



HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS





Welcome

A health promoting school is one that constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working (WHO).

The 'Healthy School' is one which takes responsibility for maintaining and promoting the health of all who 'learn, work, play and live' within it not only by formally teaching pupils about how to lead healthy lives but by enabling pupils and staff to take control over aspects of the school environment which influence their health.

It actively promotes, protects and embeds the physical, mental and social health and well-being of its community through positive action.

This can be achieved by policy, strategic planning and staff development about its curriculum, ethos, physical environment and community relations.

This e-bulletin includes a range of projects and initiatives focused on enhancing the health and wellbeing of children and young people within the school environment across Wales.

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How are schools implementing the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being?

Amy Davies,

Principal Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales

Rhian Fewtrell,

Senior Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales

Schools across Wales are implementing the Welsh Government statutory [‘Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing’](#) (WSAEMWB). The framework aims to support schools to promote positive mental well-being, prevent mental ill health, and take action to support individuals where needed.

Public Health Wales have completed two process evaluations to understand how schools have been embedding the WSAEMWB. The first looks at how schools are embedding self-evaluation to understand the needs and strengths of their school community; the second

discusses the planning and implementation of actions to meet their well-being needs.

What did we do?

We used realist-informed case study methodology to explore:

- how schools have engaged with the self-evaluation process as the first stage of the WSAEMWB, to understand the needs and strengths of their school community.
- how schools have planned and implemented actions that meets their identified well-being needs.

We held interviews, focus groups and surveys with school staff and workforce (Implementation Coordinators of the WSAEMWB based

in Health Boards and Local Authorities) across every area of Wales. As well as analysing the responses from schools and the workforce, we examined routine monitoring data and completed a documentary review of key paperwork, tools and plans.

What did we find?

We identified key themes associated with successfully embedding self-evaluation. These are; School Culture & Ethos, Leadership, Whole School Involvement & Engagement, and Applying Continuous Improvement approaches. These areas are intertwined with each other and encourage ways of working that support schools

on their implementation journey. It appears to be important that schools work on structured reflection and fostering inquiry-based approaches. Developing inclusive whole-school dialogue and methods to reach a consensus on priority areas for action facilitates successful implementation.

We also found that having a school culture that prioritises well-being was fundamentally important in helping schools successfully plan and implement well-being actions. Some of the ways schools have developed a well-being culture include building relationships within the school community; shared values and beliefs; promoting pupil compassion; mutual respect; a connected school community; a supportive leadership team. A sense of belonging to the school was another key factor that made a difference to successful planning and implementation of action. Having a sense of belonging includes feeling accepted, respected, included and supported. In the broader school context having consistent and integrated support from partners helps maintain school relationships and encourages progress with planning and implementation of actions.

Implications for practice

Engagement across the whole school community along with commitment from Leadership is crucial to successful and continually improving implementation. Investing time into developing a sense of belonging and school connectedness with learners, families and staff is crucial. And building relationships with partners and wider services can strengthen access to appropriate support. Visit the [Public Health Wales Webpage](#) to read more top tips for schools and system partners.



Practice

Want schools to be Smoke Free? Team up with JustB

Caoimhe Pugh,

Smoking Prevention Trainer JUSTB Team
Public Health Wales

Smoking remains the leading cause of avoidable ill health, early death and health inequalities in Wales. The Welsh Government has recently committed to an ambitious plan to create a smoke free Wales by 2030.

The [JUSTB smoking prevention programme](#) is delivered over 8 weeks in selected high schools across Wales. The Programme addresses the influence of peer interactions and friendship ties on the uptake of regular smoking. Identified by peers, influential students from year 8 attend a two-day training course, facilitated by 'JUSTB' smoking prevention trainers. The training and follow up sessions raise awareness of the tobacco industry's approach to recruiting

smokers, highlighting health and other impacts of smoking to individuals and their communities.

The programme is designed to motivate, empower and enable young people to discuss the risks of smoking in informal and supportive environments. The structured Programme offers opportunities to debate, learn and develop skills to have successful smokefree conversations. The JustB programme introduces information on e-cigarettes and vapes as well as tackling illegal and illicit tobacco which is a growing threat in Wales and contributing towards health inequalities.

The training programme concludes with a school assembly. The ambassadors

deliver a presentation to their year group on the work they've completed with team JustB. The programme is well received in schools by staff and students. We are pleased to be able to share the following feedback:

'I knew this would be a great opportunity for our school, and I was not disappointed. Pupil health and wellbeing is very important at our school. We recognised that taking part would contribute to pupils' physical wellbeing and meets the principles of the new curriculum for Wales. I was really impressed with the strategy of identifying influential members of the year group. The programme involved a huge range of engaging and educational activities, keeping the pupils

on their toes and maximising opportunities for learning. The pupils were all thoroughly engaged. – Assistant Head for Wellbeing.

