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SCHOOL HEALTH
RESEARCH NETWORK

Wales-wide school reforms: The complex space between vision and success

School Health & Wellbeing Research Brief, March 2021

Wales is preparing for the roll-out of national school reforms in September 2022. This briefing focusses on issues around successful implementation of the reforms from the perspectives of senior stakeholders in the Welsh education system, with a particular focus on, but not limited to, health and wellbeing.



What we already know...

Schools are busy and high-pressured environments with a wide range of priorities. While challenging, an increased emphasis on, and integration of health and wellbeing into school life can improve staff and learner health and wellbeing and have a positive impact on learner performance in other subjects. How can schools begin to achieve change? What areas should be considered? This briefing begins to address some of these questions.

In a nutshell

- In order to realise the aims of the reforms, a cultural shift is required among practitioners, leaders and the wider education system. Practitioners will shift from being a teacher of a curriculum to curriculum designers. This is in the context of health and wellbeing being awarded gravitas and prioritisation in a way that has not been done before.
- Professional learning and development is critical for realising the aims of the reforms, particularly for the new health and wellbeing AoLE.
- Peer to peer support, working with external partners, and wider stakeholder engagement are critical. Schools have a finite amount of resource, and while practitioners will be upskilled to deliver on the health and wellbeing agenda, linking with peers and external partners to exchange ideas and practices can facilitate schools to achieve their health and wellbeing goals.
- Health and Wellbeing in schools must be appropriately reflected in accountability measures.



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Issues to consider

Whilst working with external partners can complement a schools health and wellbeing agenda, outsourcing can be problematic. Schools should avoid buying services from companies without an established evidence base and track record. Organisations such as Public Health Wales and the Welsh Network of Healthy Schools can provide advice and information. Partnership working should complement, not replace school level health and wellbeing activities.

What we did...

- Interviews were held with senior stakeholders in the Welsh education system.
- Data were analysed and several themes were produced, describing and summarizing the most prominent views and ideas.
- This briefing describes findings from one of three thematic areas: 'the complex space between vision and success'.



What does this mean for my school?

- Professional learning will be made available and schools should take advantage of the offer. Focussing on the Whole School Approach, and training around the use of data and evidence in health and wellbeing can increase practitioners' knowledge and skills. Working with partners from health can also facilitate this.
- Schools might begin considering the long-term use of school-level health data to evaluate impacts of their health initiatives.
- Some of the methods of achieving a cultural shift are already described. In addition, leadership can focus on providing sufficient time and space for practitioners to understand the new curriculum, and time and space for trial and error in the classroom.

This research brief contains pre-publication feedback to stakeholders. Please note that there is not yet a research paper available on this topic