

Citizen Engagement:

EOTAS Online Survey Summary

March 2020

Background and Approach to Engagement

In the autumn of 2019, the Children, Young People and Education Committee began conducting an inquiry into Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS). To ensure experiences were heard from families accessing EOTAS in Wales, and staff working within EOTAS provisions, an online survey was run by the Citizen Engagement Team to capture these comments.

Families

Parents and carers whose child has accessed (or is accessing) EOTAS provision in the last few years and lived in Wales were invited to take part by staff from within EOTAS provisions and through a social media campaign.

The survey investigated the following areas:

- What sort of timescales were parents and carers faced with when their child needed to be placed in a EOTAS provision?



- Were families supported by local authorities while they waited for placements and how satisfied were they with the communication during this process?
- As families, were they able to effectively engage with the provision and its staff to ensure progress was being made in their young person's education, well-being and future success?

Comments were received from **19 families** from across all five Assembly Regions.

Staff

Staff at all levels were invited to submit a response to the survey. Questioning centred around their understanding of best practice strategies, access to professional development and service delivery methods by staff within the sector.

EOTAS provisions were contacted directly and a social media campaign was run.

85 members of staff across all five Assembly Regions submitted a survey.

Results of the survey

To compile this summary note an analysis of a complete data set was conducted; all data can be sourced to individual responses and further analysis can be undertaken by reviewing the initial results.

The Families Stories

Analysis of the data submitted by parents described four prominent points along their journey. Comments submitted openly described issues families had encountered along the way which have been highlighted below.

Quotes in this section have been submitted by parent's and carers.

Leaving Mainstream School

Where families described the initial point that their child left school, the majority of reasons identified came down to a lack of understanding from the mainstream school to deal with the young person and their needs. Whether this is because of lack of funding, training, or both it's unclear.

"He went to the EOTAS provision because the education system failed him. He was diagnosed at 14 with autism. He was in a school where they told me he had no problems and he needed to man up, he was too weak. He was groomed by another pupil and sexually assaulted because he couldn't understand the intentions of this boy. Then they listened to me, but they still put him at the back of his home economics room with his head of year for five months while they decided what to do. Social services were involved and we had tests, at long last someone was listening"

"Prior to attending the EOTAS provision our child was failed by the system so much so that he had tried to take his own life. He didn't receive a statement of educational needs in time before high school began, and this proved detrimental to his well-being. With a diagnosis of Asperger's, ADHD, and General Anxiety disorder the stress and unfamiliarity of the new rota, lack of his old familiar routine meant he quickly fell apart. We chose this EOTAS provision due to its unique layout and its unique environment for our son. We can honestly say that the provision and its staff played an integral part in saving our child's life"

"My son couldn't cope in a large class, he had behaviour problems, attachment disorder with heightened anxieties. No one took much responsibility it was a case of out of sight out of mind with no support except for SNAP Cymru which I found myself"

"My son has ASD was being bullied in main stream school and because of this he found he couldn't cope with the main stream environment. He used to walk out of school"

"My child has severe anxiety and could not attend main stream school. We had contact with Snap and Families Together. The lack of support from the school was absolutely appalling with no consideration for the welfare of our daughter and just treated her as a number that wasn't attending school. The LEA were a disgrace and provided no support just threats of court action"

Period of time between leaving mainstream and acceptance at an EOTAS provision

Comments from the families perspective highlighted the lengthy amount of time it took for these young people to get into an EOTAS provision after they left their mainstream school. For example, for one family it took 4 months and another as long as 3 years.

In almost all cases, families described a lack of communication from the local authorities. They felt they had to "fight" for answers and challenge decisions. It was reported that local authorities which they had trust in initially to deal with the situation, were not able to offer suitable suggestions or manage the process effectively. There were concerns that authorities may not be knowledgeable enough of the options available.