‘It was an interesting experience, partly because some of it was just having fun and doing fun activities, Then the rest of it was us learning facts and sometimes having serious conversations which is an interesting combination’ – Smokefree Ambassador.

This school year 2024/2025 the JustB team will complete smoking prevention training in around 45 schools across

Wales arming approximately 1,300 young people with skills and knowledge to have smokefree conversations with over 6,000 year 8 peers across Wales. The programme gives young people the tools, knowledge and skills to make informed choices about themselves, their health and their future. It contributes towards lowering the smoking prevalence of young people in Wales which we have seen drop from an average of 9% in 2018 to an average of less than 3% in 2023 (SHRN Data dashboard, November 2024). We continue to work in partnership with schools

towards the ambition of a smokefree Wales and look forward to when team JustB retires ourselves!

[JUSTB - Public Health Wales](#)



Prifysgol Abertawe Swansea University

Research

Co-developing health literate children through the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience

Dr. Emily Marchant,

Lecturer in Education, Swansea University

The Curriculum for Wales provides a framework for children to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to thrive now and into the future. This includes a focus on health through the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience and its Four Purposes. Health literacy the ability to find, understand and use information to make healthy choices, has a key part to play in this (1). Schools are an important place to help develop and promote health and wellbeing and as a result, health literacy (2). In primary schools especially, there is a promising space to allow children to learn healthy habits that track into adulthood (3). Led

Dr. Michaela James,

Research Officer, Swansea University

by researchers at Swansea University, we wanted to find out what teachers and children know already about health literacy and their views on the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience so far.

Health literacy was identified as a priority in Wales in 2010 and since then, education policy and public health developments have attempted to focus on it (1, 4, 5). However, there is still limited research on how health literacy is understood and put into teaching and learning. To address this gap between policy and practice, this study carried out interviews with two headteachers and 6 classroom teachers alongside

Levi Hughes,

Research Assistant, Swansea University

focus groups with 24 children (aged 7-11) across four schools. The findings revealed that whilst teachers and children in primary schools do value health skills and learning, it is met with limited confidence and awareness regarding its design, how it can compliment other curriculum topics, how it can be assessed and how it can be applied across different learning abilities. This highlights the importance of clearer guidance and resources for both teachers and children.

The research paper for this study is currently in-draft. Its potential impact is focused on identifying and co-developing effective actions that aim to further support the embedding of the Health and Wellbeing

Area of Learning Experience into the curriculum and ultimately impacting health literacy. From a teacher's point of view, these actions focused on learning opportunities to strengthen their professional confidence and awareness of health literacy included training curriculum leads, whole-school training and increased opportunities for collaboration with Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) to form a better evidence-base and understanding of school needs. From the perspective of children, they wanted more interactive and practical activities relating to health literacy. Examples of these included outdoor games or board games, making collaborative posters in class and food-based or cooking activities.

The key messages from this study are how health literacy is not currently a considered outcome of teaching and learning for primary schools in South Wales. There is a disconnect between policy intentions and the reality of life in schools, the value of engaging learning opportunities for both teachers and children and the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration relating to health literacy.

To find out more about this study, please contact us at: m.l.james@swansea.ac.uk

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For more of our research, please visit: <https://happen-wales.co.uk/> or contact: happen-wales@swansea.ac.uk

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Research

The What Works Toolkit – promoting evidence informed practice to support emotional and mental well-being needs within school communities

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Amy Davies,

Principal Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales

Public Health Wales have been developing a [‘What Works Toolkit’](#), a collection of evidence summaries which aim to support schools to make informed decisions when choosing interventions and approaches to improve the emotional and mental well-being of learners and staff.

This supports the implementation of the Welsh Government’s [‘Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing’](#) (WSAEMWB) which highlights the importance of using interventions which have a ‘sound or innovative and

developing evidence base’.

How are the summaries developed?

Several steps are taken to create the summaries, the first step involves gathering information from the developer on the intervention or approach. This information includes resource requirements, costs, how the intervention or approach intends to work and what aspects of well-being it supports.

An evidence review is conducted which involves searching for published academic research involving the intervention or approach

of interest. The evidence must measure changes in outcomes relating to emotional and mental well-being, such as happiness, self-esteem, empathy, emotional regulation, sense of belonging and more. [The conceptual framework for mental wellbeing](#) describes the different influences on mental well-being in more detail.

