

Curriculum delay
Union calls for primaries
to follow secondaries.

Inspection update
New Minister for Education
decides what's next for Estyn.

New term, new Covid rules
Government drops masks
and contact groups in class.

educateinwales

Issue 68
Autumn term 2021



80% suffer poor mental health

FOUR in every five educators in Wales are experiencing poor mental health – and yet they say the issue is not taken seriously in their workplace, and can be seen as a sign of weakness or never even discussed.

These are just some of the findings of a mental health and wellbeing survey carried out by NEU Cymru in July, which attracted more than 1,600 responses.

Eighty per cent agreed that work impacted on their mental health, and nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) said work had had an impact since the coronavirus pandemic began. However, only 38 per cent had contacted their GP about their mental health.

In addition to dealing with their own wellbeing, nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) of respondents currently support someone else experiencing poor mental health.

Eighty-one per cent of those who responded said they worked an extra six to 20-plus hours a week, and 66 per cent said they were thinking about, or seriously considering, leaving the profession.

‘Educators near breaking point’

NEU Cymru secretary David Evans said: “The results of this survey are quite alarming and clearly show that the education workforce is near to breaking point. We know the Welsh Government has worked with the charity Education Support to address staff wellbeing but this survey shows that the mental health of educators needs to be taken seriously.”

He said the union would be seeking to work with the Government and local authorities to ensure mental health got the “much-needed” attention it deserved.

Other findings from the survey include:
■ 85 per cent of educators have supported a

colleague in emotional distress over the past 12 months.

- 56 per cent have missed a day at work due to anxiety, depression or stress in the last year.
- Only 39 per cent have a mental health and wellbeing policy in their workplace.
- Only one in five have a good work/life balance.

NEU Cymru is calling for training for workplace and health and safety reps to be more widely available to equip them with the skills and knowledge to improve staff wellbeing.

It wants to see examples of good practice published to promote staff wellbeing and establish a culture of openness around mental health, and is calling for funding for a staff wellbeing/mental health champion in every Welsh local authority.

■ The results of the survey will be used as part of the NEU's mental health and wellbeing campaign.



Teacher Kelly Turner (front left) with Crumlin pupils marching through the village, after Covid restrictions meant that parents could not go into the school to see the children's work

A CAERPHILLY school has become ‘plastic clever’ after pupils took the challenge of reducing plastic use in their community. Children from nursery to year 6 at Crumlin High Level Primary School took part in the #PlasticHeroes project, which culminated in a march through their village, complete with placards and protest songs. And their work has been recognised with a Plastic Clever School award from the Kids Against Plastic campaign. “The kids were concerned about plastic in the seas so we started with the effect plastic has on wildlife,” said teacher Kelly Turner. The project went on to include artwork, research, devising games and a lunchbox survey to see how much plastic they contained. They decided to hold a protest march to highlight their message. “The children loved it. Parents came out on the doorsteps to bang pots and pans as the children sang their songs, and the shopkeepers cheered them on,” Kelly said. Now the youngsters are telling their families how to use less plastic and teachers have been told in no uncertain terms to laminate less. Kids Against Plastic also want to use their project as a case study of good practice. kidsagainstplastic.co.uk

Union calls for delay to primary curriculum



NEU Cymru is urging the Welsh Government to delay the introduction of the new curriculum in primary schools until September 2023.

Jeremy Miles, Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, announced the delay in mandating secondary schools on 6 July, but said primary schools should move ahead with transitioning to the new curriculum as planned.

NEU Cymru secretary David Evans said the union had been asking for the rollout of the new curriculum to be postponed for some time. “We would have preferred the implementation of the new curriculum to have been delayed for primary schools as well,” he said.

“Our members have always supported the new curriculum in principle, but there has been so much disruption caused by the pandemic in our schools, it is only right they have extra time and support to make sure they are ready.”

David welcomed the move by the

minister to remove the requirement for assessments to be carried out at the end of key stages in primary schools in the 2021/22 academic year for pupils transitioning to the new curriculum next September.

The minister announced an additional £7.24 million to support schools with curriculum reform.

But he also said only secondary schools that were in a position to go ahead with implementing the new curriculum this September were encouraged to do so, a suggestion David said “isn’t helpful and puts unwanted pressure on schools”.

