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Welsh Network of Health and  
Well-being Promoting Schools

# Proposed National Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools in Wales



Engagement Document Version 1  
**Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg**  
This document is available in Welsh

# Contents

<b>Background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Proposed National Standards</b>	<b>5</b>
Why is the change from a National Quality Award to a set of National Standards needed?	5
How were the proposed Standards developed?	7
How are the proposed Standards organised?	7
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>8</b>
Digital support for schools to self-evaluate progress in meeting the proposed Standards	8
Support to schools to help identify actions relating to specific areas of need or health and well-being priorities	8
<b>Accreditation and recognition of excellent practice in schools</b>	<b>9</b>
Level One: Starting out	9
Level Two: Embedding	9
Level Three: Achieved Standards and Continuously Improving	9
<b>Proposed National Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools in Wales</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Engagement questions</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>A: Leadership, commitment and governance</b>	<b>11</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	11
Proposed Standards	11
<b>B: Understanding need and evaluating action</b>	<b>13</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	13
Proposed Standards	13
<b>C: Involvement, engagement and communication</b>	<b>15</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	15
Proposed Standards	16
<b>D: Workforce</b>	<b>17</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	17
Proposed Standards	17
<b>E: School culture and environment</b>	<b>18</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	18
Proposed Standards	18
<b>F: Curriculum</b>	<b>20</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	20
Proposed Standards	20
<b>G: Help and support services</b>	<b>22</b>
Why are we proposing this as a core component?	22
Proposed Standards	22
<b>References</b>	<b>24</b>

**“No education system is effective unless it promotes the health and well-being of its students, staff, and community”**

WHO, UNESCO.

## Background

Health, well-being, and educational outcomes are intertwined, and by looking after one, we make a positive impact on another. Schools play a vital role in supporting the lifelong health and well-being of learners, families, staff, and the wider community.

A health and well-being promoting school is defined as a school that makes a constant and consistent effort to ensure a safe and healthy setting for teaching, learning, and working. It uses its organisational potential to foster the physical, social-emotional, and psychological conditions for health and well-being and positive educational outcomes. In doing so, a health and well-being promoting school embodies a whole-school approach to promoting health and attainment<sup>1</sup>.

There is a supportive evidence base for a health and well-being promoting schools approach. Whilst single interventions may have short term positive impacts, health promoting school interventions can have a long-term positive effect on a range of health and well-being outcomes and can support education achievement alongside well-being.



# The Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools

The Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools (WNHWPS, previously known as the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes) has been supporting schools to embed a whole-school approach to health and well-being since the late 1990s.

Almost all schools in Wales have participated in, and continue to be a part of, the programme. Local teams work directly with schools, using national tools, standards, and guidance.

The National Quality Award (NQA) was introduced in Wales in 2009 by the Welsh Government, with it being managed

and delivered by Public Health Wales. It was the highest recognition a school could achieve through the WNHWPS, with 15% of schools in Wales receiving the award. The NQA recognised schools that demonstrated excellence in health and well-being, meeting the highest standards across various health-related themes and whole-school practices.



# Proposed National Standards

## Why is the change from a National Quality Award to a set of National Standards needed?

In 2021, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) published [Global Standards and Indicators](#)<sup>1</sup> as part of their ongoing ambition of “making every school a health promoting school.” The Curriculum for Wales and the [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#)<sup>2</sup>, referred to throughout as ‘the Statutory Framework’, has increased the focus on whole-school approaches to health and well-being. This has come at a time when schools face significant challenge, including recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the rising cost of living and implementation of education reform. These pressures have put significant strain on schools, driven by factors such as the growing needs of learners and their families, as well as the demands on the workforce to effectively implement reforms. This highlights the crucial role of health and well-being in building resilience and supporting academic success.

Since 2009, the Welsh Government [Indicators for the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes National Quality Award](#)<sup>3</sup> (NQA criteria) has provided schools with best practice criteria for embedding a whole-school approach across seven topic areas. Given the changing context, schools have expressed that, while they value the framework provided by the NQA, a review is needed to better align it with the curriculum and the Statutory Framework.<sup>2</sup> This review should also ensure that the national framework helps every school in Wales sustainably embed and develop their whole-school approach in a way that best supports their learners. In response, Public Health Wales has developed a proposed set of **National Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools in Wales** (referred to throughout as ‘Standards’) as an alternative to the NQA criteria.

