

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Cyllido Ysgolion yng Nghymru | School Funding in Wales

SF 05

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas y Seicolegwyr Addysg

Response from: Association of Educational Psychologists

Introduction

The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) is the professional association and trade union for the 3,200 Educational Psychologists across the UK. In Wales the AEP has around 200 members.

The educational psychology (EP) profession is a highly skilled and essential element in the nation's workforce, with specialist training in applying psychology in education. To become qualified, EPs must have a degree in psychology, some experience working with children in appropriate settings, and have completed a three-year doctoral course. EPs are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council to ensure that they adhere to the highest professional standards.

EPs in Wales

Most EPs in Wales are employed by local authorities (LAs), each of which has an educational psychology service (EPS), but the model of service delivery varies across the country.

EPs work in schools and other settings with children and young people (CYP) to support their development, well-being, resilience, learning and achievement. They are experts in responding to the ALN (Additional Learning Needs) and mental health issues of children and young people. They have a duty to contribute to the statutory process of statements of SEN. More broadly, they support the emotional wellbeing of all pupils and staff, and work towards a whole school approach to good mental health. This might include:

- Assessments and observations of CYP.
- Guidance and advice on interventions and support for the individual child, groups of children, the whole class, the year group, or the whole school.
- Providing professional development, training, or consultation for teachers and other professionals.
- Direct work with parents and carers in their responses to their children.
- Working at a strategic level with the local authority in relation to ALN policy and implementation.
- Supporting communities following a critical incident such as the death of a member of staff or pupil.

Response – key points

In order to formulate this inquiry response, the AEP requested feedback from all EP services in Wales and collated the evidence received into an overall response. This document makes the following key points:

- The reduction in centrally-retained budgets and the delegation of funding to schools has had a negative impact on support services like EPs, as schools often do not have the time or the resources to prioritise and use the services appropriately.
- Delegation of budgets has led to an inconsistent patchwork of provision and a “postcode lottery” for the CYP accessing these services. Schools cannot ensure equity and transparency across the LA.
- It is unreasonable to expect schools to be aware of and adequately prioritise the delivery of key Government targets and policies, and indeed our members report that this does not happen on the ground.
- As a result, it is the opinion of the AEP that the current model inhibits delivery of the Welsh Government’s policy objectives, particularly in relation to ALN reforms (see below).
- There is also a concern amongst members that, once delegated to schools, the process of deploying budgets is not open and transparent, nor open to challenge.
- The AEP would like to see a clearer formula funding and allocation to ALN provision and Pastoral Care in school budgets which protect these posts in schools.
- Many of our members report that, at a time when the Government is implementing reforms, including to ALN provision, smaller pockets of funding could have a much larger impact if they were pooled at level of the LA.
- The AEP calls on the Committee to consider the experience of EPs in England, where the delegation of school funding has meant that EP services are increasingly being “traded” or “bought in” from the budgets of individual schools.
- When services are provided in this way, the cost implications have meant that the capacity of EPs to provide a full range of support to schools, including preventative work, is severely limited. This is detrimental to the school and the community, but particularly to CYP with ALN.

Impact on the provision of services for Additional Learning Needs

- Schools have not received sufficient budgets in recent years to continue with the same level of ALN provision and staff as previously happened. Effective interventions, which have supported childrens ALN, wellbeing and inclusion, have been cut. Some examples of this include:

- Schools feel they are unable to provide the staff time for important pupil interventions, such as 1:1 and group sessions to address learning needs.
- School staff are not afforded time for meetings to consult with EPs and other experts to develop person-centred approaches to learning.
- Owing to time constraints, many schools feel the best way of using EPs is through statutory assessment. As a result, statutory assessment is being used as a first step, rather than early interventions aimed at supporting the CYP.
- Schools are increasingly requesting EP support for tasks that they could complete themselves, but no longer feel that they have the time for, such as information for exam concessions in secondary school, and dyslexia risk screening in primary school.
- Some schools feel they can no longer send staff on training sessions offered by the local authority because of time and resource pressures. Some courses have been cancelled due to insufficient numbers in attendance, despite demand from many schools in order to best support vulnerable pupils.
- As a consequence, LAs have needed to increase capacity in specialist ALN provision and manage waiting lists.
- Unfortunate messages are being given by schools to parents that they do not have enough funding to meet their child's ALN needs. This is undermining confidence in an inclusive school system.
- There are insufficient resources and time provided for in school budgets to support the development of person-centred strategies for children and young people.