He added: “The pandemic is not over. As much as we would all like to focus on education for our young people, we know there will be more disruption to come over the next year – with people off isolating to protect their peers and the wider community.”

“We therefore hope that the focus on wellbeing for everyone in the education system remains a top priority.”

(Pictured left) Jeremy Miles

Learning dates for your diary

LEARNING is at the heart of NEU Cymru and we take pride in the local training that we provide for education professionals, officers and workplace reps.

TRAINING FOR REPS

Due to the ongoing health crisis, the union’s one- and three-day training courses for all new and existing workplace reps will continue to be delivered virtually. They will take place over a period of six weeks, with weekly two-hour sessions from 4-6pm.

Foundation courses

- Tuesdays, from 12 October-23 November (excluding half-term)
- Wednesdays, from 3 November-8 December

If you’re interested in attending a course, email cymru.wales@neu.org.uk – and remember, reps are legally entitled to attend this training. The NEU will support any rep who has difficulties

getting time off work to attend. Once normal service has resumed, we will be arranging full three-day courses, as well as a modular course, where the three days are done separately over a period of time.

More courses through WULF

Courses are also available through the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) and a regularly updated list of topics can be found at bit.ly/3hWYJcj with information on how to register.

If you would like the union to consider organising a particular course, please email Lisa Williams at lisa.williams@neu.org.uk or Beth Roberts at beth.roberts@neu.org.uk

Check your email inbox for information on the latest training opportunities. Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/neucymrutraining, follow us on Twitter at [@neucymrutrain](https://twitter.com/neucymrutrain) and visit neu.org.uk/learning-and-events

Estyn inspections suspended further

NEWS that Estyn’s core inspection programme will be suspended for a further term from September is welcomed by NEU Cymru.

Education Minister Jeremy Miles said the move would enable the inspection body to focus on those schools and pupil referral units in most need of support before the new curriculum is rolled out (see above).

David Evans, NEU Cymru secretary, said members would be “heartened” that the minister had understood the challenges the education workforce faced.

“Throughout the pandemic, Estyn has recognised the work everyone is doing in education and was quick to stop inspections last March. By taking this welcome step, the Education Minister has acknowledged that he understands the challenges and realises that an Estyn inspection would not be helpful at this time,” David said.

The minister also said Estyn would pilot new inspection arrangements during the spring term 2022.

Meet NEU Cymru's Officer of the Year



THE 2020/21 Wales Officer of the Year puts her success down to her dedicated colleagues in the district.

Caerphilly district secretary Pamela Ireland (pictured left) said she accepted the

award "on behalf of Team Caerphilly".

"We have a very dedicated group of people who come to all the meetings and support us in whatever we do," she said.

A science teacher for 25 years, Pamela took over as district secretary after retiring three years ago.

She makes herself available at all times for members, who during the pandemic have raised issues such as anxiety, bubbles and testing. District membership has increased by more than 70 in the last year.

The district also runs an award scheme of its own, the NEU Endeavour Award, for pupils who have attended school despite physical, emotional or other difficulties.

Of her own honour, Pamela said: "It's great to have the award, I'm more pleased than I thought I would be."



The winning entry by Lili Slatter, from Ysgol Maesydderwen in Ystradgynlais

THOUSANDS of pupils from across Wales entered Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC) Wales' 2021 Creative Competition, which this year was exclusively sponsored by NEU Cymru. Categories ranged from clothing design and creative writing to digital media and poster design. This year's special category was entitled Racism and the Beautiful Game, which saw pupils explore the issues of racism in football.

The overall winner was Lili Slatter from Ysgol Maesydderwen in Ystradgynlais, Powys, for her poster. She received an iPad, donated by the NEU as part of its commitment to anti-racism work in schools. The winners and runners up were announced online by a host of famous sporting and television stars, including Cardiff City captain Sean Morrison, ITV sports correspondent Beth Fisher, and TV presenters Jason Mohammad, Lisa Rogers and Alex Winters.

To see all prize-winning entries, go to bit.ly/3wMjT13

■ SRtRC is celebrating 25 years of campaigning – see page 19

Welsh Government publishes Covid plan

THE Welsh Government has made three main changes to the guidance for the reopening of educational establishments from this September.

