, which is an increase of 7% from the previous year⁶. The [Children looked after](#) statistical release (Welsh Government, 2019a) includes details of the reason for placing children in care by the category of need. Year-on-year, the most common reason why a child becomes looked after is because of abuse and neglect. At 31st March 2019, there were 2,820 children across Wales on the Child Protection Register, which is a rate of 45 per 10,000 children aged under 18 (StatsWales, 2019).

Although statistics relating to the prison population are published by the Ministry of Justice, there is limited information about how many prisoners are parents. The statistical release for 2018 about [Wales children receiving care and support census, 2018](#), (Welsh Government, 2019b), includes statistics about parenting capacity, but does not include details on imprisonment. However, for more than half (55%) of all children receiving care and support, at least one parenting factor of five common factors was recorded. These factors are:

- parental substance or alcohol misuse
- parental learning disability
- parental mental ill health
- parental physical ill health
- domestic abuse

During 2017-2018, 11,365 children accessed local authority funded counselling (Welsh Government, 2018). The most common form of referral was by school-based and other education staff, accounting for nearly half of all referrals. Family issues were the most common form of presenting issue and predominant issue.

The Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group commissioned the NSPCC to explore how care experienced children's and young people's emotional and mental health needs are being assessed and supported in Wales. The findings were published in a report [Listen. Act. Thrive. The Emotional and Mental Health of Care Experienced Children and Young People \(NSPCC, 2019\)](#). The principal finding was that care experienced children and young people are not receiving the emotional

⁶ This data is taken from experimental statistics, which are currently being tested and may be subject to change.

and mental health support they need. The report identified four key issues. Firstly, mental health assessments are not adequately assessing the emotional and mental health of care experienced children and young people. Secondly, it is difficult for care experienced children and young people to access specialist mental health services across Wales, due to the high threshold of referral, along with long waiting times. Thirdly, young people felt that carers, teachers and support workers had not received enough training to provide adequate support. Lastly, young people noted that agencies supporting care experienced children and young people are not effectively working together, meaning that young people are having to repeat their story.

The briefing recommends a joined-up approach to emotional and mental health services, that Regional Partnership Boards fund dedicated CAMHS resources, and that training should be provided to adults working with care experienced children and young people.

The National Assembly for Wales, Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee (2018) [Mind Over Matter: A report on the step change needed in emotional and mental health support for children and young people in Wales](#) report is based on written and oral evidence from a range of key stakeholders and had two aims. The first aim was to build on the previous Committee's [report](#) on specialist child and adolescent mental health services (National Assembly for Wales, CYPE Committee, 2014). The report concludes that improvements have been made, and that the Welsh Government has substantially invested in CAMHS services, but that these changes are not far-reaching enough. The second aim of the report was to establish whether early intervention, prevention and resilience services were in place to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people in Wales. The report emphasises that the distress many children and young people in schools and primary care across Wales suffer could be reduced, or avoided, if they are able to draw on the right support at the right time.

The report sets out one key recommendation, which is that the Welsh Government makes the emotional and mental wellbeing and resilience of children and young people a stated national priority. The Committee calls on the Welsh Government to do this by:

- providing an adequate and ring-fenced resource for schools to become community hubs of cross-sector and cross-professional support for emotional resilience and mental wellbeing, supported by statutory and third sector agencies, most notably health
- ensuring that emotional and mental health is fully embedded in the new curriculum
- ensuring that everyone who cares for, volunteers or works with children and young people is trained in emotional and mental health awareness, to tackle stigma, promote good mental health and signpost to support services where necessary
- publishing an independent review of progress in this area every two years, involving children and young people throughout (National Assembly for Wales, CYPE Committee, 2018, p.65)

In October 2018, the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2018) published a Policy Position paper in response to the general increased awareness of ACEs, the Public Health Wales research and the development of Welsh Government funding to help professionals become ACE-aware. The paper outlines the potential problems but also potential positive opportunities around placing ACEs as the driver of public policy for children. Social inequalities such as poverty, poor housing, discrimination and lack of prospects are shown to lead to considerable stress in family relationships. However, there is a risk that children's social problems are seen as down to their families' individual behaviour, such as violence and addiction. The paper makes clear that changing social conditions should be at the forefront of the Welsh Government's priorities.

The Policy Position paper states that public services should not focus so much on counting the number of ACEs a child might have. She describes this as 'a fairly crude way to measure trauma' (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2018, p.1). Children and young people have varying degrees of resilience and what might be highly traumatic for one child might not have the same negative effect on another. Other children may not have any ACEs but might still need support. Her hope is that public services will not be counting ACEs in order for children and young people to be able to access services and support. In addition, the paper says that seeking and storing information from children and young people about their experiences by schools and other settings must be compliant with best practice guidelines, data protection law and children's rights to privacy.

In terms of potential advantages to Wales becoming an ACE-aware nation, the paper is hopeful that there will be greater understanding and desire to help children with the most challenging behaviour. The development of ACE-aware schools could lead to them becoming more creative in their support for children with disadvantaged backgrounds and thus preventing potential breakdown of relationships and exclusions. The paper sees the increased awareness and understanding as potentially enabling a reconfiguration of public services around the recognised needs of children and young people. Those who have experienced multiple ACEs often struggle to access the services that they need, such as access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) due to the absence of pressure or support of the adults around them. It is hoped that public services will reshape their arrangements so that they are more accessible to their local population. The paper underlines the importance of the 'trusted adult'. It is hoped that increased knowledge of the harmful impact of traumatic childhood experiences will strengthen the determination of those who work with children to help support relationships with family and communities.

