

Highland Council Psychological Service
Support for Children and young people during Lockdown –
Supporting Resilience and Recovery

During the period of Lockdown across Scotland the Highland Council Psychological Service has continued to work with partners to support children, young people and their families and has been focused on meeting both current need, but also to prepare the service and our partners to support families as we come out of Lockdown and during the recovery phase when schools re-open. Support for school staff has continued, as would be expected, albeit in a different format. The service has responded to home working by using Microsoft Teams for consultations and meetings and Google Meets and Google Classrooms for direct work with children and as a platform for larger team meetings and for staff training. All schools and early years settings have continued to have access to their liaison educational psychologist for consultations relating to individual pupils. In addition, staff have been working closely with Area ASN staff and the Education Improvement Team to provide support, advice and planning for school systems, school staff and importantly for vulnerable children and young people. This has included support in the planning stages for the Keeping in Touch Hubs and supporting planning for transitions for children and young people with high level needs.

Over the course of term 3, the Psychological Service was engaged in 714 consultations relating to children and young people. Unsurprisingly the most common themes were around transitions, family issues, and mental health and wellbeing.

There has been a great deal of information available from a variety of sources around the world about support for pupils during this time and about the possible impact of COVID-19. One of the tasks of the Psychological service has been to be aware of the various resources and to filter these in such a way that good quality, factual and evidence based information has been disseminated to staff through various channels.

During the initial stages of Lockdown there was an opportunity to provide a number of training opportunities for staff who had more time to engage in CPD as they were more practically based and initially less able to provide direct support to pupils online e.g. Pupil Support Assistants. A variety of training modules and courses were therefore made available to them, to undertake online and at home. This provided an opportunity to enhance their capacity and understanding in key aspects of their roles e.g. Promoting Positive Relationships, Differentiation, Neurodevelopmental Differences, Intimate Care etc. Over time, as all staff have become more familiar with Google Classrooms and Google Meets, these modules and training opportunities have remained in their classrooms for all staff to access as required.

Training for staff has been made available in both Google Classrooms and on the Psychological Service Website

<https://highlandcouncilpsychologicalservice.wordpress.com/covid-19-information-and-resources/> including training sessions and modules prepared on

- [De-escalation Guidelines](#)
- [Early Level, Communication and Language](#)
- [Neurodevelopmental Needs](#)
- [Nurturing Principles](#)
- [Promoting Positive Relationships and Emotional Literacy](#)
- [Teaching in a Crisis](#)
- [Change, loss and bereavement](#)
- [Supporting Mental Health](#)
- [Staff Wellbeing](#)
- [Recovery and Return to School](#)

A specific webpage has been created on the Psychological Service website for resources specifically linked with Covid-10

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/886/schools_-_additional_support_needs/36/psychological_service/2 and this includes information for both parents and young people, as well as professionals about talking with children about Coronavirus, psychological support and advice for schools and parents/carers and looking after yourself and your children during COVID-19.

In collaboration with PMHW Team Lead a section of the Digital Hub has been populated with resources to support mental and emotional wellbeing for both staff and families and this has been well used during the past few months.

<https://sites.google.com/millburnacademy.org.uk/highlanddigitalschoolshub/wellbeing-for-all>

Resources and materials for pupils with ASN has also been collated by the service and made available on the Digital Hub from an early stage, so that the parents of children with significant ASN could access curricular materials and activities geared to the needs of their children and young people. This section of the Hub also provides information to parents about the specialist services who all have continued to work virtually with children and families throughout the past few months.

<https://sites.google.com/millburnacademy.org.uk/highlanddigitalschoolshub/digital-learning/asn>

Further support for pupils working remotely has been provided by a small research project undertaken in collaboration with staff from 2 Highland schools about the use of cooperative learning online. The outcome of the project was that this intervention provided both a positive impact on the young people's wellbeing and the school upscaled this way of teaching by adopting it for all classes.