## How are the Standards different to the NQA indicators?

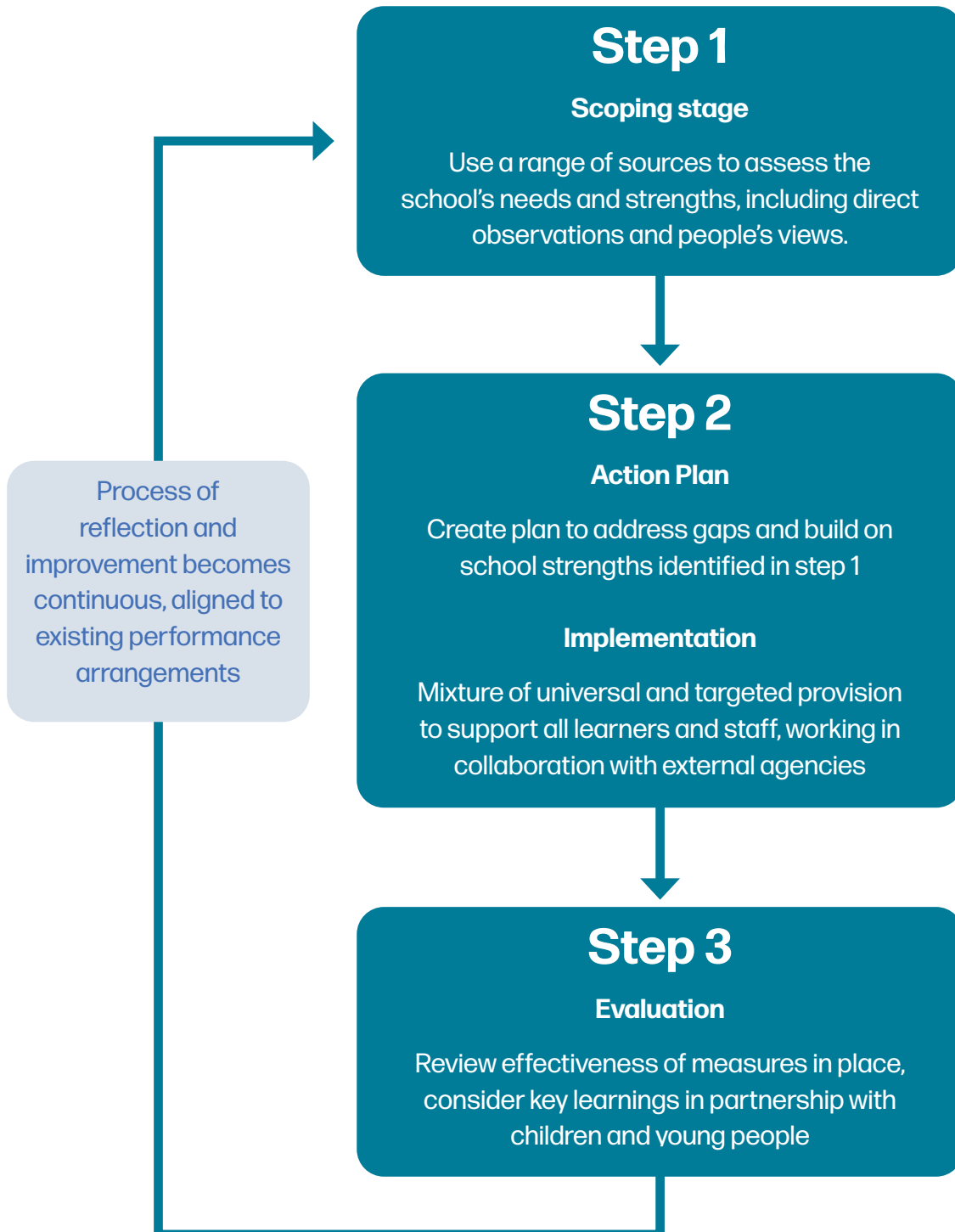
In line with the Global Standards and Indicators, the Standards focus on the core principles of a whole school approach to health and well-being (e.g. leadership and workforce) rather than pre-defined health topics (e.g. tobacco and food & fitness). The Standards set out a baseline for schools that, over time, we can reasonably expect all to achieve. The Standards enable schools to identify and take action in response to their needs and priorities of the school community rather than specific topics.

Here is a summary of the key proposed changes:

- **Reducing** the number of criteria from 73 indicators to 22 standards.
- Shifting from a goal of excellence to a set of **Standards** that all schools, with support, can reasonably achieve. This reflects the policy commitment to health and well-being as a core purpose of our education system in Wales.
- Shifting from a topic focus to the **core principles** of a whole-school approach that support a range of health and well-being outcomes.
- Shifting from nationally described areas of practice to supporting schools to identify **their priorities**, informed by regional and local priorities.
- Supporting schools’ wider practice of **self-evaluation and improvement planning** using the model described in the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> (see Fig. 1.)
- **Aligning** the Standards and the [School Health Research Network \(SHRN\) School Environment Questionnaire](#)<sup>4</sup>.
- **Reducing the evidence burden** on schools so that energy focuses on embedding and continuously improving their approach.

The proposed Standards have been designed to make it easier for schools to focus on the **core principles** of a whole-school approach that support a range of health and well-being outcomes. They also align directly with the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> and embody its core values of **belonging, efficacy, and voice**.

**Figure 1.** Flow diagram illustrating the process for embedding a whole-school approach as described in the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup>.





## How were the proposed Standards developed?

The proposed Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools in Wales were developed from the international evidence base, the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> and the Global Standards and Indicators for Health-Promoting Schools<sup>3</sup>. The identified core components were then mapped to key education and health policies and frameworks in Wales (for example, [Community Focused Schools](#)<sup>5</sup>, [the School Improvement Framework](#)<sup>6</sup>, the [Estyn Inspection Framework](#)<sup>7</sup> (2024 revision), [The Right Way- A Children's Human Rights Approach](#)<sup>8</sup>, [the Trauma- Informed Wales Framework](#)<sup>9</sup> and the [Nest Framework](#)<sup>\*10</sup>). This approach was taken to ensure consistency of language and enable schools to use the proposed Standards to help them meet a range of shared health and education policy goals.

Significant engagement with schools, children and young people, the health and well-being promoting schools' workforce, and key health and education stakeholders has played a crucial role in refining the proposed Standards. Development was overseen by the Health Promoting Schools Programme Board, a national multi-agency board with representation from schools, health, education, academia, and Welsh Government with Ministerial oversight.

