

SUBJECT:	Support for Vulnerable Learners
MEETING:	Performance and Overview Committee
DATE:	3rd June 2025
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide an update to members as to the effectiveness of a number of our approaches in supporting the needs of vulnerable learners in our schools and settings including.
- The development of Trauma Informed approaches.
 - The Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) programme embedded in our schools.
 - The Monmouthshire's Specialist Teaching Service (MoSTS).
 - The Education Support Team (EST).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 Following the report to this committee a year ago (14th May 2024) we would welcome members of this committee to note the content of this report, which outlines updates to our approaches to supporting vulnerable learners in schools and settings. Members are invited to comment accordingly.
- 2.2 Members to consider the adequacy of actions undertaken by the Inclusion Service to support schools and meet the needs of some of our vulnerable learners.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The areas of work highlighted in this report support the aims of the Community and Corporate Plan (2022-8) to: develop and achieve a truly inclusive educational system that recognises learners' starting points, strengths and educational needs; and to improve school attendance and reduced levels of exclusion which remove barriers to learning for pupils.
- 3.2 Our approaches support Monmouthshire's aim to develop an inclusive education system which gives all children the best start in life, and to provide high quality support and provision for vulnerable learners.
- 3.3 Monmouthshire's Inclusion Strategy for children and young people establishes our vision and framework to develop an inclusive education system which gives all children the best start in life.

3.4 Trauma Informed Approaches

- 3.4.1 The development of Trauma Informed approaches, which form part of a universal, whole-school, preventative approach, continue to be led by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS). The Welsh Government Wellbeing Grant for 2024-25 and 2025-26 continues to be utilised to develop and offer Trauma Informed approaches and Professional Learning. The Monmouthshire TIS (Trauma Informed Schools) cross-directorate Steering Group and the TIS Working Group continue to meet to develop this work and focus on the

development of in-house resources and professional learning rather than buy this in from external providers (i.e. TIS-UK). This will ensure sustainability into the future to meet longer-term need and allow our work in this area to be guided by Welsh and Monmouthshire contexts.

- 3.4.2 Six Educational Psychologists and all members of the Education Support Team (EST) have achieved TIS diploma status.
- 3.4.3 A Monmouthshire specific Trauma-Informed Professional Learning programme (Trauma Informed Practice Skills and Strategies - TIPSS) has been developed in collaboration with Traumatic Stress Wales (TSW)¹ and Aces Hub Wales². This aligns with the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework³.
- 3.4.4 An MCC TIPSS Training team has been established and tiered TIPSS Professional Learning is now being offered and delivered to schools/settings as well as local authority services and officers, with evaluation measures to track progress and impact. This is a flexible model designed to meet the needs of schools and services, with ongoing support from EPS and EST to embed these approaches strategically, systemically and through case work.
- 3.4.5 Monmouthshire Guidance and Resources/Toolkit to support embedding trauma-informed practices and approaches has been developed collaboratively. This is in draft form and will be finalised and shared with schools and services in September 2025.
- 3.4.6 A Monmouthshire TIS supervision model was developed and is delivered in collaboration with other services which does not rely on buying in this service externally. This offers a reflective space and ensures those who have completed the TIS diploma maintain their practitioner status. This reflective space/supervision is now also being offered to professionals who have completed the TIPSS 'Trauma Skilled' or 'Trauma Enhanced' Professional Learning.
- 3.4.7 Since September four primary schools and one local authority team (Education Welfare Service) have engaged with whole school/ service TIPSS 'Trauma Skilled' Professional Learning.
- 3.4.8 TIPSS all Wales evaluation data for pilot sites was very positive. Monmouthshire specific data is being collated.
- 3.4.9 TIPSS 'Trauma Enhanced' Professional Learning is being delivered in May 2025 to ELSAs and those professionals who have already completed the 'Trauma Skilled' Professional Learning.

3.4.10 Risks and/or Concerns

The risk to the success of embedding these approaches throughout our schools, settings and services include.

- 3.4.10.1 Schools having the time, capacity and leadership commitment to embedding this as a whole school/ setting approach, alongside a commitment to changing culture and ethos.
- 3.4.10.2 A commitment to changing processes and policies, such as Behaviour/Relationship policies and exclusion processes so that they align with a trauma informed/ relational approach.
- 3.4.10.3 An overreliance on grant funding could pose a risk to the continued development of a sustainable model and ensuring this approach is fully embedded across our schools/settings, and the Local Authority.