A range of advice for children, parents and staff working in Early Years has been provided by the preschool home visiting teachers within the Psychological Service <https://highlandcouncilpsychologicalservice.wordpress.com/supporting-learners/easeys-for-asn/> and these resources also supports the work collated and promoted through www.bumps2bairns which had a daily blog post for parents to support them in a range of activities while their children were not in nursery. This

website is managed by the Early Years Educational Psychologist but promotes the work of a much wider team of professionals from a variety of disciplines, including teachers and allied health professionals and it is this multi-professional approach that makes this work so well respected across Scotland. The focus from early years has been on supporting play pedagogy in transitions back to early years settings and into early level in school and is widely supported Scottish Government Guidance in [Realising the Ambition](#) and by our own practitioners https://padlet.com/laura_carson/highlandplaypedagogy The work on early years transitions has also been noted by Education Scotland as best practice <https://wakelet.com/wake/CASkLDRrNyMTIoEZnTiXt>

The EY Educational Psychologist has also been involved in supporting the creation of the quality standard for provision of home ELC learning and providing advice to Scottish Government on ParentClub resources for families <https://www.parentclub.scot/> support for Education Scotland #beingmeblether twitter events and podcasts on transition to ELC and the creation of half day video training on trauma informed services for the Child Protection Committee.

A multi-agency group led by the Principal Psychologist created guidance for schools on transitions for pupils with ASN returning to schools and also support for mental health support and psychological safety for all pupils. This has been shared with all school staff and two training sessions with almost 200 participants in each have been delivered to reinforce the key messages of this document. <https://highlandcouncilpsychologicalservice.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/transitions-for-children-and-young-people-with-asn.pdf>

The Principal Psychologist worked with a Business Analyst within the Council to collate and analyse the results of a secondary school survey that was created by a group of young people from Tain Royal Academy and distributed across Highland by the Education Improvement Team and Head Teachers. The results of this survey provided information on the views of parents and pupils in relation to their emotional wellbeing and also how they were feeling about a return to school. The report of this survey was shared with all Head Teachers, with individual school results being provided to support transitions planning in each school.

Mental health advice for managers to support staff on their return to school in August has been written with key links for manager and advice on recognising the signs of emotional and psychological distress, which would be expected in some staff. The Service has also updated the Tragic Events Policy and Guidance in light of recent events and this will continue to be used to support Head Teachers managing situations where children, young people and staff have experienced bereavement during this time. Reconnector sessions have been delivered to Seasons' for Growth Companions over recent months and the Principal Psychologist and PMHW Team Lead have also provided three online sessions on Change, Loss and Bereavement to support the awareness and confidence of staff and Head Teachers in managing these issues.

Some schools would ordinarily be supporting the transition from nursery to P1 or from P7 to S1 through the use of Resilient Kids, a package of activities and

resources created by the Psychological Service to support building resilience and emotional/social skills in children and young people. Given that many of these resources were not available to school staff over recent months, they have been made available electronically for those schools who wanted to use them as part of their wellbeing curriculum, supporting pupils online.

Wellbeing sessions during the summer have continued to be offered by the Psychological Service and the PMHW Service to young people and Highlife Highland staff on a range of topics including The Teenage Brain, Worries and Anxieties, Coping and Managing Stress, Managing and Avoiding Conflict at Home, Mindfulness, Online Digital Safety. These sessions have been well received by the pupils who have joined them, but numbers have been small and it is therefore planned to make them available as a regular offer to young people and to staff through Google Meets in the new session. In addition to this, a few groups have continued to meet over the summer, led by the relevant educational psychologist i.e. the Mental Health Warriors from Tain Royal Academy and the Young People who are part of the Syrian New Scots Group.

To directly support parents and professionals an additional day has been offered on the Just Ask Helpline by all services, Allied Health Professionals, Health Visitors, Educational Psychologists and Primary Mental Health Worker Service. The demand has been high and for Educational Psychology and PMHW Services there have been 71 calls from parents and professionals since the start of the Lockdown period.

A pilot intervention has also been delivered to a group of 7 parents, who have children with neurodevelopmental difficulties and significant issues with anxiety. These parents have been supported by 2 PMHWs and 3 Educational Psychologists, working in collaboration with an Autism Practitioner. Using a coaching framework, parents and professionals have been working together to plan for and support this group of children through a period of high anxiety, as they plan their transition back to school in August.

Bernadette Cairns
Principal Educational Psychologist
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