## How are the proposed Standards organised?

There are 22 proposed Standards arranged across seven core component areas:

- Leadership, commitment and governance
- Understanding need and evaluating action
- Involvement, engagement and communication
- Workforce
- School culture and environment
- Curriculum
- Help and support services

Each proposed Standard is accompanied by a series of 'what this means' statements, which provide a detailed description of the behaviours and practices necessary to fully embed the Standard. Whilst the descriptions of the proposed Standards themselves are static, we anticipate that the statements about '*what this means*' may change over time as systems and practices evolve.

*\*The [NEST Framework](#) sets out core principles for delivering and improving mental health and well-being services for babies, children, young people and their families. When schools implement the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing, they are doing their part to deliver NEST. Because of this, most staff will not need to know about the NEST framework in addition to the whole-school approach and the proposed Standards. However, we recommend that those with a responsibility for liaising with external agencies (such as CAMHS, charities working with the school, and school nurses) have an understanding of the NEST framework and the language used to help them in their conversations and ensure consistent messages; also that practices are carried out in line with the NEST principles.*

## Next steps

### Digital support for schools to self-evaluate progress in meeting the proposed Standards

Following engagement with the school sector, Public Health Wales intends to develop a digital tool to accompany the proposed Standards. This tool will build on the approach used and learning from the [Public Health Wales WSAEMWB Self Evaluation Tool<sup>11</sup>](#). The intention is that the digital tool will:

- support schools to self-evaluate their progress against the proposed Standards, identifying areas of excellent practice and opportunities for development to inform their planning.
- enable schools to action plan against their areas for development and priority needs.
- identify links between the proposed Standards and key policy documents to maximise their use in progressing against a range of national priorities and ambitions.
- reduce the existing burden of paperwork, build in flexibility and support partnerships between schools and local support for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools.
- enable schools to access a wider repository of information, guidance and quality assurance resources based on school needs and priorities.

### Support to schools to help identify actions relating to specific areas of need or health and well-being priorities

The proposed Standards will be accompanied by a series of tools that will enable schools to undertake 'deep dives' in relation to a priority need or theme they have identified, for example, physical activity or food and nutrition. Self-evaluations focused on specific health and well-being themes will help the whole school community identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This process will support the development of targeted improvement actions and goals. Additionally, these tools can be used to track progress over time. The initial thematic deep-dive tools will focus on areas such as Physical Activity, Violence Prevention, and Emotional and Mental Well-being (drawing from the current Whole-School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-Being (WSAEMWB) self-evaluation tool). Over time, further thematic resources will be developed

Self-evaluations relating to specific health and well-being themes will enable the whole school community to identify what they are doing well and where they have potential to improve. This will help them to develop their improvement actions and goals. These tools can also be used to self-evaluate progress over time. Initial thematic deep dive tools will focus on areas such as Physical Activity, Violence Prevention and Emotional and Mental Well-being (based on the current [Whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being \(WSAEMWB\) self-evaluation tool<sup>11</sup>](#)), with further thematic resources developed over time.



# Accreditation and recognition of excellent practice in schools

Schools have told us that accreditation and recognition of good practice are important as it enables them to:

- evidence their commitment to health and well-being to their school community.
- engage with others around their whole-school approach to health and well-being.
- seek assurance and external review of their approach.
- develop a shared understanding of what 'good' looks like.
- identify and share good practice with others.
- celebrate progress and recognise the contribution of the whole school community.
- provide evidence of approach and impact to the accountability environment.

Assessments against the National Quality Award criteria ended on 31st March 2024. Public Health Wales proposes to replace the National Quality Award with a national Health and Well-being Promoting Schools accreditation. All schools working towards the proposed Standards would be able to seek accreditation at three levels.

## Level One: Starting out

Accreditation achieved by schools evidencing:

- Some engagement with the Health and Well-being Promoting Schools programme.
- Commitment to action and started self-evaluation against the Standards.

## Level Two: Embedding

Accreditation achieved by schools evidencing:

- Ongoing engagement with the Health and Well-being Promoting Schools programme.
- Year-on-year meaningful progress to fully meeting the Standards.
- Plans to progress towards meeting the Standards in full.

Level Two accreditation will be reviewed on an annual basis with schools aiming to progress to Level Three.

## Level Three: Achieved Standards and Continuously Improving

Accreditation achieved by schools evidencing:

- Ongoing engagement with the Health and Well-being Promoting Schools programme.
- Meeting the Standards in full.
- Ongoing plans for improvement and reflection. This may be core component based (for example, further improving their approach to involvement) or topic based (for example, broadening their approach in relation to specific outcomes).

We propose that Level Three 'Achieved Standards and Continuously Improving' accreditation is awarded on a biennial basis and that all schools who currently hold the National Quality Award are automatically accredited at this level for a period of two years following their last review. Similarly, schools that have completed the WSAEMWB self-evaluation tool and subsequent action plans will be well on their way to achieving Level Three of the proposed Standards for health promoting schools.

The provision of evidence to support accreditation should not be over-burdensome to schools. A primary source of evidence will be the findings and discussions generated through the self-evaluation process, including supportive conversations with their local Health and Well-being Promoting Schools team.

In addition to accreditation against the proposed Standards, Public Health Wales proposes to work with key partners across health and education to collectively recognise examples of excellent practice in relation to a core component (for example, participation and engagement) or a topic (for example, emotional and mental well-being), via annual 'Health and Well-being Promoting Schools Awards'. All schools working towards the Standards would be eligible for this recognition in relation to specific pieces of work.