Research papers are reviewed and critically appraised, with the key information summarised and presented to an expert panel. The panel includes a range of professionals with experience in education, health, policy

and academia who agree what the evidence tells us about how effective the intervention or approach may be, and recommendations for schools.

Using the summaries in practice

There is a range of support available to help with the implementation of the WSAEMWB Framework, including dedicated Implementation Co-ordinators as part of the wider school coordinator workforce.

Schools and the wider workforce are encouraged to use the What Works Toolkit evidence summaries to support them in their journey of embedding the WSAEMWB Framework. Once a school has completed their self-evaluation and identified specific needs, the summaries can be used to help identify interventions or approaches which may support them to address that need.

The summaries have two sections – the first section outlines key information around the intervention, including how the intervention influences well-being and the implications for schools. The second section explains the evidence base in more detail, including what was done, what the evidence said, any limitations of the evidence and a concluding statement.

It is important to recognise that any one intervention

or approach may not fully meet a school's identified needs. Utilising the range of resources available to support evidence informed decision making can help schools to consider how they can monitor and evaluate the impact of any activity they undertake against identified emotional and mental well-being priorities in their community.

For further information about the whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being including the What Works Toolkit, visit the [Public Health Wales website](#).



Research

Meals that Matter: An Evaluation of Universal Free School Meals in Wales

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In 2022, Wales became the first UK nation to introduce Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for all primary school children aged 4–11. Previously, families could only access free school meals if they were means-tested, leaving out many low-income families still living in poverty. UFSM aims to reduce these inequalities; tackling food insecurity and improving health. Our research explores the early impact of UFSM on children’s health and wellbeing. Using surveys and by talking to children, our study explores not just health outcomes but also the broader role school meals play in children’s daily lives.

Access to good quality meals

Dr Michaela James,

Research Officer, The Centre for Population Health (CPH), Swansea University

is vital for children’s growth, development, and wellbeing. A recent scoping review [1] of UFSM globally, found that it does improve children’s overall health, reduces inequalities, and benefits families by removing food-related stress. Notably, longer engagement with UFSM was linked to better health outcomes.

In Wales, we evaluated early UFSM outcomes using data from the HAPPEN Cohort (Health and Attainment of Pupils Primary Education) [2], which has tracked health and wellbeing trends since 2018. We have not seen any significant changes in wellbeing indicators, but this is possibly due to the limited

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time this has been on offer. We have seen uptake of meals improve. To understand pupil experiences, we have spoken to Year 6 pupils across three local authorities (five schools in total). Many children reported poor food quality, limited menu options, and reduced portion sizes, particularly affecting older pupils. However, in schools where pupils had strong relationships with kitchen staff, satisfaction was higher. Children also talked about how important lunchtimes are for friendships and play. While nutritional outcomes are yet to emerge, the school meal experience has an impact on children’s social and emotional experiences.

This work provides early insight into UFSM experiences by children in Wales. Our findings draw attention to issues around food quality, choices, and portion sizes. By highlighting pupil voices, this research suggests a positive mealtime experience is just as important as nutritional content in improving children's outcomes. As children continue to receive UFSM, longer-term exposure may lead to measurable changes in outcomes, ensuring happier, healthier children in Wales.

School meals matter beyond just food. Our research highlights lunchtime is a key for relationship-building, emotional wellbeing and social development. However, for the provision to meet its full potential, improvements in quality, variety and appropriate portions are required. Listening to children is essential to ensure that UFSM is effective in meeting their needs. Continued monitoring and longer-term evaluation will be vital to assess health impacts and guide the future of universal school meal provision in Wales.

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Practice

Promoting healthy behaviours during exam time - the importance of energy, relaxation and stress management

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The BCUHB Health Improvement Team aim to empower the residents of Wrexham and Flint to engage with and embrace the value of health and wellbeing. We are a multi skilled team of health improvement practitioners who provide evidence based and sustainable health promotion/ health improvement initiatives to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. We work in partnership with the community and other agencies to reach as many community members in Wrexham and Flint as possible. We provide healthy lifestyle resources and advice for professionals and the community, targeting

evidenced based health outcomes pertinent to these areas.

At the start of the academic year the team were approached by a local secondary school for help in providing workshop activities to pupils during their year 11 'exam stress buster' day. These workshops were developed with the aim of helping pupils reduce and relieve stress during exam time focusing on sleep, relaxation, nutrition and hydration.