¹ [Home - All Wales Traumatic Stress NHS](#)

² [Home - ACE Hub Wales](#)

³ [Trauma-Informed Wales](#)

3.4.11 Going Forward

- 3.4.11.1 TIPSS Professional learning will continue to be offered to schools and services.
- 3.4.11.2 The TIPSS 'Trauma Skilled' and 'Trauma Enhanced' programmes will be evaluated and refined/further developed to ensure impact on practice in schools/ settings.
- 3.4.11.3 Monmouthshire Guidance and Resources will be finalised and shared with all schools and services.
- 3.4.11.4 TIS Supervision/Reflective Space will continue to be offered to relevant professionals in Monmouthshire.

3.5 Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA)

- 3.5.1 ELSA is a school based targeted, evidence-based intervention designed to build capacity of school staff to support the emotional needs of their learners from within their own resources.
- 3.5.2 The ELSA programme continues to be led and delivered by Educational Psychologists.
- 3.5.3 Currently Monmouthshire has around 78 active ELSAs across schools, settings and services. In Autumn 2024, a further ELSA Initial Training course was offered and fourteen new ELSAs were trained. In December 2024 (on completion of this Initial ELSA training course) all primary and secondary schools, and the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) had at least one active ELSA.
- 3.5.4 In Autumn 2024, the annual ELSA Professional Learning event was very well attended (44 ELSAs). Traumatic Stress Wales delivered a workshop for all ELSAs, focusing on supporting children through trauma. This supported our TIPSS/trauma informed work.
- 3.5.5 Two EPs completed Pelican Training, a programme which complements ELSA work, designed to support the emotional literacy of pupils with complex needs/ greater communication needs.

3.5.6 Risks and/or concerns

Risks to the continuing success of the ELSA programme in Monmouthshire include:

- 3.5.6.1 Staff turnover and reduction in numbers of TAs in schools.
- 3.5.6.2 Continued commitment of EP time to offer the Initial ELSA Training, Supervision and CPD given risks nationally to EP recruitment and retention.
- 3.5.6.3 The levels of administrative/ logistical time needed to maintain high standards with high numbers of ELSAs, this is currently managed by the EPS.

3.5.7 Going Forward

- 3.5.7.1 High quality Initial ELSA Training will continue to be offered by the EPS, with the aim of maintaining at least one ELSA in each school; high quality supervision and Professional Learning will continue; and evaluation of the impact of the ELSA intervention in Monmouthshire schools will be further developed.
- 3.5.7.2 All ELSAs will be offered TIPSS Enhanced Training.

3.6 Monmouthshire Specialist Teaching Service (MoSTS)

- 3.6.1 MoSTS aims to improve outcomes for pupils with literacy difficulties in primary schools in Monmouthshire. They also provide support into King Henry VIII (secondary phase) under a service level agreement.
- 3.6.2 During academic year 2023-24, MoSTS received 147 individual requests for involvement from primary schools. MoSTS provided blocks of intervention to approximately 110 pupils in primary schools and assessed and provided advice to schools in relation to a

further 47 pupils. It is worth noting that due to pupils/requests panning academic years these number don't align.

- 3.6.3 The service has developed a robust approach to managing a small 'waiting list' and to supporting our schools to meet the needs of these learners, through developing the advisory element of the team. This model continues to be shaped and developed in light of further recent reductions to the team.
- 3.6.4 A MoSTS Professional Learning offer was developed, based on schools' needs and practice-based evidence/evidence-based practice and interventions.
- 3.6.5 The impact of the MoSTS intervention was evaluated using both qualitative and quantitative information. MoSTS Intervention data for 2023-24 indicated that pupils who received MoSTS intervention made positive gains in their reading, spelling and comprehension, as well as in relation to their self-confidence around reading, spelling, handwriting and having strategies to help with their reading and spelling. Parent/carers and school evaluations were very positive, and schools continue to value support and direct intervention from MoSTS for specific pupils, as well as training and advice from MoSTS.
- 3.6.6 Data, measures and evaluations from stakeholders fed into service improvement and has helped shape service delivery, including developing the advice, support and collaboration with school staff and parents/carers.

