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# Wales-wide school reforms: Future roles for schools and reform aims

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 some of the aims of the reforms and future roles of schools from the perspectives of senior stakeholders in the Welsh education system, with a particular focus on, but not limited to, the health and wellbeing aims.



## 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. What are some the aims of the reforms, including health and wellbeing aims?

## In a nutshell

- A major aim of the reform is to increase practitioner autonomy and freedom in the classroom.
- There will be a new direction for health and wellbeing, which goes way beyond the current statutory PSE, and beyond simply focussing on physical activity.
- Schools have a role to play in equality and helping ALL learners to achieve positive health and education outcomes regardless of background, race, gender or ability.
- Schools play a role in improving the mental health and wellbeing of their staff and learners.
- Learning and education are means of achieving wider policy targets to improve society set by Welsh Government. While this is a big task, there is recognition that schools form *part* of the bigger picture.

## Issues to consider

Health and wellbeing does not have the same history of being taught as other subjects, and because of this, in reality it is probably the most challenging AoLE to get right. Professional learning, and allocating sufficient time and space for health and wellbeing in the curriculum and wider school environment, can help overcome barriers.

## 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 future role of schools and reform aims'.



## What does this mean for my school?

- The Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience (as well as the other AOLES) is designed to be cross-cutting. This means that learning around health and wellbeing can be weaved into other subject areas (for example, use of statistics in a numeracy lessons, or handwashing and hygiene in science).
- Increased freedom and autonomy may be daunting, but can be really beneficial. It means that schools can tailor learning around health and wellbeing to their particular context and to individual learner needs. Combined with the use of data and evidence and adoption of a whole school approach, schools can begin to have a really positive impact on health and wellbeing.
- There is a risk that with increased school level autonomy, the inequalities gap may increase. Although the reduction of inequalities in health and education is something that cannot, and should not be placed solely at the door of schools, by beginning to consider it's wider role and taking ownership, a school can begin to have a positive impact.
- Familiarisation and adoption of Welsh Governments strategy on 'A Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Wellbeing' will help schools on their mental health and wellbeing journey.

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