The team delivered three different workshops to pupils during the day focussing on health behaviours that are particularly important during periods of stress. Workshop one focussed on sleep, the

importance of a good sleeping environment and how to develop a helpful sleeping routine. This workshop also looked at the effect of energy drinks on the body, discussing the amount of caffeine and sugar in some of the popular brands and what effects these can have on the body. The information covered in the sleep workshop linked into the second workshop where pupils discussed some healthier ways to get their energy. This workshop looked at the 'Eatwell guide' and the importance of regular eating, snacking, staying hydrated and having balance and variety in the foods and drinks they are choosing. The focus was on where they can get their

energy from and choosing the more nutritious options over the high sugar food and drinks choices. This is especially important during periods of stress where the temptation for energy drinks and high sugar foods and drinks can be increased.

The final activity that the pupils took part in was a guided relaxation session which showed them a strategy to help combat stress, relax and unwind. Pupils rested comfortably and were guided through a script describing a peaceful place where they had to imagine the words being read out.

These workshops aimed to provide pupils with the knowledge and tools to help develop positive health behaviours during the stressful exam period and provided them with the knowledge to make healthier informed choices.

If you would like to find out more about the BCUHB Health Improvement Team please contact the team on 03000 859 625 or bcu.healthimprovementteam@wales.nhs.uk



Research

Maintaining Wellbeing in the Transition from Primary to Secondary School

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A growing increase in the proportion of secondary school pupils across Wales reporting poor wellbeing, has been further exacerbated since the Covid-19 pandemic, rising from nearly 1 in 5 (19%) in 2019/2020(1) to nearly 2 in 5 by 2022/23(2). Teachers have witnessed the impact of poor wellbeing among pupils during this time(3).

There is a lack of research exploring the impact transition on the wellbeing of learners in Wales. Our study tracked a cohort of year 6 pupils into year 7, exploring self-assessed rates of wellbeing during this period, using a positive psychology approach.

Increasing rates of reported poor wellbeing among schoolchildren, highlight the role that education can play in promoting learner wellbeing. The transition from primary to secondary school while exciting, can also be a challenging time for pupils. Data from The Children's Society(4) demonstrate that year 7 pupils report lower levels of wellbeing compared to their year 6 counterparts.

We explored whether low wellbeing could be ascertained from an online self-assessment conducted at three points during transition from primary to secondary school. We asked pupils from six cluster primary schools of one Welsh-medium secondary school to participate. The

self-assessment drew on the PERMA-profiler, a positive psychology assessment, and was co-constructed with Year 6 and 7 teachers.

We found that pupils' wellbeing dipped during their transition into year 7, although this gradually improved towards the end of term. Feedback gathered from pupil focus groups found: the self-assessment was useful in informing teachers of issues or ongoing challenges, navigating the pupil-teacher relationship could be difficult. General feedback was that pupils thought the self-assessment a valuable tool in the overall concern and appreciation of their individual wellbeing, with teachers in agreement(5). However, pupils with lower

wellbeing were less likely to trust their teachers and to confide in them.

Teachers across primary and secondary school sought insights into how transition affects student wellbeing and how to better support pupils. Students reported that self-assessment tools provided an effective, low-pressure method to communicate difficulties to form tutors without face-to-face conversations. They appreciated that the school viewed them holistically rather than solely through academic performance. The self-assessment process fostered self-awareness about personal responsibility for wellbeing and helped students recognize the importance of their own resilience. This approach created a supportive framework where students felt seen beyond their grades while developing important self-management skills for their educational journey.

Pupils can use a self-assessment to identify their levels of wellbeing, and teachers can respond proactively. Universal strategies and guidance for teachers is needed to support learners with low levels of wellbeing in their pedagogical practice and to respond to the needs of pupils. Wellbeing is everybody's responsibility and schools need to teach pupils to recognise the importance

of their own wellbeing and to be proactive in promoting it. Early identification and mitigation may prevent more complex wellbeing issues.

Our work highlights the paucity of educational resources available in Welsh for practitioners, teachers and school staff to support learner wellbeing.

For further information about our work, please contact: rajpacker@cardiffmet.ac.uk

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Policy

The right to play in schools

Marianne Mannello,

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Children say that playtimes are an important part of the school day.

98% of the children surveyed as part of the Wales Children's Omnibus Survey (2022) said they look forward to playtime at school. 82% said they especially like playtime as it allows them to spend time with their friends.

Between 2019 and 2022, the Welsh Government undertook an in-depth and collaborative review of its play policy work. A cross-professional steering group of play and playwork specialists and policy officials from across the Welsh Government was set up to support the review.

The steering group considered the range of national policy and delivery initiatives that

support children in accessing their right to play across educational settings. The discussions highlighted the need to ensure that play is valued in these settings, not only for instrumental educational outcomes, but also for the immediate wellbeing benefits it brings to children of all ages.

