

School improvement guidance

Question 1 – Do you agree with the importance of robust self-evaluation and improvement planning by schools, which draws on a broad range of evidence, as set out in the School improvement guidance?

Agree

Comments (no more than 250 words)

- We agree with emphasis on self-evaluation, something which is supported throughout the education system and by stakeholders such as Estyn(1) . As acknowledged in the guidance, there is potential for variability in quality of self-evaluations. We suggest the use of School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey data to mitigate this.
- The SHRN is the first national network of its kind, bringing together 100% of the maintained, mainstream secondary schools in Wales (210) with academic researchers, policymakers and practitioners from health, education and social care to promote an evidence informed approach to improving young people's health and wellbeing in school. The survey provides biannual pupil level data on a range of health and wellbeing (H&WB) issues. Supported by Welsh Government, there is currently a feasibility study to extending SHRN into primary schools, which aims to support earlier data-led action to set children on positive mental H&WB trajectories. Furthermore, the integration of secondary and primary school work into a single coordinated network, reflecting the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes(2)(WNHSS) model in Wales, opens up opportunities to support schools in collaborating to develop joined up approaches to support H&WB.
- SHRN can help schools decide on school level H&WB priorities, as well as providing a mechanism for schools to self-evaluate impacts of H&WB initiatives in their context. The use of SHRN data for background H&WB was highlighted as good practice in the Estyn report1.

Question 2 – Do you agree that the national categorisation system should end, but be replaced by a similar process, led by regional consortia, in which consortia agree with schools the support they need to improve, as set out in the School improvement guidance?

Agree

Comments (no more than 250 words)

- We support the decision to end the national categorisation system. This will allow schools more autonomy and freedom to respond to their local contexts. From a H&WB perspective, this is critical given that the needs of learners vary widely across different contexts (Long and Moore,6 in preparation).
- Many schools excel in work around H&WB, but this is not currently reflected under the categorisation system, which may unfairly categorise schools serving particularly deprived communities unfavourably. The opposite is also true – a high-achieving school may not serve the H&WB needs of their learners but score highly in the categorisation system. The green light system does not take account of inequalities and gain among groups with protected characteristics.
- Ending the categorisation system discourages labelling, and schools from accountability gaming, for example focussing resources on learners who borderline grade C/D GCSE at the expense of helping high or low performing learners to achieve their potential (Long and Moore,6 in preparation). This opens the system to collaboration, encouraging supportive peer-to-peer learning instead of competition.

Question 3 – Do you agree with the distinction between evaluation and improvement activities, and the accountability system, as set out in the School improvement guidance? Is this distinction made clear?

Agree

Comments (no more than 250 words)

- This is an important distinction, and from a Health and Wellbeing perspective has implications for how schools evaluate and are held accountable for the health and wellbeing agenda; however, the definitions, narrative and presentation in the document could be made clearer, for example through stating what each is and is not in summary boxes and providing examples.

Question 4 – Do you agree that the accountability system set out in the School improvement guidance will align with the new Curriculum for Wales and its principles?

Agree

Comments (no more than 250 words)

- The Health and Wellbeing agenda is unique in comparison to other areas of learning. It has multiple levels(2,3,4,5): on one hand, there is progression through a H&WB curriculum; on the other, there are wider, systemic school level factors that have a significant impact on learner and staff H&WB. This requires learning and outcomes to be considered at several levels. These levels can be conceptualised as mapping on to 1) the Health and Wellbeing AoLE, and 2) one of the four purposes ('healthy, confident individuals'). Rather than treating these as an 'either or' scenario, we propose that they are in fact complementary and have their own merits.
- In response to Qualifications Wales' consultation, we support the position to create a H&WB qualification. This would create capacity, for example by providing support for the introduction of a H&WB pathway for practitioners and providing learners with the knowledge, skills and experiences to enter H&WB professions post-schooling. While there is a risk that the H&WB agenda becomes performative, ensuring a multi-level approach accompanied by appropriate evaluative processes can mitigate this risk (Long and Moore6, in preparation).
- A formal H&WB qualification could prove valuable for creating capacity across the system, but alone this is not sufficient. There is increasing political recognition of this, for example with the introduction of a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing.(5) The HPS framework(3,4) and WNHSS(2) also offer empirical data, evidence-based practice and a framework for schools, and should be prioritised to achieve the H&WB aims of the reforms.

Question 5 – Do you agree with the roles and responsibilities assigned to different bodies within the education system as set out in the School improvement guidance?

Comments (no more than 250 words)

It would be helpful to have summary boxes with bullet points outlining key roles of schools, consortia, Local Authorities and governing bodies at the end of each section.

Question 6 – We would like to know your views on the effects that the framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability, as set out in the School improvement guidance, will have on the diverse needs of individual learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who share protected characteristics(1) (1) The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on governing bodies to ensure that their school meets the requirements of equality legislation. The Act protects pupils from discrimination and harassment based on 'protected characteristics'. These protected characteristics are disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. Comments (no more than 250 words)

- Schools have a safeguarding framework that captures individual level information about protected characteristics that could be used to inform work in this area. While these mechanisms are already in place, they have not been used for these purposes.
- We are making recommendations for two impact assessments:
 1. An Equality Impact Assessment: these are used to meet statutory equality and human rights requirements (<https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/equality-impact-assessment-in-wales-practice-hub/>)
 2. A Health Impact Assessment: this provides a framework for the consideration of health inequalities in service planning and the identification of unintended negative impacts of decisions (<https://www.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/topics/health-impact-assessment/1093/>)
- Many policies, plans, proposals or decisions have the potential to impact on health and potentially widen health inequalities. By conducting these types of assessments, the potential impacts can be considered, and action taken to reduce them.
- It's important to manage expectations and be realistic about what schools can do in terms of ameliorating the wider social determinants of health and inequalities.

Question 9 – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them.

- In order to effectively address priorities identified during self-evaluation, schools need H&WB evidence going into schools. This can be achieved in two ways:
 1. Professional learning, including both a H&WB pathway and a package of continuous professional development to enable the existing workforce to be upskilled, for example around the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework^{3,4} the WNHSS2 (operationalising the HPS framework), the Whole School Approach⁵, inequalities, and the use of data and evidence in health (Long and Moore,⁶ in preparation).
 2. Partnership working with health organisations, for example Public Health Wales and the WNHSS2 to facilitate exchange of knowledge and evidence.
- Finally, schools are engaging in a wealth of evidence-based initiatives, but at present this is highly variable. Examples include Health Promoting Schools (HPS) framework^{2,3}, the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme² the Whole School Approach,⁵ Schools as Learning Organizations and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) informed schools. The H&WB agenda is fragmented, and combined with the lack of an agreed model, we recognise that the different initiatives can be confusing for schools. An overarching framework is required, and this needs to be closely linked to the professional learning strategy.

Submit your response

Do you live in Wales?

Yes

Do you have a business interest in Wales?

No

Please provide the first part of your home postcode, e.g. CF10

CF103BD

You are about to submit your response. Please ensure you are satisfied with the answers you have provided before sending.

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