# Proposed National Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools in Wales

The proposed Standards are detailed on the following pages and are organised around the following core components:

- A. Leadership, Governance and Commitment
- B. Understanding Need and Evaluating Action
- C. Involvement, Engagement and Communication
- D. Workforce
- E. School Culture and Environment
- F. Curriculum
- G. Help and Support Services

These have been developed following an extensive period of evidence reviewing, consultation, engagement and refinement. We are now in the final phase of engagement which aims to familiarise key partners (including schools) with the content of the Standards as well as enable further refinement.

## Engagement questions

We ask that you consider the following questions whilst reviewing the proposed Standards and welcome your responses to these questions via the link below.

1. Does the move to a set of Standards involving self-evaluation and a continuous improvement approach make sense to you?
2. In your view, do the proposed Standards collectively describe the core components of a Health and Well-being Promoting School?
3. Is there anything missing from the proposed Standards?
4. Were there any of the Standards that were not clear? If so, which ones?
5. Do the 'what this means' statements help you to understand each standard fully?
6. What do schools need to help them with undertaking their self-evaluation, gathering evidence and addressing the areas of action and implementation?
7. As they are currently set out, do the Standards support schools with their core expectations/requirements (e.g. in relation to curriculum delivery)?
8. In your view, will schools value the opportunity to achieve accreditation against the Standards for Health and Well-being Promoting Schools?
9. We have asked several specific questions. If you have any related issues that we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

Please use the response form here [Proposed National Standards for Health and Well-being Schools in Wales](#) to respond to the above questions or make contact directly with your views by 11th April 2025 to [healthy.schools@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:healthy.schools@wales.nhs.uk).

For information on how Public Health Wales processes your data, the Privacy Notice is available on our website: [Privacy Notice - Public Health Wales](#).

# A: Leadership, commitment and governance

## Why are we proposing this as a core component?

The Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> describes how effective leadership is crucial to fostering health and well-being in schools. Effective leaders embed health and well-being as a core value, ensuring its visibility throughout the school and its importance understood by the entire school community<sup>12</sup>.

It is important to establish a named health and well-being leadership role within the senior leadership team because of the breadth of action required. Supported by others this role can:

- coordinate, oversee, and review action within the school.
- foster internal and external engagement<sup>13</sup>.
- persistently champion a well-being ethos.

Establishing a plan for health and well-being action with clear and measurable objectives:

- supports sustainable change.
- demonstrates your school is prioritising health and well-being.
- enables explicit alignment with your school's overarching goals and vision<sup>14</sup>.

This should form part of your approach to self-evaluation and improvement planning in line with the [Wales Framework for Evaluation, improvement and Accountability](#)<sup>6</sup> and the three-step cyclical approach (scoping, planning, implementing and evaluating, Figure 1) set out in the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> and embedded within these standards. Strong partnerships with other agencies will support schools to develop comprehensive plans for health and well-being based on a shared understanding of needs and priorities so that partners are working together as part of a **whole system approach** to health and well-being.

Finally, taking a whole-school approach means involving the entire school in your planning and delivery (see Involvement, Engagement and Communication) and considering a multitude of factors that work together to promote health and well-being across your setting. This approach is more effective at achieving sustained change for learners than scattered, isolated or time-limited interventions<sup>7</sup>. In practice it means that learning in the classroom is consistently complemented by the School's Culture and Environment, reflected in school policies and reinforced by communication and action across the whole-school community.

## Proposed Standards

**LCG1: Our school can demonstrate effective leadership, commitment and governance of a whole-school approach to health and well-being.**

What this means:

- Health and well-being is led by a resourced senior member of staff who is supported as appropriate by others.
- Health and well-being is high on the school's agenda and priorities are embedded within the school development plan.
- Health and well-being activity and improvement plans are appropriately resourced.
- Senior leadership models values, relationships and behaviours consistent with an inclusive ethos and the school's strategic commitment to health, well-being and sustainability.
- Governance processes are in place to oversee and review activity which involves school leadership and governors.

**LCG2: Our school can demonstrate effective planning and coordination of activity to embed a whole-school approach to health and well-being.**

What this means:

- In taking health and well-being action, the school can evidence a whole-school approach.
- Action plans include measurable indicators of progress which are kept under review and barriers to achieving them are identified and addressed.
- The school can evidence ongoing processes for self-evaluation, improvement planning and delivery of health and well-being action against identified priorities.

**LCG3: Our school can demonstrate how they work with partners to plan and embed a whole-school approach and are active partners within a wider system approach to health and well-being.**

What this means:

- The school has effective networks and relationships with the wider system, so it is aware of national and local health and well-being priorities.
- The school works actively with partners by sharing appropriate information to ensure learner health and well-being need is met.
- The school appropriately engages with national programmes designed to promote the health and well-being of learners and the school community.
- The role of other agencies in supporting delivery of health and well-being action is carefully considered, planned and overseen by the school.

**LCG4: Our school develops and embeds a range of appropriate policies and practices to support a whole-school approach to health and well-being.**

What this means:

- School policies and approaches align with best practice and relevant local/ national guidance and standards.
- Health and well-being action is consistent with the school's policy, values and ethos.
- Policies apply to the whole-school community; school organised activities (for example trips) and school facilities at all times.
- The school draws on evidence-based guidance and advice from Public Health Wales, the Director of Public Health and other expert bodies as appropriate.