"The individual home tutors have been excellent but the overall structures which support them and the lack of connection between the different bits of the education system have been very poor indeed"

"We waited 3 years and we had to fight for it and had no support from the LEA"

"We waited for 12 months for 5 hours tutoring at the library. Then a further 6 months for online learning"

"Our daughter had a breakdown at 14, suspected ASD. Couldn't attend school [...] I had to continually chase the Local Authority. We were passed from dept to dept and each dept refused to take ownership. Calls and emails were not returned. It was an absolute nightmare. I had no support, just open hostility for trying to get help for my daughter"

"The timescale for waiting for a place was way too long. Our son had to have home tuition for a year and he was with no education whatsoever for a good few months. We had to fight to get him where he is now, the LEA didn't want him to go to the provision he's in, they made that very clear"

"My daughter was suffering from social anxiety and was school phobic. I had a huge fight on my hands as my daughter was misunderstood. We were consistently threatened with legal action for my daughter's non-attendance at school. They did not care about her well-being but only wanted her mark on their register. There needs to be more EOTAS provisions available as there is an increase in children with anxiety disorders, depression and social problems which make them school phobic. There are not enough places available for these children and their parents are therefore not informed about the provisions available to their children"

"My child waited about 4 months to get into a provision other than school and huge time scale gaps when things haven't worked out"

"I cannot praise the EOTAS provision highly enough. Very difficult to access though. Even professionals don't seem to know it exists, or think it's for physical illness only"

Period of time while settling the young people into the EOTAS provision or when preparing young people for a new setting

The majority of parents described how their children were not given any choice for the location of their child's studies, how they would study or what they would study. Families felt that many EOTAS provisions appeared not to tailor or individualise its approach to dealing with individuals and their specific circumstances. This was often detrimental to the young person and didn't provide a positive and manageable learning environment so on occasions failed.

"Absolutely terrible there was no support. I had to chase everything. When she was finally provided with the new provision there was no discussion about the subjects and range of online lessons. Just a laptop and left to get on with it."

Another epic fail as it was again too much. She needed to start slow and build up. We weren't asked for our opinion or suggestions"

"To me my child was an afterthought and was passed from pillar to post, unsuitable tutors were put in place which escalated everything it was a nightmare with little or no support early intervention is a must but it needs to be the right help offered"

"Information was not passed onto to tutors so on my daughters first session she was given a maths GCSE exam to complete. This triggered massive anxiety and she was unable to return"

"My son hasn't been supported. If we had waited he would have missed 2 years of schooling. We opted to pay for some online schooling to fill the gap while we waited for support. Once we did this we weren't offered anything and are still paying 2 years later. LA has refused to engage"

"I'd describe the quality of EOTAS provision for my child as poor. It's only 5 hours a week at local library. If my son had a learning disability he would have had a statement and full time education as the issue was mental health he was discriminated against, it's totally unacceptable"

Once settled in an EOTAS provision

Parents reported that after settling within an EOTAS provision the young people had encountered many positive signs of improvement of behaviour, well-being and learning.

Strategies the families felt worked included closely working with the young people, 1:1 support, building trust and focusing on life skills. Families also reported an improvement in communication from the staff at the provisions compared to how communication had been previously with the Local Authority.

This positive environment was described many times as "life changing" for these young people and their families. However, for some, it only went so far as to build their resilience because when it came to the point of these young people trying to attain qualifications, there seemed to be no flexibility or provision to support them within an examination environment.

"My daughter has come on leaps and bounds. She now feels that she has a future with the plans they are putting in place for her. She trusts them and has really started to grow. This is all thanks to the 1 on 1 support she has received.

They are giving her life lessons and skills. How to have an opinion. Setting out a clear path for their future and giving them the confidence to achieve this"

"My son went from being bullied and scared and uncomfortable and not going out, to growing in confidence feeling comfortable and safe and was able to continue his studies. The EOTAS provision has made a real difference in my sons life because of them my son will do his exams will move on get a job all because of the support and teaching of the dedicated staff"

"Our son tried to do GCSE Papers, he was excited to do the exam and hoped to achieve a grade but unfortunately we were let down again by the system. We were unable to get an adjudicator to witness exams being taken in exam controlled environment. Instead we were told they could sit exams in a leisure centre with other pupils. This failed my son as he cannot sit with people he doesn't know in a place he has never been with an adjudicator he has never seen before"

"The staff are amazing. I see them every day. Nothing is too much trouble. They have been so patient with him, I can go there and speak or ring any time. He's gone from a child who hides in the corner and won't speak to anyone, that wouldn't wear clothes to a young man who will speak to you. He now will wear trainers, all be it they are soft and we have to have the right material etc, but there was a time he was actually wearing pyjamas and slippers. That's the only way we could get him there"