The Welsh Government commissioned Children in Wales – through its Young Wales initiative – to consult with children across Wales about their experiences and thoughts on play. Through this work, children of all ages feel that schools and the education sector are responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities to play. They are clear that

playing is not only important for children in primary school. Children aged between 12 and 18 feel that schools and education providers should allocate more time for play and more opportunities for children to meet up during the school day. They suggested that the review should consider playtime or break time for children aged 12 to 18 in school and colleges. Teachers also note the benefits of playing, particularly playing outdoors:

97% of teachers say that outdoor play is critical for children to reach their full potential.

88% of teachers say that children are happier after playing outdoors.

86% of teachers say that playing outdoors gives children a better understanding of the environment.

Evidence suggests that school playtime initiatives aimed at enriching opportunities to play are linked to a range of improvements in:

academic skills
attitudes
attention
behaviour
social skills
social relations between different groups of children
enjoyment of and adjustment to school life.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment no. 17 emphasises that the playing is of positive benefit to children's educational development and should be facilitated during the course of every day throughout early childhood education, as well as in primary and secondary school. General Comment no. 17 notes that schools have a major role in the promotion of the right to play across the following areas:

Curriculum demands
Educational pedagogy
Physical environment of

settings
Structure of the day.
A child spends more than six hours a day and 28 weeks of the year at school, for at least 12 years of life, so children have considerable opportunities to play in educational settings.

Play Wales has a range of resources to help schools support play in school every day:

A play friendly school guidance provides information about policy and practice to help school communities take a whole school approach in supporting children's right to play.

A reading list for teachers – Supporting the right to play in school for those with an interest in improving children's opportunities for playing at school.

Focus on play – Supporting the right to play in schools is a briefing for head teachers, teachers and school governors about the crucial role of children's play in promoting positive mental health.

Opening school grounds for play is a toolkit to support schools to offer opportunities for children to play at school outside of school hours.

Right to play workshop raises awareness about the right to play, supporting children and teenagers to make the case for better opportunities to play and meet up with their friends.

[To read the various publications, visit the Resources library on the Play Wales website.](#)

Date for your diary: the International Day of Play will take place on 11 June 2025. It provides an opportunity to draw global awareness to children's play and schools across Wales have a major role in promoting the right to play for children and teenagers.

This article was originally published in the Children in Wales Spring 2025 magazine.

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Practice

Run Wales: The Daily Mile!

Cath Bingham,

Young Person's Physical Activity Officer,
Welsh Athletics

Run Wales, the 'Health and Wellbeing' branch of Welsh Athletics, are the proud delivery partner of [The Daily Mile](#) in Wales.

The Daily Mile's mission is to help children thrive by supporting schools and nurseries to embed a culture of regular physical activity. The success of the Daily Mile is in its simplicity; 15 minutes of concentrated physical activity with children running, walking or wheeling at their own pace in the fresh air with friends. It is a free, proven programme. Inclusivity and accessibility are at the heart of The Daily Mile.

There's no cost to sign up, no equipment required, the resources are free and there are no running costs. All we

ask is that children are given the opportunity to get 15 minutes of physical activity outdoors every day to help tackle childhood obesity, improve children's emotional and mental well-being, and foster healthier habits across Wales.

Low physical activity levels are having a direct impact on children's health and on their overall development. According to [research](#) from The Daily Mile Foundation, nearly half of UK teachers (48%) say that they have observed low levels of physical activity leading to children being less attentive in class, as well as more disruptive (41%). Declining activity levels also places pressure on teachers, with three quarters (75%) feeling responsible for

the physical wellbeing of their pupils.

The Daily Mile enhances overall well-being by creating a culture of physical activity in a fun, inclusive environment, where children regardless of age, ability, or circumstance can enjoy being active regularly. Teachers and school staff are encouraged to take part, leading by example and creating a culture of physical activity for the whole school community.

Over 600 primary schools in Wales are now taking part in The Daily Mile. We want to reach every school and early years setting across Wales, ensuring all children and young people are able to access simple, inclusive physical activity and build healthy habits for lifelong enjoyment

of movement! We are thrilled with the positive feedback and stories from our Daily Mile schools in Wales; take a look at some examples on our [website](#). Sign-up is free, and you'll receive a digital welcome pack to help you get started! [Register here](#).