# B: Understanding need and evaluating action

## Why are we proposing this as a core component?

As outlined in the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup>, learners' health and well-being needs including their emotional and mental well-being needs should be regularly reviewed as part of your self-evaluation and improvement planning cycle. Understanding the health and well-being needs of your learners and community enables you to take action to address those needs. Evaluating action enables you to learn and adapt; maximising effective approaches and responding to challenges or unintended consequences that arise during your journey.

Aligned with Education in Wales' commitment to equity<sup>15</sup>, whole-school approaches aim to reduce inequalities due to factors such as poverty, disability, ethnicity or gender identity. Understanding variation between groups within your school community, particularly for those who are at greater risk of poor outcomes, will help you to prioritise action. You can assess these needs in several ways:

- **Analysing data:** Data can identify patterns and trends which help you to understand the specific health and well-being needs of your community.
- **Listening to the whole-school community:** Understand the different needs, experiences and perspectives of your school community. Pay specific attention to including those who face barriers to engagement.
- **Health and education partners:** Working with partners helps you to understand national, local and regional priorities and identify emerging needs. This requires good communication and working relationships through, for example involvement in local strategic forums and opportunities for two-way communication.
- **Reviewing regularly:** Need is not static. Estyn<sup>16</sup> describes how schools that evidence good practice regularly review their school community's needs as part of their ongoing improvement planning cycle (or more frequently if required in response to specific events such as disruption to face-to-face education).

While health and well-being promoting schools draw on evidence and best practice to plan and deliver action, every school is unique; what 'works' in one school may have a different impact in another or affect different groups in different ways. Therefore, assessing the impact of action on your specific school and community is crucial. Through local evaluation and active participation in research schools can:

- Identify what is working well and what needs to be improved.
- Examine the impact actions are having on the needs identified alongside potentially unanticipated outcomes.
- Identify how programmes impact different groups within the school to help remove barriers and ensure programmes are reaching those with greatest need.
- Evidence improvement and account for use of resources.
- Contribute to wider knowledge and evidence about health and well-being in schools.

## Proposed Standards

**UNEA1: Our school uses a range of information and data sources to understand and plan for the health and well-being needs of the school community.**

What this means:

- The school uses multiple sources of data and information to understand needs, identify priorities and inform planning regarding health and well-being.
- The process of identifying, understanding and prioritising need involves the whole-school community and considers national and local health and well-being priorities.
- Priorities are regularly reviewed and trends in health and well-being are monitored to identify emerging needs early.

**UNEA2: Our school can identify and describe the needs of specific groups of learners who may be at greater risk of poor health and well-being outcomes.**

What this means:

- The school understands which learners are at risk of poorer health and well-being outcomes and prioritises action to meet their needs. This includes considering times of transition (for example, starting primary and secondary school and new starters).
- The school actively monitors a range of health and well-being outcomes against key indicators (for example, free school meals, ethnicity and attendance) to understand how they are meeting the needs of learners at risk of poorer health and well-being outcomes.
- The school understands where members of the school community may experience barriers to inclusion due to key characteristics.

**UNEA3: Our school uses robust monitoring and evaluation to understand impact and progress against identified priorities, adapting our approach where necessary.**

What this means:

- The school regularly reviews its actions to ensure they are meeting the needs and objectives identified in their planning.
- There is an ongoing process of reviewing action and need to reflect and embed learning and address areas for improvement.
- The school understands how it can evidence improvement and impact on health and well-being using appropriate evaluative approaches.
- The school works with others to share learning and best practice, supports the creation of research active practitioners within the school.



# C: Involvement, engagement and communication

## Why are we proposing this as a core component?

Involvement, engagement, and positive communication are crucial for a whole-school approach because they contribute to:

- **Improved learner outcomes.** Including education achievement, health and well-being, social-emotional learning, attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities<sup>17,18</sup>. For example having permission to collaborate and an equal voice in doing so enhances learners' self-worth, self-belief and self-esteem.
- **A more positive and supportive school culture.** When individuals feel valued, respected and have a voice they are more likely to feel safe and supported and be supportive of each other, contributing to a sense of belonging<sup>19</sup>.
- **Increased likelihood of developing health-promoting knowledge and skills.** Learner involvement in health promotion activities enhances opportunities to learn and develop health-promoting skills<sup>20</sup>.
- **Removing barriers.** When everyone is involved, they are more likely to identify barriers to health and well-being and periods where additional support is needed (for example during transition), as well as opportunities to address these collaboratively.
- **Effective decision-making.** When everyone has a voice, decisions are more likely to be based on the best interests of the entire school community.
- **Sustainability of health and well-being initiatives.** School community involvement in planning, implementation, and evaluation fosters support and contributes to long-term success<sup>12, 21</sup>.
- **The principles of the United Nations Convention on the rights of child (UNCRC).** Integrating children's rights into every aspect of decision-making, policy and practice.

Engagement and involvement opportunities should be integral and ongoing, fostered through continuous dialogue with the entire school community, rather than limited to isolated events. This inclusive and empowering approach

should prioritise the participation of disadvantaged or marginalised individuals, ensuring that everyone has a fair opportunity to engage and contribute to school life. Unfair access to engagement opportunities can negatively impact individuals' sense of **belonging, efficacy, and voice** (which are core values of the Statutory Framework)<sup>2</sup>, contributing to poor emotional and mental well-being and a widening of health inequalities.