"We've never thought about the future. Just trying to get him to go to school and learn has been the main focus for us. For us we just want him to be happy, he will be doing his GCSE exams soon and then we will be thinking about what's next. The staff at the provision take him to the shop to get lunch and take him out on trips to socialise. You can't rush a child with autism, it takes longer and you can get setbacks at any time. Where you have to recalculate and start again"

"It's nice to know that my son is happy and safe and feels a part of something they go above and beyond. I'm always kept up to date with how he's doing in school by text message and regular phone calls"

"We owe so much to the staff and their dedication to these pupils, they promoted personal development always at our son's level and pace. They helped him to develop social skills, independence and positive behaviours [...] Before this time my son never had any goals or future aspirations and for his Dad and I this was heart breaking, our child never felt like he fit anywhere in

the world. Our son has come such a great way in the years he has been able to have the benefit of the EOTAS provision. He has days where he is far more confident, his behaviours have calmed down to a point he often can verbally say how he feels”

“For many children just one day or a few hours a week accessing school would be more appropriate than being out of school all the time but that doesn't seem to be possible at the moment”

“I can honestly say it's been one of the toughest times we as a family have been through. Getting him there [to the EOTAS provision] was a traumatic experience but I'm so glad I kept going and got him in there. Since he started it's like a weight has been lifted. Like we've got a friend who is there for him and us. I know there are a lot of kids who are like mine and just don't fit into the system. You have to keep proving why you need the place over and over, and they do think it's a one size fits all”

Staff Survey

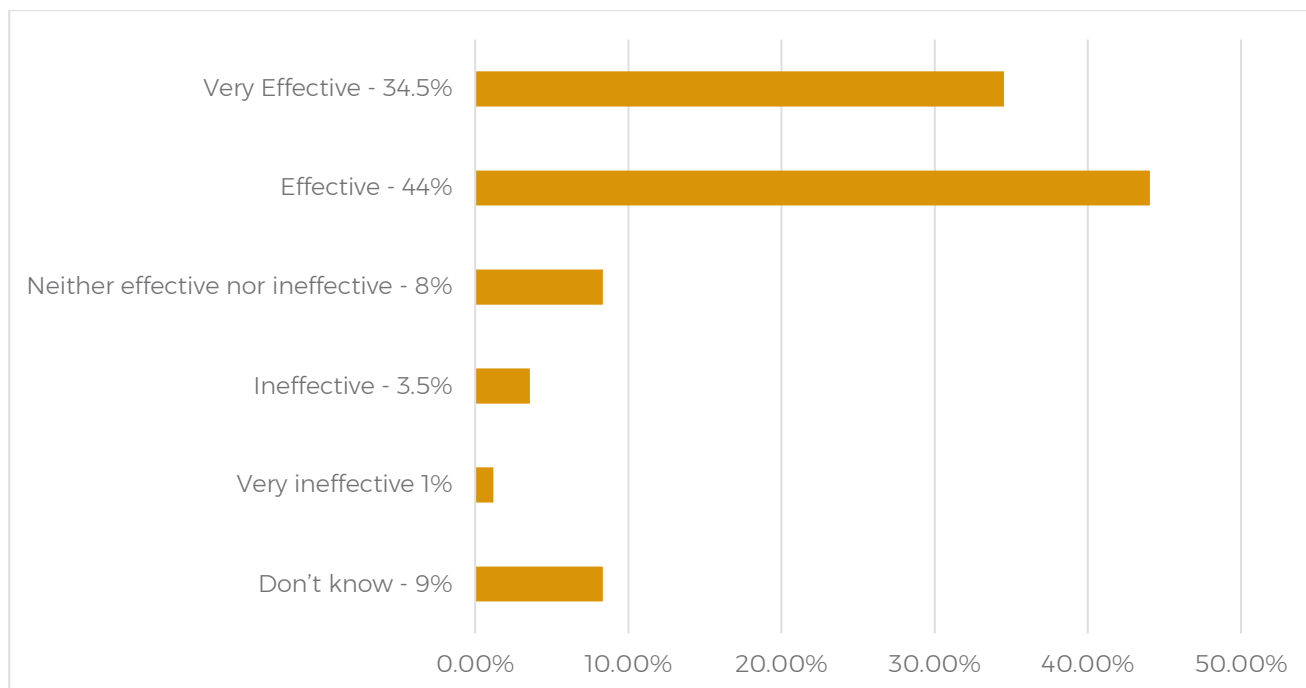
Through specific questioning of staff, five consistent themes arose. Quotes have been selected on the basis that they illustrate the reoccurring themes and therefore summarise the overall comments from the responses.