Glossary

ACE informed practice	Schools who have received training on the impact of ACE on children and young people and who have adapted their provision and practices to better support their pupils (e.g. an adapted behaviour policy)
Adverse childhood experience	Stressful or traumatic events, including abuse or neglect. They may also include household dysfunction such as witnessing domestic violence or growing up with family members who have substance use disorders, mental illness or are incarcerated.
Attachment	Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space (Ainsworth, 1973, Bowlby, 1969)...Attachment is characterised by specific behaviours, such as seeking proximity to the attachment figure when upset or threatened (Bowlby, 1969)...Attachment behaviour in adults towards the child includes responding sensitively and appropriately to the child's needs.
Boxall Profile	The Boxall Profile was developed as a part of the Nurture movement. The Boxall Profile is a two-part assessment tool designed to track the progress of cognitive development and behavioural traits of children and young people through their education. It can be used to help as an Assessment for Early Identification; with Target Setting and intervention; in Tracking progress and; with the Whole-class dynamic. Website: https://www.nurtureuk.org/
Circle Time	Circle Time is a popular activity, used in primary schools especially, to help develop positive relationships between children. It aims to give them tools to engage with and listen to each other.
Early Action Together Programme	The programme is a multi-agency partnership between Public Health Wales, all four police forces and key partner organisations in relation to policing vulnerability with a focus on ACEs.

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA)	ELSAs are Teaching Assistants who have been trained to provide support to children who have difficulties understanding and regulating their own emotions and behaviours. They are trained and supervised by Educational Psychologists and there is a national network covering Wales and England. Further details, resources and additional links available at: https://www.elsanetwork.org/
Families First	All local authorities in Wales administer a Families First service. The service brings together the full range of council professionals to assess and support children, young people and their families.
Lego® therapy	A social development programme for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other social communication difficulties. It uses children's love of playing with Lego® to help them develop communication and social skills. Website: https://www.welovebricks.com/lego-therapy/
Multi Agency Planning Meetings (MAP)	The MAP brings together relevant practitioners and parents to address the needs of a child or young person. The team works together to plan coordinated support from agencies to address problems in a holistic way.
Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)	A MARAC is a multi-agency meeting where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The aim is to support the victim of abuse, which includes planning to mitigate future risks.
National Behaviour and Attendance Review Project	A project designed to help the local authorities in Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan to develop a comprehensive approach to the behavioural, social and emotional development of children and young people
Nurture Groups	The nurturing approach aims to identify missing early nurturing experiences and give children and young people the social and emotional skills that can help them improve peer relationships, develop resilience and increase confidence.

Operation Encompass	<p>Operation Encompass is a charitable organisation set up in 2011 to support children who experience Domestic Abuse. It provides an efficient, confidential channel of communication between police forces and Key Adults within schools to enable the immediate and discrete recognition of the child's situation by the Key Adult, ensuring that a secure and sympathetic environment is provided and the broader effects of abuse are addressed.</p> <p>Website: https://www.operationencompass.org/</p>
Pastoral Support Plan (PSP)	<p>A Pastoral Support Plan is a school-based programme, which is meant to help a child improve his/her social, emotional and behavioural skills. The PSP will identify precise targets for the child to work towards and should include the child and parents in the drafting and review process.</p>
Public Protection Notices (PPN)	<p>Police officers and staff who become aware of children and young people that are either witnesses to or victims of crime or abuse must complete a PPN referral. This will be shared with other agencies such as Children's Services, health and education.</p>
Restorative practice	<p>A school that takes a restorative approach to resolving conflict and preventing harm. Restorative approaches enable those who have been harmed to convey the impact of the harm to those responsible, and for those responsible to acknowledge this impact and take steps to make it right.</p>
Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA)	<p>This is an initiative run by UNICEF UK, which encourages schools to place the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) at the heart of its ethos and curriculum.</p> <p>Website: https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/</p>
Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL)	<p>Originally started as a pilot by the Department for Education and Skills, SEAL has been developed to provide curriculum resources for class-based work and for smaller targeted groups to help children between the ages of 3-16 years old learn and develop personal and social skills.</p> <p>Website: http://www.sealcommunity.org/</p>

Social and emotional intervention programmes	Whole-school / whole-class or individual and group programmes that promote social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance and good emotional health
STAR Programme (Safety, Trust and Respect)	A range of resources, training and support for schools offered by Welsh Women’s Aid to professionals working with children and young people
Talkabout	Talkabout is a series of social communication programmes developed by Speech and Language Therapist Alex Kelly for use specifically with children and young people who have ASD and other social communication difficulties. It is a practical resource which is aimed at improving Social Communication Skills such as: Listening, Conversational Skills, Body Language, Awareness & Assertiveness. For more information see: http://alexkelly.biz/talkabout-faq/
Toxic stress	This can occur when a child experiences strong, frequent and or prolonged trauma such as abuse, neglect, violence, accumulated burdens of social and economic hardships without adult support.
Trauma-informed school	Schools who recognise and respond to the impact of toxic stress on children
Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI)	Organisations directly involved with the health, education, safety, crime prevention and social wellbeing of people in Wales have embraced the WASPI as a tool to help them share personal information effectively and lawfully with each other.

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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