Opportunities to engage in authentic decision making is a critical element of the Curriculum for Wales Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, participation and engagement with families and the wider community is central to Community Focused Schools in Wales<sup>5</sup>. This alignment highlights the complementary nature of the proposed Standards and Community Focused Schools and we recommend reviewing this component alongside their series of [engagement guidance](#).

Positive relationships built on effective two-way communication within the whole-school community contribute to<sup>23</sup>:

- **Building trust and respect.** This fosters a positive social environment where everyone feels safe and valued.
- **Creating a sense of belonging.** This enhances well-being and engagement.

When the school community (learners, staff and parents/ carers) understands the benefits (personal, social, academic and, from a staff perspective, professional learning needs) of health and well-being activity they are more likely to be supportive and participate. This understanding can help overcome any resistance to change or new initiatives<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, communicating the benefits of health and well-being helps create and embed a culture where health and well-being is valued by everyone. Communication extends beyond newsletters and websites; the day-to-day life of the school, particularly the actions of leaders, should actively model the values and behaviours set out in the school plans and policies (See Leadership, commitment and governance).

## Proposed Standards

**IEC1: Our school can demonstrate that the whole-school community is engaged and involved in promoting health and well-being.**

What this means:

- The school can evidence how it enables and ensures that learners, staff, governors, parents/ carers and partners are actively engaged in identifying and prioritising health and well-being action.
- Formal and ongoing mechanisms exist to facilitate engagement in decision making for the whole-school community.
- The school provides active and ongoing feedback to the whole-school community on how their contribution has been used.
- The school adopts a rights-based approach to learner engagement consistent with the Rights of the Child.
- The school ensures those who are adversely affected by poverty or disadvantage are supported to participate and engage, including in decision making.
- Opportunities to collaborate with the local community are identified and used to develop and support the whole-school approach.

**IEC2: Formal and informal communications within and from our school evidence our commitment to promoting good health and well-being.**

What this means:

- The school communicates their health and well-being priorities, vision, plans and policies in a way that is accessible to all.
- The school communicates the multiple benefits (academic, social, personal) of activities which promote health and well-being and values participation in these equally with other aspects of school life.
- The school ensures that school communications promote their values of belonging, efficacy and voice.
- The school promotes positive communications between members of the school community and has systems in place to respond where issues are identified in the physical and virtual environment.
- Staff model healthy behaviours and relationships in their interactions within the school and with the school community.



# D: Workforce

## Why are we proposing this as a core component?

Workforce well-being is a core component a whole-school approach. All staff working in schools are a critical part of the school community and their well-being has a direct impact on the well-being of learners. When staff are well supported and have high levels of well-being, they are better able to create a positive and supportive learning environment.<sup>25</sup> In turn, this supports positive health and education outcomes for learners<sup>26</sup>.

The Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> highlights that highly trained, highly motivated, trauma-informed school staff, who are aware of how their relationship with learners impacts their development, are central to promoting emotional and mental well-being.

Emotionally and mentally healthy school staff are better able to develop strong and positive staff-learner relationships. Evidence shows that cultivating a culture that equally values staff well-being is essential for retaining and motivating your workforce<sup>27</sup>. This is important not simply in terms of supporting academic attainment, but in fostering an ethos where nurturing learners and building their cooperation, commitment, resilience and confidence is everybody's business.

Professional learning is important to a whole-school approach to health and well-being as it allows staff to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to create a positive and supportive learning environment. Professional learning contributes to staff:

- Developing a shared understanding of and engagement with the school's vision and values for health and well-being.
- Identifying and implementing evidence-based practices to promote learner health and well-being.
- Delivering a holistic health and well-being curriculum, including social and emotional learning.
- Creating a culture of collaboration and support among staff and learners
- Developing an awareness and understanding of how adversity, trauma and distress can occur to anyone, its potential impact and supportive factors individuals may need in place to prevent and mitigate the long-term impact on physical and mental health and well-being<sup>28</sup>.
- Working effectively with parents/carers and services to promote health and well-being, including identifying and responding to specific need.

## Proposed Standards

**W1: Our school can demonstrate how workforce health and well-being is actively promoted and protected.**

What this means:

- Staff have appropriate workloads and support for their roles which takes account their different responsibilities and impact of their role.
- The school seeks to understand the health and well-being needs of their staff and puts measures in place to positively address these.
- The school regularly engages with individual staff about their health and well-being needs and signposts to evidence-based supportive services.
- The school understands the benefits of fair work and works to implements these principles for all staff.
- The school promotes a positive working culture where staff feel safe to express feelings, make mistakes and reflect on their own and others' thoughts, emotions and behaviour.

**W2: Our school supports staff through appropriate professional learning to develop and maintain the knowledge, skills and understanding to fulfil their health and well-being role.**

What this means:

- Opportunities for professional learning and development relating to health and well-being have equal priority with other areas.
- Staff understand trauma, its potential impact and the principles of trauma informed relationships and environments.
- Professional learning links to identified need, self-evaluation findings and improvement priorities within the school.
- Staff are supported to develop awareness and skills to identify, critically understand and challenge harmful attitudes, social norms and beliefs that underpin bullying, discrimination, hate crime and gender-based violence.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is expert enough to deliver the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience.

# E: School culture and environment

## Why are we proposing this as a core component?

School culture and environment includes:

- Facilities; physical and virtual.
- Culture, climate and relationships.
- Policies and practices in place.