Results have been calculated from the number of respondents who answered the specific question and not the overall number of respondents to the survey.

Quotes in this section have been submitted by staff working within EOTAS provisions.

Theme 1 - Communication with parents

Staff selected from the following options to describe how effective they felt the provision they worked within is at engaging and supporting parents throughout the EOTAS process:



To explain their choice, survey participants were invited to comment after the question. Here is the range of strategies and approaches staff use to communicate well. The list is varied but many provisions appeared to be offering;

- Information to the parent regarding the initial acceptance of a new student attending their provision once the young person has been allocated to that provision.
- Detailed information about how the provision is run and the expectations and culture within the setting.
- Regular updates on how their child is progressing, often daily updates.
- Invitations to parent & child events, beyond 'parent's evening' style events and parent support group sessions.
- Easy contact with staff. Provisions were offering communication channels through a variety of ways and in some cases buddying up of individual staff members and families was used to ensure consistency.

"We have close contact with parents from the moment the application for placement is received. We have regular telephone contact with parents and use the app 'class dojo'. This allows us to share pupils progress on a daily basis and also allows parents to contact staff via a messaging facility within the app. We have regular reviews with parents to discuss pupil progress at both our setting and mainstream"

"We work closely with parents from the minute a child is referred. We ensure regular contact is made and we listen and support any concerns they have"

"We hold regular meetings, open evenings and events for parents/carers. Daily and weekly information shared via a communication app, including sharing their child's work through photographs and short videos. Regular positive phone calls. Parent/carer engagement has increased dramatically in the last 2 years"

"A letter is sent out with a prospectus outlining our objectives. A home visit then takes place followed by a visit for both students and parents/carers to attend. We explain what is available"

"Having a member of staff to link with the family is good practice"

"Community cafe twice a year where parents are invited to attend and we offer to pick parents up in the mini bus so they can attend."

"Parents tell us they feel supported through the process and value the communication with the provider. Parents tell us that they and their child feel more positive about future outcomes"

"Parents are invited to events such as sports day and craft fayres which parents are well attended"

"We try to build a good relationship with the young people to trust us. We are sometimes the only bit of consistency that they have"

"Information passed back forth with parents on very frequent basis. Students behaviour at home discussed and joint approaches encouraged"

There were comments made by staff around challenges with individual parents not always engaging with the efforts of the staff at the provision.

"Engagement with parents/carers starts at an early stage in the admissions process and we endeavour to keep in close contact with parents/carers. Many parents respond positively, however it is extremely difficult to support and engage all parents/carers"

"We keep parents, who are willing to engage, fully up to date and maintain daily contact"

"Our communication is good, parents don't always respond"

"Some of these challenges have developed from the logistics of the provision or situation, but some may have developed from confusion about the system they [parents] have found themselves within"

"Difficulties with regular and building contact with parents due to logistics of covering the entirety of North Wales and visiting time to the hospital being in the evening. Contact is sought, welcomed but has its challenges"