It is also publishing a Local Covid-19 Infection Control Decision Framework at the start of the autumn term, which will enable schools to adapt the guidance to reflect local levels of risk from coronavirus infection. The framework was drawn up over the summer with schools, local authorities and public health experts.

The operational guidance, published in July, is designed to bring some normality back to education. The three main changes are:

1. Face coverings

Face coverings will no longer be routinely

“The guidance is designed to bring back some normality to education.”

recommended in classrooms for staff or learners. Schools and settings may wish to encourage their use in areas where there is likely to be more social mixing, such as in communal areas. Close interactions between learners should be minimised, and

social distancing should still be maintained wherever possible.

2. Contact groups

Contact groups will no longer be required for school pupils or full-time learners in colleges.

The reliance on contact groups will be replaced by a stronger focus on contact tracing, in line with the general population.

The Test, Trace, Protect system will be used to identify close contacts of learners who have tested positive.

3. School session times

Normal school session times will resume.

■ Read the full operational guidance at bit.ly/36KXQgF

Here to help

AS the largest education union in Europe, NEU Cymru can offer members an unrivalled service.

Our professional team is here to provide expertise to our network of workplace representatives and district and branch secretaries.

If you have a problem at work or want to know more about member services, contact:

- your workplace representative
- your branch secretary
- Adviceline
- NEU Cymru office.

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'Disappointing' 1.75% pay rise
NEU Cymru is disappointed with the 1.75 per cent 2021 pay rise proposed by the Welsh Government.

Education Minister Jeremy Miles said he accepted the 12 main recommendations made by the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWPRB) in June.

But NEU Cymru secretary David Evans said the increase was significantly below what the union had sought.

"NEU Cymru asked for a higher pay award to start to redress the balance in respect of real-terms cuts since 2010 and to reward a workforce that has been on the frontline during the pandemic," he said.

The union has sent its views to the Government and was waiting for a response as Educate in Wales went to press. The pay increase is due to take effect this September.

- Read the IWPRB report at bit.ly/3zk6Epl
- Read the Welsh Government's proposals at bit.ly/3BkQTKr

Small schools set for closure

MORE rural schools are being closed across Wales despite vocal opposition by local communities.

Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Powys councils have all voted to close some small schools in their areas, and Carmarthenshire is due to decide on the future of two schools in the autumn.

Ysgol Abersoch in Gwynedd is expected to close on 31 December and Ysgol Talwrn in Anglesey will close in the 2022/23 school year.

In Powys, two schools – Ysgol Pennant and Llanrhaeadr-ym-

Mochnant Primary School – were given a reprieve in the summer after a consultation process but the council is to press ahead with the closure of Castle Caereinion Church in Wales School next August.

At least two other schools in the county could also be closed.

At its annual conference in March, NEU Cymru agreed to actively campaign to save rural schools amid concerns about the effect of closures on children's mental health and educators' jobs.

Learn Welsh with Uni of Wales

A TEACHER who has been learning Welsh for a year says it has changed her life.

Angharad Jones took a sabbatical from Pontllanfraith Primary School in Caerphilly to learn the language on the University of Wales' scheme, Cymraeg mewn Blwyddyn (Welsh in a Year).

She has taken part in various social media videos and vlogs as she has progressed and reached the semi-finals of the Welsh Learner of the Year award. Welsh comedian Tudur Owen has called her "inspiring" and Angharad was invited to feature on the Welsh language television channel, S4C.

"I'm at the start of my journey to speak Welsh, but I can say that the Welsh language has definitely changed my life," said Angharad, who has also been helping others in her school to learn the language.

The course is part of the Welsh language sabbatical scheme provided by the university and funded by the Welsh Government – see bit.ly/3riHMfz

Your NEU executive members

VALE of Glamorgan branch secretary Máiréad Canavan and Hannah O'Neill, Blaenau Gwent branch secretary, have been elected as Wales' members on the union's national executive. They are joined by Elizabeth McLean, Denbighshire branch secretary. Máiréad



(From left) Executive members for Wales, Máiréad, Hannah and Elizabeth

was first elected to the executive in 2019 and Hannah was appointed in

January this year. All three will remain in post until August 2023.