Collectively, these factors can significantly influence the health and well-being of your learners and school community<sup>20</sup>. A key ambition of the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> is to support good emotional and mental well-being by promoting a positive school culture and environment, based on the core values of **belonging**, **efficacy** and having a **voice**, where positive relationships are formed with others.

A positive school environment promotes academic achievement physical, social-emotional, and good mental health. It fosters positive relationships, healthy social norms and provides learners with opportunities to apply curriculum learning about health and well-being learning by, for example, enabling:

- Nutritious food choices.
- Health promoting activities such as opportunities to participate in clubs and self-directed play.
- Positive social interactions.

Conversely, a negative environment can harm health and well-being and contradict curriculum-based efforts to promote healthy behaviours.

The [Curriculum for Wales](#)<sup>29</sup> and the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> emphasise the importance of children and young people developing positive relationships based on trust and mutual respect. There is strong evidence<sup>30,31</sup> that the ability to build and sustain strong positive relationships with others plays a significant role in promoting mental well-being throughout the life-course. As well as fostering positive learner-staff relationships, schools have a crucial role in prioritising and modelling good-quality relationships. This includes the relationships staff develop with one another, relationships established with parents and carers and the school's relationship with the wider community.

Building school connectivity is equally important for both individual and collective health and well-being. Evidence suggests that promoting a sense of **belonging** can be a valuable strategy for motivation, attendance and academic

achievement as well as a range of health and well-being outcomes including mental health and counter-culture behaviours such as vaping, smoking, and alcohol use<sup>18</sup>. The foundations for building a sense of belonging lie in strong school communities built on shared values, trust, inclusivity and voice. This should be supported by environments where individuals feel safe and supported (see also involvement, engagement and communication). Conversely, experiences of discrimination and inequality can harm a sense of belonging, impacting both individuals and communities. By fostering inclusivity, all can experience school as a safe and empowering environment that builds upon learners' unique experiences, encourages learners to reflect and express their views and feelings, and enables learners to develop positive identities, attitudes and values.

## Proposed Standards

**SCE1: Our school can demonstrate how it recognises the importance of and fosters positive relationships amongst the whole-school community.**

What this means:

- The school cultivates a respectful anti-bullying social culture that is proactive in creating opportunities to celebrate diversity, challenge stereotypes and develop positive identities.
- The school has strategies and policies in place to foster positive relationships based on mutual trust and respect between all members of the community, including those who face barriers to engagement.
- The school cultivates a positive culture where learners feel safe to speak their mind, make mistakes and reflect on their own and others' thoughts, emotions and behaviour.
- The school takes effective action to prevent and manage incidents of discrimination/bullying/harassment/violence (in person and online).
- The school maximises opportunities to foster a sense of belonging within the school.
- The school can evidence how they work to identify those members of the school community who are isolated and seek to support their inclusion.

**SCE2: Our school provides a range of safe and welcoming spaces that protect and promote health and well-being.**

What this means:

- The school provides safe and secure indoor, outdoor and virtual spaces, including compliance with all relevant legislation, standards and regulation which protects and promotes health and well-being.
- The school provides a pleasant, welcoming and social environment that values those within the school and wider community.
- The school ensures facilities and activities do not present a barrier to participation for any member of the school community.
- School facilities are maximised to meet the health and well-being needs of the school community.

**SCE3: Our school environment provides a range of opportunities to develop healthy personal behaviours.**

What this means:

- The school provides purposeful social, psychological and physical directed and self-directed activities that enable learners to develop lifelong healthy behaviours.
- Activities provide for the different needs, experiences and interests of members of the school community.
- Food provision within the school complies with legislation and is consistent with the school's values and priorities and enables learners to develop lifelong healthy behaviours.

**SCE4: Our school uses the extended whole-school day to create opportunities to model and develop healthy practices.**

What this means:

- Breaks and lunchtime provide adequate time and space for all learners and staff to select, eat and enjoy meals without rushing.
- There is a consistent routine with breaks and lunchtime providing adequate time and space for all learners and staff to socialise and be physically active.
- (Secondary) Measures are in place to encourage learners to stay on site and effectively use facilities during breaks and lunch.
- The school encourages, facilitates and monitors active and safe travel to and from school.



## F: Curriculum

### Why are we proposing this as a core component?

The Curriculum for Wales outlines how successful design, learning and teaching in the health and well-being Area of Learning and Experience should be underpinned by a whole-school approach and supported by the school's policies and practices. Without this, the Curriculum states that 'learning in this area will be compromised'. Likewise, the Statutory Framework<sup>2</sup> sets out the expectation that schools will integrate their whole-school approach and curriculum, maximising opportunities to present and recognise links between the two. Estyn also describe the importance of ample opportunities for reinforcing and practicing learning, including through an aligned curriculum and whole-school approach<sup>9</sup>. For physical health this may be demonstrated through your healthy food offerings and opportunities for physical activity, for emotional and mental well-being this would include fostering a mentally healthy environment (see School Environment and Culture) and in your supportive response to need and help-seeking (see Help and Support Services).

Your curriculum and whole-school approach should collectively promote an understanding of the interconnectivity between physical, emotional, mental and social health. For instance, initiatives supporting physical well-being through health-promoting activities like exercise, proper sleep, and a balanced diet also contribute to emotional and mental well-being. And strong social connections, such as healthy relationships, positively impact both physical and mental health by providing emotional support, fostering positive coping mechanisms, and creating opportunities for shared health-promoting activities.