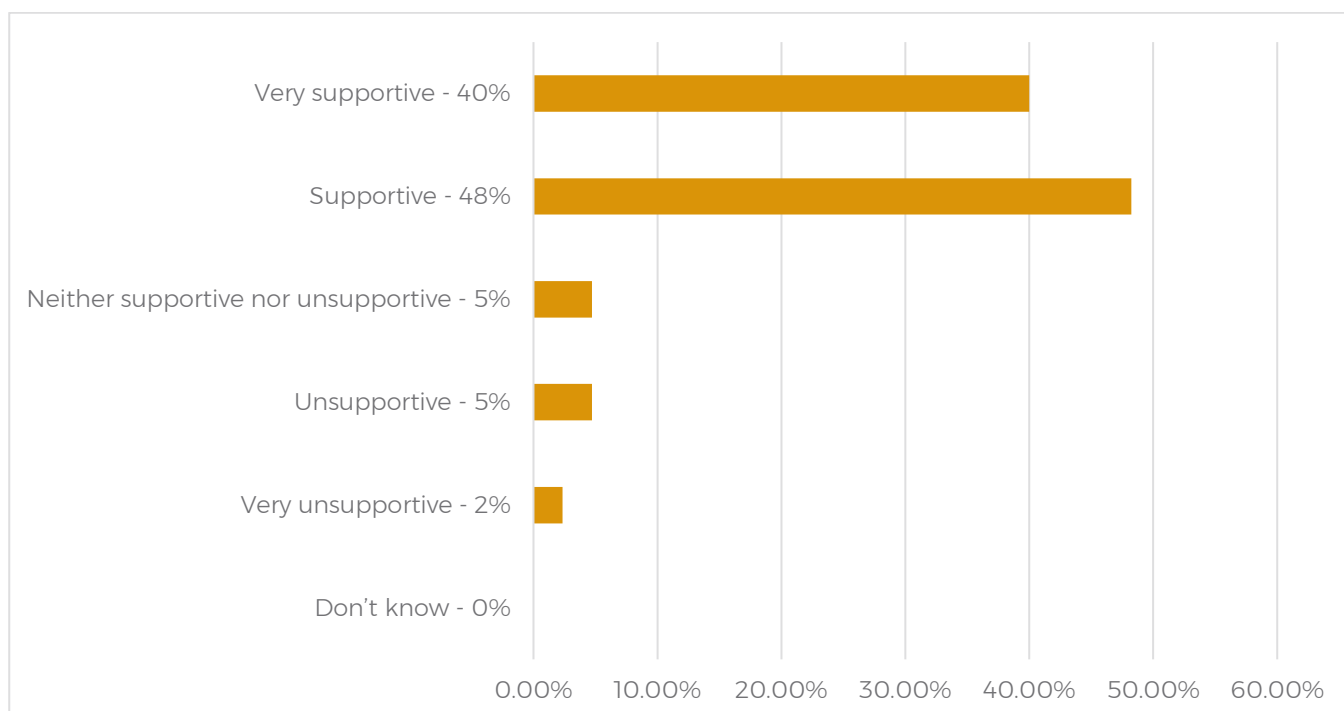
"The 'supporting' aspect is very effective, however because of the geographical implications of the settings engagement can be difficult"

"It is hard for parents to understand who oversees their child's education and who is responsible for them"

"The system is effective but there is room for improvement. Sometimes parents arrive at the PRU and do not seem to be fully informed about the process"

Theme 2 - Staff Training

Staff selected from the following options to describe how supportive they felt the provision they worked in was when offering professional development opportunities.



Although the overall perception was that staff are able to further develop their skills, with several comments stating they were receiving degree level training and sponsored by the provision, some difficulties were raised including:

- The challenge to get time within the school week to attend courses.
- Financial constraints.
- A lack of suitable training for the setting they are working in as often courses focus on mainstream settings.

"I'm often offered opportunities, however it can be difficult to arrange cover and I often feel guilty if suitable cover isn't available – as it can be too distributive for the children"

"They encourage us to take on professional development but it's often quite difficult to release us due to the establishment we work in"

"A significant amount of EOTAS staff time is out in mainstream schools supporting under performing schools. Yet a NQT cannot complete their training within a PRU provision and general behaviour management through Teacher training is still not given the emphasis it is needed. A teacher needs to have good behaviour management skills to enable their pupils to learn to their full potential. Behaviour and learning goes hand in hand"

Provisions have tried to work around these challenges but the approaches seem to vary:

