

# Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 23 January 2024

## PE2051/A: Improve the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Scottish Government's views on the action called for within Petition PE2051 to improve the processes for protecting children and young people from traumatic incidents.

I was sorry to hear of the petitioner's experiences and the impact this has had on her. I hope the below illustrates the progress that has been made over the last 20 years in putting a focus on wellbeing at the heart of the Scottish education policy landscape and curriculum, and therefore addresses the actions the petitioner is calling for.

Under Curriculum for Excellence, along with literacy and numeracy, health and wellbeing is one of the three core areas that are the responsibility of all staff in the school. This means all adults working in schools are responsible for supporting and developing children and young people's mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing to support successful learning and happy lives.

Scottish Government policy emphasises the importance of having a relationship policy in each school. Education Scotland's Rights, Support and Wellbeing Team advocate a relationship-based approach to all local authorities and make explicit links between this and positive outcomes in attainment. One of the key approaches that is supported within Local Authorities is a nurturing approach and this is reflected in key Scottish Government guidance such as ['Developing a positive whole school ethos and culture: relationships, learning and behaviour'](#).

Scotland's 'Getting it right for every child approach' (GIRFEC) provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing of children, young people, and families. The National Practice Model under 'Getting it right for every child' provides a structure to support practitioners, working together with children, young people and families, to make effective use

of assessment information including the [statutory guidance](#) around assessing children and young people's wellbeing.

One of the core components of 'Getting it right for every child' is the named person, who is a clear point of contact for children, young people and families to go to for support and advice. A named person can also connect families to a wider network of support and services so that they get the right help, at the right time, from the right people. For school-aged children the named person is usually a headteacher or senior teacher.

We know that the health and wellbeing of every child and young person is greatly enhanced through the individual support and pastoral care which they receive through having an identified member of staff who knows and understands them and can support them in facing changes and challenges and in making choices. School staff already have a wide range of approaches and strategies in place to support children and young people's mental health. Education Scotland also provide tools and guidance for school staff to further strengthen support to children and young people. Educational psychologists also work to help children and young people experiencing problems that affect their learning. They build capacity in schools to support children with additional support needs.

On 26 October 2023, the Scottish Government published the '[Getting It right for every child' \(GIRFEC\): Child's Plan Practice Statement](#) which compliments the guidance series published in September 2022 to help and support practitioners and managers embed and implement 'Getting it right for every child' into their everyday practice.

The non-statutory GIRFEC child's plan remains an important element in the ways children's and related services can work in a co-ordinated way to support the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. Using the 'Getting it right for every child' approach, practitioners and lead professionals should support a child or young person's wellbeing by working alongside them and their family, and other practitioners involved in supporting their learning.

The Committee will also be aware that all local authorities have counselling services in place through secondary schools, which is available for children 10 years and over. Counselling is just one of a range of mental health supports available and can help children and young people explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives and improve resilience.

To further support schools, June 2021 we published a new professional learning resource for school staff. The resource provides essential learning required to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Although aimed at school staff, the resource is free and available to anyone who wishes to access it at: [CYPMH – Professional Learning Resource](#).

In August 2021, we also published a Whole School Approach Framework which provides practical measures that a school and a local authority can use to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: [Mental health and wellbeing: whole school approach: framework - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). The Framework is clear that a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing also links well with whole school relationship-based and nurturing approaches and is trauma-informed.

In relation to at-risk children, in August 2023, we updated our [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#). The guidance describes the responsibilities and expectations of everyone who works with children and young people, and emphasises the key role that the education workforce have in the support and protection of children. All staff working in education establishments have a key role in the support and protection of children and young people and all staff must be aware of, and must follow, child protection procedures.

Finally, in 2017, we updated our national guidance on school exclusions: [Included, engaged and involved part 2: preventing and managing school exclusions - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). This gives a stronger focus on supporting positive behaviour and approaches that can be used to prevent the need for exclusion. The guidance is clear that exclusion should be used as a last resort, and should be a proportionate response where there is no appropriate alternative. The wellbeing of the child or young person should be the key consideration. The guidance states that all exclusions from school must be formally recorded, and children and young people must not be sent home on an 'informal exclusion' or sent home to 'cool-off.'

I hope the Committee finds the information in this letter helpful and that the Committee is reassured that supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people is an absolute priority for the Scottish Government.

**Jenny Gilruth MSP**