Registered Daily Mile schools may be eligible for the Children Fit for Life Award, designed to recognise and celebrate schools that have fully embraced The Daily Mile in their setting. This award aims to bring tangible benefits and a positive impact to your school community. Becoming a Daily Mile Children Fit for Life Awarded school is not just a recognition; it's a celebration of your school's commitment to enhancing children's health and happiness. [Check it out and apply here!](#)

Get started today and grow The Daily Mile community in your school. For guidance and support, contact Cath at Run Wales!

For further information please contact: Cath.bingham@runwales.org.uk



GIG
CYMRU
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WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales



Mae Brechu yn
achub bywydau
Vaccination
saves lives

Practice

HPV vaccination programme for Year 8 pupils

Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme,

Public Health Wales

HPV is the short name for more than 100 viruses called Human Papillomavirus. It is very common, and 8 in 10 people will get infected at some point in their lives. It usually has no symptoms, which is why it's so easy to pass on. In most people it clears up quickly, but if it continues, it can cause certain types of cancer.

The HPV vaccine is offered free to all boys and girls who are aged 12 to 13 years (school Year 8). Since the HPV vaccine was widely introduced in 2008, it has reduced cervical cancer rates by almost 90% in women in their 20s. Research suggests that over time the HPV vaccine will help save thousands of lives in the UK

The HPV vaccination

programme is offered in schools for free to all year 8 pupils, and those who may have previously missed their vaccination. The vaccine which is given as a single dose offers long-lasting protection.

Young people who missed their HPV vaccination in school will be given other opportunities to receive the vaccine, either in school or community vaccination centres. They can also contact their school nurse, immunisation team or GP to discuss how to get the vaccine. Young people remain eligible to receive the vaccine up until their 25th birthday*.

For more information, visit: [HPV vaccine - Public Health Wales](#)

Help to share the message on the importance of the HPV vaccinations among the relevant audience by downloading and sharing a range of videos and resources available on our online campaign album - [HPV Vaccination Benefits](#)

*For boys, this only applies to those born on or after 1 September 2006



Research

Navigating the Storm - A trauma informed programme helping to develop emotional regulation in primary aged children

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School Liaison Officer, Wrexham University

A multi-disciplinary team from Wrexham University, including experts in Criminology, Education, the TrACE (Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experience) team, Civic Mission, and Recruitment are leading a research project aimed at supporting the wellbeing and emotional regulation of children in schools. The pilot project centres around a workbook inspired by

the 'Navigating the Storm' animation (1). The workbook demonstrates how using interactive initiatives through a trauma-informed lens can help children better understand their emotions, form meaningful connections, and recognise their individual strengths. This work will contribute to limited research in this area, offering evidence-based insights into effective practices within educational

settings.

Project Summary

This pilot project has supported educators in developing pupil emotional self-regulation skills through an evidence-based TrACE 'Navigating the Storm' workbook.

The workbook includes flexible resources and lesson plans that can be used in

classrooms or one-to-one settings. Activities within the workbook, such as arts and crafts, music-based exercises, and mindfulness practices are grounded in research and designed to support emotional wellbeing, social skills, and mental health. These activities are also important for academic focus and achievement, enabling positive connections, improving social skills and learner engagement.

A user-friendly practitioner guide accompanies the resource, along with a programme workshop, and subsequent monitoring and support sessions help educators understand the research underpinning each activity and adapt materials to individual learner needs. The research involved six North Wales primary schools, with staff involved attending an initial training session before piloting the workbook for a 12-week period within their education settings. Data collection involved interviews and focus groups in which staff reflected on their experiences, discussed outcomes and suggested amendments. Analysis is ongoing, and resulting findings will be presented in a journal article and report, due to be made available in the Autumn.

What difference has the project made?

This project has offered professional development and

school resources for teachers and practitioners to support children to develop co and self-regulation strategies which can positively enhance the trajectory of a child's educational achievement throughout their lives. It has offered a practical resource for educational practitioners to use and adapt to meet the individual needs of pupils which contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of children and young people.

What are the key messages or learning to others?

Emerging findings show the pilot has been well received by teachers and practitioners and has integrated well into the schools. The toolkit is described as easy to deliver, adaptable and has encouraged self-discussion and reflection.

The workbook is designed to enhance empathy, shown to improve self-concept, encourage positive behaviour, reduce aggression, and boost academic achievement (Feshbach, 1975; 1978). Recent findings by Vasseleu et al. (2024) also show that educators who implement self-regulation strategies within classrooms reported increased confidence and knowledge in supporting children.

Our emerging findings support the theory that such projects are beneficial to pupils, educators and school settings.