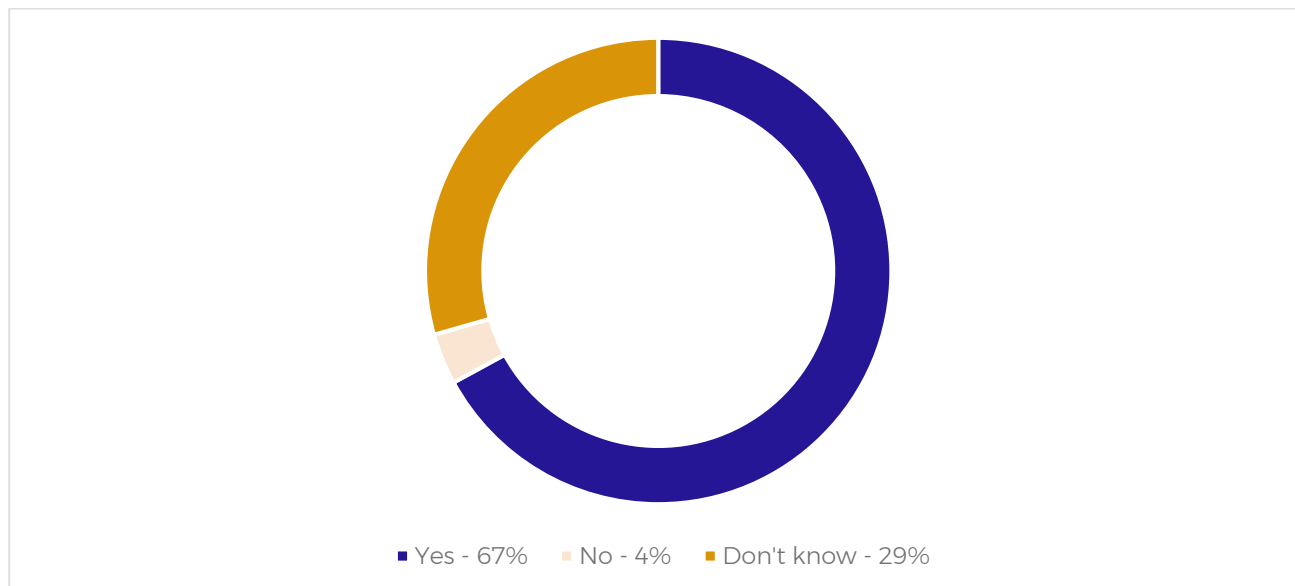
"We are part of a cluster group where we share ideas and resources. Training is provided on a variety of subjects, which allows my own personal development to grow"

"Staff are routinely placed on local authority courses and in addition staff are given opportunities to access external accreditation. At our provision, we have set up a monthly learning group where we discuss aspects of leadership at all levels"

"Although due to staff numbers it is not always possible to attend training, staff are offered plenty of CPD time, including time at university. Twilight training is also arranged to keep staff up to date"

Theme 3 - Partnership working

Staff selected from the following options to indicate if their provision shared ideas and best practice with other EOTAS provisions and mainstream schools:



Conclusions could be drawn that there may be a lack of internal communication of sharing of best practice given almost 30% of respondents selected 'don't know' for this question.

However, many positive approaches were mentioned, including:

- National networking events for all staff from PRU's in Wales.
- Regular visits to other local provisions to share ideas, positive behaviour strategies and observe session delivery.
- Weekly outreach support from one provision is sent into the local mainstream school – during the visit, the staff discuss progress and positive behaviour strategies and approaches to improve learning structures.
- Staff from mainstream schools are invited into provisions to learn much of the above but also gain a sense of the environment within the provision.
- A number of schools have set up Specialist Interest Groups within the provision or with staff across several provisions or mainstream schools – the curriculum and other topics are discussed.

- Several local authorities have set up clusters of schools where cross-cluster moderation meetings, networking and idea sharing is possible as well as arranging collaborative courses from external providers.

There also seemed to be some sharing of best practice between organisations that the young people studied at after they had left the EOTAS provision. This forward looking approach supported the young people and their future plans.

Theme 4- Funding / Budgeting

Views were shared around staffs perception of value for money within the provision they worked in. Themes centred around:

- Lack of funding.
- Delays with funding or late payments
- Lack of value for money with regards the costs for transport and use of agency staff.

"I think it's a complete waste of money paying Transport costs of £10,000 plus every month to transport pupils out of county to provisions in Cardiff. The invoices make my eyes water every week!"

