



Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN  
[SeneddIechyd@senedd.cymru](mailto:SeneddIechyd@senedd.cymru)

5 April 2023

Dear Russell and Jayne,

Thank you for your letter dated 19 January regarding a national children's counselling service. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in replying. We have been receiving a significant amount of correspondence recently and in some cases I am afraid it is taking longer to respond than we would wish.

As you are aware, the mental health and well-being of children and young people in Wales is a top priority for me and we are taking a whole system approach to improve emotional mental health and well-being to ensure the right services are easily accessible for all. In November I provided the Children Young People and Education Committee with an update which sets out the changes we continue to implement to drive services improvements.

In terms of your suggestion regarding a national counselling service for children, there is already a range of national provision where appropriate. Our schools based counselling has a statutory duty to provide support for all school age children in Year 6 and above, with CAMHS services providing in-reach support. In 2020, the Welsh Government also revised the *School and community-based counselling operating toolkit* highlighting the need to ensure adequate counselling support in the community for children who may not be able to attend school due to exclusion or for other reasons.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Lynne.Neagle@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Lynne.Neagle@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

To support our work with schools, we have introduced a school in-reach service. This provides CAMHS support to schools to help them provide emotional support to students. Dedicated mental health practitioners are now in schools providing consultation, liaison, advice and training. Following a successful pilot programme, the service has now been rolled out across all-Wales. We have provided over £5.3m in the current year to support this and health boards inform us they have recruited over 100 (whole time equivalent) staff to work with schools.

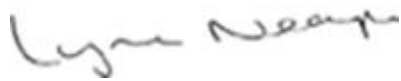
This is in addition to the counselling services provided through primary and secondary CAMHS which is available to children of all ages who meet the threshold to benefit from this support. All Health Boards in Wales now have single points of access which facilitates easier access to services and health boards have a range of services, including counselling, available for young people while they are waiting for assessments and intervention to start providing timely access to support.

Counselling services will not be appropriate for all children, particularly younger children where there is a focus on the provision of play, families and other therapies. This is the model being adopted by health boards and we are replicating this model in our prevention and early intervention services. For example, for several years we have required local authorities to develop age-appropriate provision for younger age children, below the current Year 6 threshold, with most now offering some form of support. This was highlighted in research we commissioned from Cardiff University (published March 2022) 'Review of statutory school and community-based counselling services: Optimisation of services for children and young people aged 11 – 18 years and extension to younger primary school aged children'. We have been working with commissioners and providers of the service in the last year to take forward the findings of the research and further improve provision. The Minister for Education and Welsh Language and I have convened an Oversight and Delivery Board, replacing the previous Joint Ministerial Group on a Whole System Approach to Wellbeing, to assure us that our wellbeing work is having the desired impact. A dedicated school counselling workstream has been established beneath the Board to consider extending and improving provision of counselling and therapeutic support to children and young people.

We are also currently in the process of tendering further research in this area for an evaluation of impact of school and community-based counselling services for young people. The aims of which include determining the effectiveness and impact of services on young people's mental health and wellbeing, further educational and social outcomes (e.g. young people's attainment, attendance, relationships), and referrals to CAMHS and other mental health services.

Moving forward, focus is on utilising the NYTH/NEST framework to further embed the no wrong door approach into service design and delivery. Regional Partnership Boards have all assigned NYTH/NEST leads to drive forward the implementation of the NYTH/NEST framework. As part of this work the regions are mapping what mental health and wellbeing services are available, including counselling, and improving the access to these services. It is important that we do not approach the provision of support in a one size fits all manner with the risk of excluding members of society – particularly the most vulnerable. I am also very conscious of the repeated request by young people not to over medicalise growing up which we need to factor into our approach.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynne Neagle".

**Lynne Neagle AS/MS**

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant  
Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing