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School Nursing Services in Wales - Scoping Research Report Executive Summary

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School Nursing Services in Wales - Scoping Report: Executive Summary

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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1. Executive summary

Overview of the Healthy Child Wales Programme

- 1.1 The Healthy Child Wales Programme (HCWP), a universal health programme for all families in Wales with children aged between 0 and 7 years, has been rolled out across all health boards in Wales since October 2016. The HCWP sets out what planned contacts children and their families can expect from health visitors and other health professionals, from the time of maternity service handover up to the first years of schooling.
- 1.2 The HCWP includes both surveillance¹ and screening responsibilities² for school nursing services provided to primary school children up to the age of seven.
- 1.3 In order to inform future policy on school nursing services in Wales for children beyond the age of seven, Welsh Government commissioned Miller Research³ to carry out scoping research into the way school nursing services are currently being delivered in different school settings⁴ in each health board across Wales.

Aims and objectives of the research

- 1.4 The overarching aim of the research was to provide an evidence base of current school nursing services in Wales. The specific objectives for the research were to:
 - understand what stakeholders perceive to be the role and function of school nursing services
 - clarify the universal and enhanced services currently being delivered by school nurses
 - identify any inconsistencies in the services being delivered, including examples of best practice

¹ Specifically School Health Nurse Review, which is offered to children of reception class age (4-5 years) and should involve: a formal or informal handover from the health visitor to the school nurse, a questionnaire to be completed by the parent/carer regarding the child's current health and immunisation status and key information about the school nursing service provided to parents/carers. For more details see: [an overview of the Healthy Wales Child Programme](#).

² The HCWP requires the following to be completed "soon after school entry" or "by 5 years": hearing impairment screening, vision impairment screening and Child Measurement Programme.

³ Miller Research had already been appointed in October 2017 to [deliver a formative evaluation of the HCWP](#).

⁴ Including primary, secondary and special schools and Pupil Referral Unit.

- establish how school nursing services are documented and monitored currently
- explore how school nurses work in partnership with other services
- obtain stakeholder views on areas for improvement in school nursing services.

Research methodology

1.5 The methodology for the research was qualitative in nature and included:

- a desk-based review of policy and guidance documentation
- telephone interviews with HCWP Board members⁵ and other relevant stakeholders (x7)
- telephone interviews with lead school nurses in all seven health boards in Wales^{6,7} (x8)
- telephone interviews with school nurses of varying bands⁸ from each of the seven health boards (x26)
- telephone interviews with teaching practitioners in primary, secondary and special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) across Wales (x13)
- telephone interviews with other health professionals working in schools across Wales (x7).

⁵ The HCWP Board is comprised of representation from: Welsh Government, the All Wales Health Visiting and School Health Nursing Forum, Public Health Wales, the Welsh Immunisation Group and the Public Health Wales immunisation and vaccination programme, the Chief Nursing Officer Women's Reproductive Health, NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS) and various health boards.

⁶ In one case, the interview was carried out with nursing manager, in the absence of the lead school nurse.

⁷ Specifically, Swansea Bay UHB, Aneurin Bevan UHB, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB, Cardiff and the Vale UHB, Cwm Taf UHB, Hywel Dda UHB and Powys THB.

⁸ Nursing posts are aligned to the Agenda for Change pay bands. Each of the nine pay bands has a number of pay points.

Key findings of the research

- 1.6 The research has clearly demonstrated the value of school nursing services in Wales. Nonetheless, there is considerably variation in the service being provided to school pupils across Wales, in terms of what is being delivered, who delivers it and the extent to which school nurses and other professionals can provide follow-up support to those who need it. There is also uncertainty about the appropriateness of some aspects of school nursing services in Wales.
- 1.7 The national immunisation programme is a successful element of school nursing services and a vital preventative health measure. It is a time-consuming process however, and immunisations need to be delivered by highly qualified Band 5 and 6 nurses⁹, thus limiting opportunities to deploy skill-mix.
- 1.8 The screening programme is helping to identify children with vision or hearing issues at an early stage; however, whilst in some areas the programme is being delivered using skill-mix, this is not the case everywhere.
- 1.9 In general, skill-mix in school nursing services is highly variable, and clarity is needed at a national level over what activities should and should not be delegated.
- 1.10 The research has raised questions around the clarity of the rationale for the Child Measurement Programme, given a widespread lack of capacity to provide follow-up support to children who are under- or over-weight.
- 1.11 The role of school nurses in safeguarding cases has also been questioned through this research, given both the large amount of resource that it involves as well as the fact that school nurses have limited, or even no first-hand knowledge of the children involved in these cases.
- 1.12 There is significant call for school nursing services to have a greater health promotion focus in areas like healthy eating, sex education and smoking, alcohol and drug use, in order to fulfil a more preventative role.

⁹ This is because immunisations are provided under a Patient Group Directive, which provides a legal framework that allows some registered health professionals to supply and/or administer specified medicines to a pre-defined group of patients, without them having to see a prescriber (such as a doctor or nurse prescriber).

- 1.13 There is not currently a system in place to target areas of deprivation with more intensive school nursing services in the same way that enhanced health visiting services are delivered through Flying Start.
- 1.14 Predictably, there is demand for investing in school nursing services in Wales given the increasing demands on the service from safeguarding, the commitment set out in key Welsh Government policies to invest in prevention, and the growing focus on mental health.

Implications for future school nursing services

- 1.15 Based on the findings from the research, there are some key measures that Welsh Government and other stakeholders could adopt to improve the delivery of school nursing services in Wales. These include:
- Revisiting the rationale for the CMP with appropriate national and health board stakeholders¹⁰ and, if appropriate, agreeing standardised follow-up measures to be taken by school nursing teams in relation to children outside the parameters of healthy weight.
 - Working with social services and other stakeholders to consider the relevance and value of school nurses' involvement in safeguarding cases and, if appropriate, agree an appropriate level of involvement for school nurses in the future.
 - Defining an appropriate minimum programme of health promotion activities to be undertaken by school nursing services in all areas of Wales.
 - Conducting a comprehensive audit of school nursing teams across Wales to clarify the extent of staffing and resource gaps and shortages¹¹.
 - Defining an ideal staffing structure based around appropriate skill mix and the principles of Prudent Healthcare.
 - Introducing a formal system of monitoring and evaluating school nursing services, including relevant and meaningful key performance indicators.

¹⁰ For example, the HCWP Board and school nurse leads in each health board.

¹¹ This could be done internally by all lead school nurses, using a standardized pro forma developed nationally.

- Exploring options for ensuring health boards invest in the necessary staffing and resources to deliver the national immunisation programme, the screening programme and the defined minimum programme of health promotion¹².
- Considering opportunities for a national programme providing more intensive support via school nursing services in areas of high deprivation and/or free school meals.

¹² And, if appropriate, the CMP and necessary safeguarding responsibilities.