"Agency staff costs a ridiculous amount making a 50% profit per person"

"Some pupils are in a taxi from rural Vale for over an hour and a half to get to provisions in Cardiff. They should have opportunities much closer to home that is more economical overall"

"We need to be funded securely and fairly for us to be able to continue. We have had great successes from this programme and have changed the lives of many of our learners. We would love to be funded secure enough to be able to continue this provision"

Several comments were made regarding complex funding approaches. Some provisions were unable to access a single source of funding to cover the full cost recovery to enable delivery of their work. Provisions are looking to local businesses, arts funding or even running charitable fundraisers to cover costs.

Theme 5 - Mitigating risks

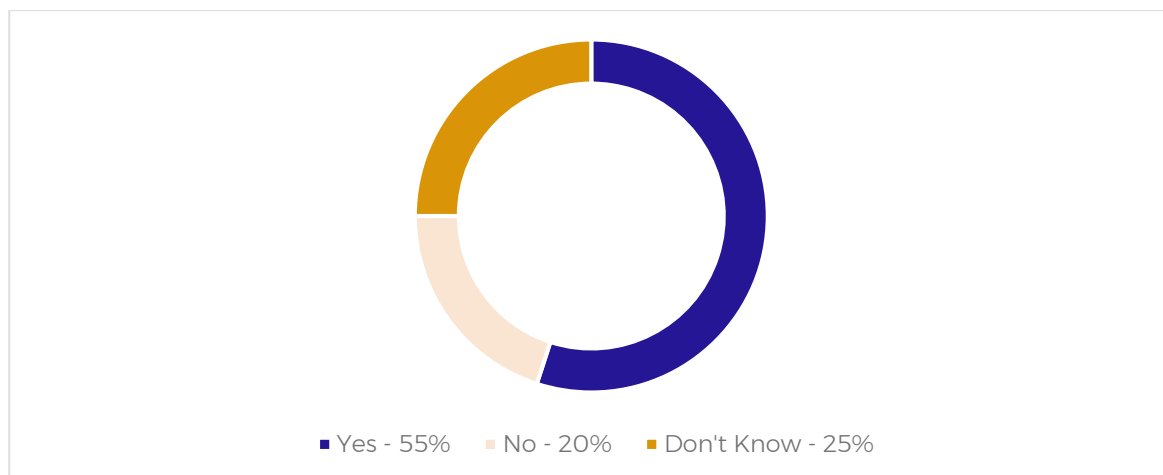
Staff were asked to describe if they felt the provision they worked in was mitigating risks in three areas;

- a) barriers to mental health;
- b) involvement with crime; and
- c) access to education in the Welsh language.

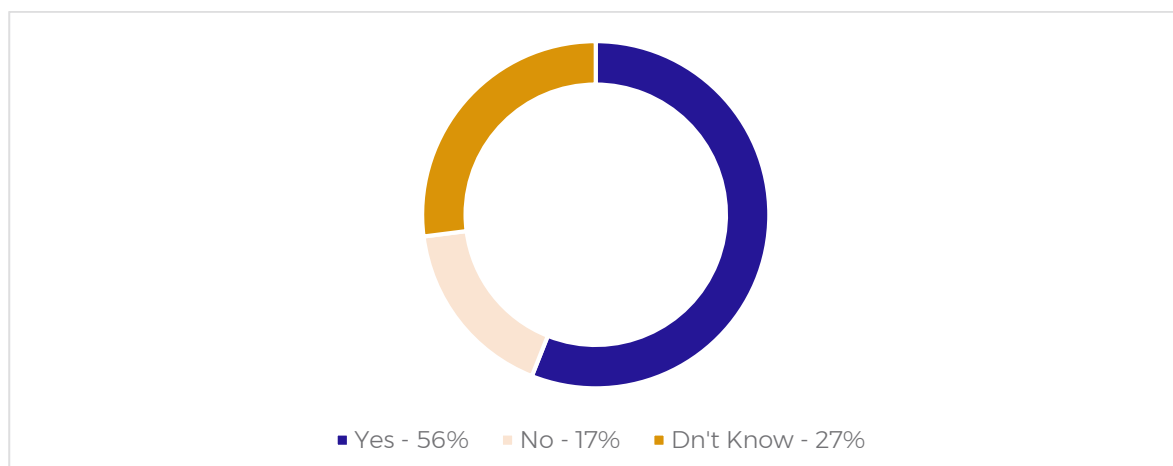
On the whole, staff responded positively to all three areas and the majority felt that these risks were being mitigated to the maximum they could be.