Further opportunities to develop these themes across the curriculum could be through arts and culture and exploration and critical examination of issues relevant to learners' lives as global citizens. By incorporating engaging and enjoyable elements into learning, schools can instill lifelong understanding and habits for well-being, laying the foundation for a healthier future.

Adopting a gender-responsive and **rights-based**<sup>32</sup> approach ensures that diverse needs and perspectives are addressed, fostering an environment where every learner feels represented and valued. A commitment to evidence-informed approaches recognises that health and well-being knowledge is dynamic and helps shape a curriculum grounded in the latest research and best practices. By acknowledging and avoiding personal biases, the curriculum becomes a tool for fostering a supportive, respectful, and inclusive educational environment for all learners<sup>33</sup>.

### Proposed Standards

**C1: Our school understands and values the contribution of a whole-school approach to the delivery of the curriculum for Wales.**

What this means:

- The school can describe how policies, programmes, activities and initiatives complement curriculum learning and how the curriculum contributes to their whole-school approach to health and well-being.
- The school can describe how curriculum development and delivery informed by the needs of learners and is adaptive to emergent priority health and well-being needs.
- Learning and experiences emphasise the interconnectivity between physical, mental, and emotional health.

**C2: Our school provides positive and authentic learning experiences that secures learners' interest and enables all to engage with, and value health promoting activity.**

What this means:

- All learners have opportunities to engage positively with health promoting behaviours through a range of enjoyable learning experiences and activities.
- The formal curriculum maximises use of the indoor and outdoor school environment as a method of promoting health and well-being.

**C3: Our school delivers a positive, inclusive, gender-responsive, rights-based, evidence-informed health and well-being curriculum where personal bias is avoided.**

What this means:

- Curriculum learning considers the different needs, experiences and interests of members of the school community.
- Curriculum delivery is both pluralistic and celebratory of diversity within and beyond school community and challenges harmful norms that are used to justify violence or discrimination.
- Curriculum design supports positive social and emotional development by avoiding shaming or stigmatisation.
- The school acts positively to remove any barriers to engagement with the curriculum for all learners (for example, when there is a disruption to face-to-face learning).



# G: Help and support services

## Why are we proposing this as a core component?

Access to high-quality, evidence-based, comprehensive help and support services is paramount for promoting child and adolescent health, well-being and education achievement<sup>34</sup>. Schools' unique relationships with their learners and school community mean they are ideally positioned to identify and address individual and collective need that is not otherwise met through the curriculum, initiatives and activities of the school.

Promoting a culture supportive of help-seeking is essential for ensuring that the school community feel comfortable and empowered to ask for support when they need it. By fostering a culture where help-seeking is normalised, valued and effectively responded to, schools enable learners to develop a critical skill they can apply throughout the life-course in line with the [Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience](#).

When additional help and support is required, schools also serve as natural hubs for integrating and providing a range of information, support and services. Sometimes this means adapting and 'filling the gap' as well as working effectively with other services to meet the needs of children and young people. Working in partnership, establishing clear referral pathways and, where specialist input or expertise is required, contributing to collective understanding and response to complex need, enables schools to connect their learners and families with the appropriate resources, improves accessibility and allows services and support to be woven into the fabric of daily school life<sup>35</sup>.

Schools serve as valuable assets for the entire community. By opening their doors to the community, schools can foster a sense of belonging, promote social cohesion, and contribute to the overall well-being of their community. Effective collaboration with other services and responding to the needs of their community by utilising school assets are also key pillars of Community Focused Schools. The proposed Standards and Community Focused Schools are complementary, and we recommend reviewing this component alongside Community Focused Schools multi-agency guidance<sup>24</sup>.

## Proposed Standards

**HSS1: Help seeking is encouraged and positively modeled within our school.**

- The school culture normalises help seeking behaviour.
- Learners, staff and families are provided with accessible information about help available and are supported to access as appropriate.
- The school culture enables learners and staff to feel listened to when they report a need, make a disclosure or reach out for support.
- Access to school-based support is regularly reviewed to identify and address potential barriers isolated or disadvantaged groups seeking help.

**HSS2: Help seeking is met with a positive response within our school.**

What this means:

- The school responds positively to help-seeking asking, "what has happened to you" rather than "what is wrong with you".
- School-based support is responsive to help-seeking and the identified needs of the school and local community.

**HSS3: Our school works in collaboration with external services and providers to meet the needs of the school community.**

What this means:

- There is effective regular communication between school staff and health and well-being service providers working with the school community to understand and meet need.
- The school supports the delivery of universal and targeted health and well-being services within the school.
- The school works in collaboration with specialist services and enables specialist intervention to deliver within the school where this best meets the needs of a learner or their family.
- The school is a community asset and, where appropriate, offers the use of school facilities for community benefit.

**HSS4: Our school has mechanisms in place to identify and work with others to meet the needs of individual learners and their families.**

What this means:

- The school has effective service pathways in place and staff know when and how to refer to additional services when needed to address additional physical, psychological, and emotional needs.
- The school has a clear process through which health and well-being concerns about individual learners can be discussed and reviewed with a multi-disciplinary team to agree a plan of action.
- The school has a clear procedure to respond to traumatic events in or outside the school and are proactive in ensuring support is in place.



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**Working together  
for a healthier Wales**