Link to the Navigating the Storm animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFSsE2qOnuw>
Feshbach, S. (1975). 'Empathy training and the regulation of aggression: potentialities and limitations'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 81(9), pp.712–720.
Feshbach, S. (1978). *Studies of television and aggression: A critical review*. In: L.A. Pervin and M. Lewis, eds. *Perspectives in Interactional Psychology*. Boston, MA: Springer, pp.315–345.

(4)Vasseleu, E., Neilsen-Hewett, C., and Howard, S. J. (2024). 'An Early Start to Self-Regulation: Evaluating the Effects of an Early Childhood Self-Regulation Intervention on Educator Beliefs, Knowledge, and Practice'. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 1–21. DOI:10.1080/02568543.2024.2396907



Research

Closing educational attainment gap offers potential benefits for health, well-being and equity

Cerys Preece,

Senior Public Health Practitioner, Wider Determinants of Health Unit, Public Health Wales

A tool designed to increase understanding of the connected factors affecting a child's educational achievement and a review of the mechanisms by which this affects health have been developed by Public Health Wales.

[Good education and skills](#) are a building block for health and well-being. However, not all children and young people have the same opportunities for learning and there is a gap in educational attainment between children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

To understand this further, the [Wider Determinants of Health Unit](#) at Public Health Wales explored what affects educational achievement in Wales and the ways in which

education affects health. This work demonstrates the close relationship between health and education, and that reducing the socio-economic gap in attainment in Wales cannot be done by schools alone.

Involving subject experts and diverse partners, the team has mapped the factors that affect educational achievement. This map describes how a child's mental well-being, engagement with the school and home learning environment contribute to educational achievement. These are in turn influenced by a wide range of family, home and social factors, including some which start before a child is born.

Not only does health affect education, but research

demonstrates how education affects health in later life, through three main pathways. These are good employment and income, social and psychological factors, and health knowledge and behaviours. However, although educational achievement can be an important driver of opportunity, it can also contribute to increased health inequalities by perpetuating cycles of intergenerational inequality.

Ciarán Humphreys, Consultant at Public Health Wales, said: "In Wales, too many people die too early due to a lack of the basic building blocks for health. Education is one of these foundations for health. When we have a good education it gives us the chance to get a decent job and money to buy what we need

for good health, such as food and heating. This also reduces stress that can impact our mental and physical health.

“We can’t expect schools to solve the problem of the educational attainment gap alone. Partners need to work together to improve opportunities for the future of our communities, recognising health and education as shared goals. This can happen by supporting learners, families, and communities through

initiatives that strengthen a whole school approach to health and well-being as well as community focussed schools. Additionally, it goes beyond the reach of the school to how we plan our housing systems, and the nature of work for parents that can all affect the opportunities for children, especially those facing disadvantage, to thrive, learn and grow.”



Research

Work to live or live to work?

Cerys Preece,

Senior Public Health Practitioner, Wider Determinants of Health Unit, Public Health Wales

Children often dream big about what jobs they will do when they are older, a teacher, an astronaut, a footballer, YouTuber. But, even if you achieve your dream job, is doing the job you love, enough to keep you happy and healthy? The reality of being in work is often different.

We know that [unemployment is bad for health](#) and can lead to higher mortality, poorer general health (long-standing illness, limiting longstanding illness), poorer mental health (including anxiety and depression), and higher medical consultation (medication consumption and hospital admission rates) through psycho-social factors, socio-economic status and financial stress.

It's not just having a job, but the nature of the job that

counts for health. Work is a key building block to health and well-being. There is clear evidence that the quality of work is important for health; and that poor quality work can be harmful and can be a risk for physical and mental health. A [recent review](#) of international evidence concluded it is not safe to assume that, in the UK, any job will lead to better health and well-being outcomes than unemployment.

What is work like for teachers?

A [report](#) commissioned by the National Education Union in 2023, found that :

Job quality is worse in schools where staff are expecting a school inspection, and in schools located in areas of high social deprivation.

The job quality of teaching professionals has barely changed since the pandemic and has, in some respects, worsened.

The job quality of comparable occupations has improved. Working conditions in schools have therefore worsened in relative terms. Teaching is both a rewarding and demanding job, but it is becoming even more demanding.

An analysis of the [labour market in England](#), found that the teaching sector continues to have recruitment and retention issues, with high numbers leaving the profession citing reasons such as high workload and pupil behaviour. There is also a lack of access to flexible working arrangements which may be contributing to those leaving

the profession.

What can be done for teachers?