3.6.7 Risks and/or Concerns

Potential risks for MoSTS include:

- 3.6.7.1 The impact of the further reduction in the service due to the retirement of a 0.6 full time equivalent (FTE) Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) in December 2023 and 0.6 FTE Specialist Teacher in December 2024.
- 3.6.7.2 Challenges relate to managing travel to maximise efficiency of the team, and school's ability to consistently release staff to deliver interventions to pupils.

3.6.8 Going Forward

The service will continue to shape their offer and model to schools, to build capacity to identify and meet the needs of pupils experiencing literacy difficulties, whilst also continuing to offer a high-quality bespoke evidence-based literacy intervention to a smaller proportion of identified pupils.

3.7 Education Support Team (EST)

- 3.7.1 The EST support schools to meet the needs of primary aged pupils presenting with behaviours that challenge, including those with ALN, neurodevelopmental conditions, and those of risk of exclusion. They also support schools to meet the needs of Children Looked After (CLA).
- 3.7.2 EST became fully staffed in September 2023, and during the academic year 2023-24 the team developed strong and supportive relationships with schools, services and local authority officers including strong collaboration with the Vulnerable Learners Lead (VLL).
- 3.7.3 In 2023-24 EST established and evaluated the impact of the EST model and used this to further develop this new service.
- 3.7.4 The initial professional learning for the EST focused on developing skills aligned with key Inclusion priorities for Monmouthshire. This resulted in the team supporting; the Monmouthshire Autism in Schools and Settings programme through the delivery of Making Sense of Autism training; the Trauma Informed (TIPSS) PL offer including

embedding this practice in schools; Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) approaches; the Form R processes with the Vulnerable Learner Lead through the completion of Team Teach Training; and taking responsibility for delivering 'CLA Friendly Schools' training from September 2024 and embedding these approaches through their casework.

3.7.5 The EST developed clear and accessible information for parent/carers.

3.7.6 Across 2023-24 EST supported 70 pupils in primary schools across Monmouthshire. Of the 70 pupils supported, 68 of these pupils remained successfully in their school placements; EST supported the identification and transition of one pupil to a special school placement; and they supported a managed move to another Monmouthshire primary. Of their caseload, 76% of the pupils who were on a reduced hours Pastoral Support Plan (PSP) increased hours or started attending full time.

3.7.7 Feedback and data gathered about the initial phase and academic year 2023-24, from school staff, pupils and parent/carers was extremely positive, and demonstrates the impact of this team in supporting primary schools to meet the needs of primary aged children presenting with behaviours that challenge, including those with ALN, neurodevelopmental conditions, and those at risk of exclusion. Relationships between EST and school staff are strong and positive.

3.7.8 Risks and/or concerns

The potential risks include the ability to continue to meet the high demand for support from schools, often in a responsive manner, whilst maintaining a high-quality service, with a preventative and capacity building focus, all of which requires staff with relevant skills and experience.

3.7.9 Going Forward

EST will continue to support schools and build their capacity to meet the needs of primary aged learners presenting with behaviours that challenge. They will continue to support and embed key Monmouthshire approaches (including Autism in Schools and Settings programme, TIPSS, Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), supporting Children who are Looked After (CLA) in collaboration with other key services. They will provide advice to schools to develop high quality Emotionally Based School Avoidance/ Anxiety (EBSA) support plans.

4. REASONS:

4.1 To provide the committee with an update on progress being made with regards to delivering the commitments set out in the Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28, alongside compliance with ALN legislation and the Principles of the Code.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Trauma Informed Practice. Welsh Government Wellbeing Grant funding has been utilised to develop this work which is led by the EPS. The aim is to develop a sustainable in-house model that could continue in light of future changes/ reductions to grants available.

5.2 ELSA. Schools and setting currently pay towards Initial ELSA training and ongoing supervision and CPD, which allows the continued commitment and use of EPs to deliver the programme.

5.3 MoSTS and EST. Both MoSTS and EST have team budgets, the teams are supported closely by the Principal Educational Psychologist, with oversight of the Head of Service

for Inclusion. The MoSTS budget reduced recently when a further member of staff retired.

6. CONSULTEES:

- Inclusion Team on 7th May 2025.
- Learning, Skills and Economy DMT on 12th May 2025.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Performance and Overview Scrutiny Paper – 14th May 2024
- [EST Annual Report 2023-24.pdf](#)
- [MoSTS Annual Report 2023-24.pdf](#)
- [EPS Annual Report 2023-24.pdf](#)

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