The results were as follows:

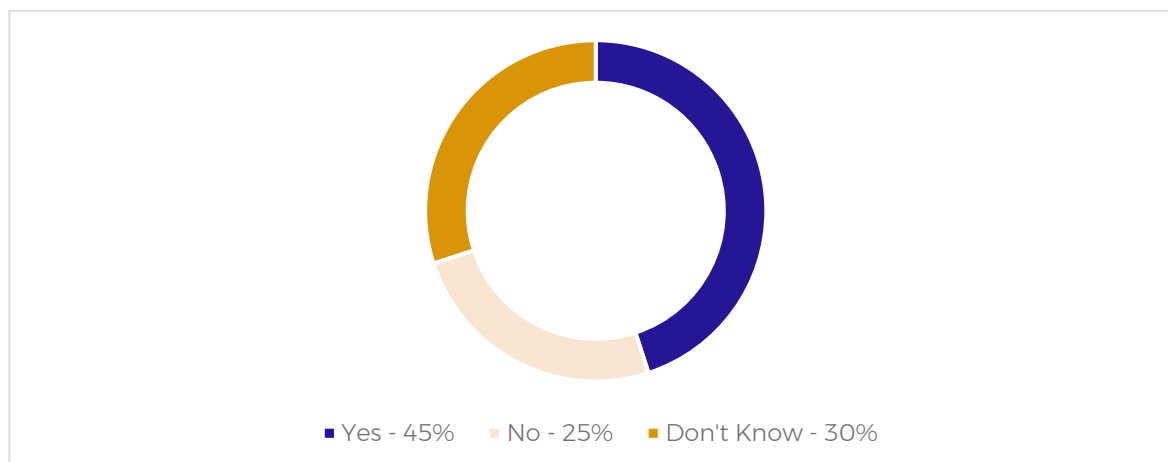
a) Is the provision mitigating risk to increased barriers to accessing mental health support?:



b) Is the provision mitigating risk to involvement with crime and the criminal justice system?:



c) Is the provision mitigating risk to a lack of access to education in the Welsh language?:



While displaying a high number of participants who didn't know how these risks may or may not be mitigated within their school, many positive strategies were described across Wales including:

a) Provisions have; employed an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant; offered on-site counselling; set up 'safe spaces' for students to talk or calm down; offered art therapy; trained staff to be able to support on site; worked with partner organisations to access specialised well-being and mental health services; collaborated with social services, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Emotional Health & Wellbeing Services, voluntary sector organisations etc to support pupils.

"Staff are trained in emotional literacy and thrive and to deal with social and emotional issues as routine practice"

"Pupils have access to the emotional health team, and can access art therapy in need be. Staff offer ELSA [Emotional Literacy Support] and a safe place"

"We refer pupils to the Health and Well Being team, they can assess and work alongside CAMHs if necessary. They provide help and support to the young person and their families, in a number of different types of therapeutic interventions"

"We have CAMHS support in our EOTAS provision delivered by our PRU's, and we have a good relationship with the service. We also liaise closely with YJS, and they are represented on the LA's Inclusion panel"

b) Provisions have; accessed support from youth prevention teams, Police Liaison Officers, Youth Justice Teams; delivered lessons by trained substance misuse staff on drugs & alcohol misuse; run Youth Inclusion and Support Projects; set up arts programmes to focus energy and concentration on a positive outlet.

"We work closely with the Youth Justice Team through at least weekly meetings. A member of the YJT sits on our management committee. We have recently been involved in a multi-agency project (Education and Criminality Partners) reporting on links between school exclusion and criminality"

"We annually access Crucial Crew which allows pupils to meet and take part in educational activities provided by the Emergency Services"

c) Several provisions stated they were able to deliver the curriculum in Welsh. However not all survey respondents commented on this area and the few who did comment described how Welsh language provision was lacking in their provision.

"Although the provision currently accessed is not delivered through the medium of Welsh, students are able to access support for Welsh development if they are first language Welsh speakers. However we currently do not have the ability to offer GCSE Welsh Language to the learners"

"Pupils can be Welsh speaking when they arrive and use of incidental Welsh is used daily"

"Welsh lessons are now being offered, but unfortunately only one member of part time staff speaks Welsh"