Whilst there are efforts in Wales to have a [whole school approach](#) to mental health and well-being, it is also integral to ensure that teachers and school staff are also participating in fair work. Fair work is where workers “are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive environment where rights are respected” ([Fair Work Commission, 2019](#))

Fair work provides a sense of purpose and means that people have money, time and resources for a healthy life for themselves and their families. Fair work for teachers for example might mean focusing on improving working conditions, career development, employee involvement, flexible working and job intensity. Teachers and support staff are integral to the success. For pupils to be able to thrive and achieve in education, we need to ensure that work and working

conditions support teachers and well as pupils.

For further information on fair work, visit phw.nhs.wales/fairwork or email phw.determinants@wales.nhs.uk

Better join up, better outcomes - a needs assessment around collaboration for child poverty

The Wider Determinants of Health Unit in Public Health Wales, on behalf of the Building a Healthier Wales Coordination Group, are conducting a survey for the 'better join up, better outcomes – a needs assessment around collaboration for child poverty'.

The survey is for professionals working in formalised partnerships or collaborations in Wales to reduce and/or mitigate child poverty, and asks about your role, your partnership's alignment to the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2024) and examples of good practice.

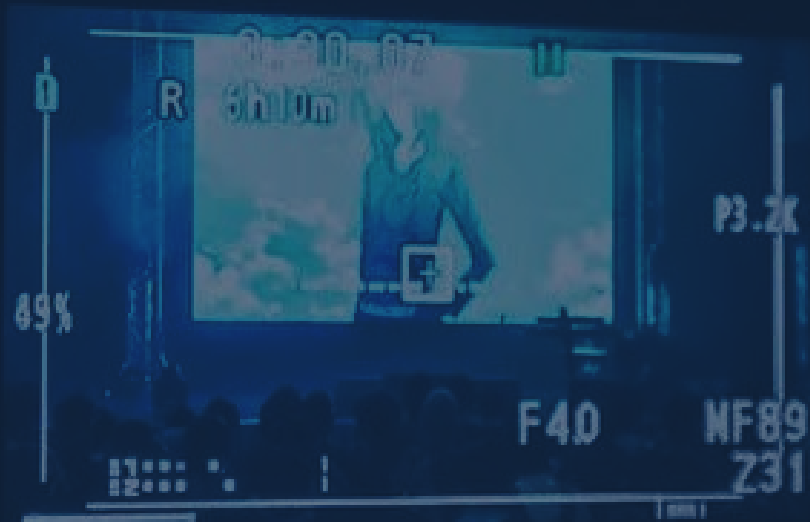
More information on the purpose of this survey, and your rights as a survey respondent, can be found in [this information sheet](#). Please read this and decide if you would like to take part.

If you would like to take part, here is the link to the survey <https://forms.office.com/e/bme01jYDsM>

If you feel other colleagues are suitable to also participate, please forward this email on to them.

If you would like to know more or have any questions, please contact PHW.Determinants@wales.nhs.uk

Videos



BARS

EVF DTL ZEBRA

LCD WFM

COUNTER-RESET/TC SE

FUNCTION SHTR/F



Building Strong Foundations | Cardiff Highlights

The conference aligned with the PHNC objectives of sharing knowledge, facilitating the developments of solutions and approaches and connecting members and building a community.

[Watch](#)



Building Strong Foundations | Llandudno Highlights

The conference aligned with the PHNC objectives of sharing knowledge, facilitating the developments of solutions and approaches and connecting members and building a community.

[Watch](#)



WHIASU@20

The landscape of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has changed massively over the last 20 years, and the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) have been right at the heart of it since its founding in 2004.

[Watch](#)

Explore our video library on our website [View all our videos](#)

News & Resources





[New vision for mental health in Wales paves the way for same-day support](#)

06-05-2025



[New strategy aims to build a healthier and more resilient food system across Wales](#)

29-04-2025



[Public Health Wales announce new behavioural science resources to optimise health communications](#)

29-04-2025

[All News](#)

[Mental health and wellbeing strategy: delivery plan 2025 to 2028](#)

Welsh Government

[Mental health and wellbeing strategy 2025 to 2035](#)

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Next Issue

INVESTING IN PREVENTION



Good health is a fundamental right, but in Wales, health outcomes vary unfairly across communities. Effective prevention initiatives such as early years education, vaccination programmes, smoking cessation and support for carers can deliver great value for money and are essential for prioritising public funding.

They can address health inequalities, reverse the nation's health decline, and promote well-being. For our upcoming e-bulletin, we are inviting contributions from across Wales for national, regional or local initiatives, policies or programmes that prioritise prevention.

Our article submission form will provide you with further information on word count, layout of your article and guidance for images.

Please send articles to publichealth.network@wales.nhs.uk by 22nd May 2025.

[Contribute](#)