

Embedding a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being

Question 1: To what extent do you believe that the guidance will promote consistent whole-school approaches, supporting the positive emotional well-being and mental health of all learners and staff?

Slightly disagree

If you selected 'slightly disagree' or 'strongly disagree', please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

As an ESDGC advisor, WAGL would like to see overarching guidance to explain the multiple benefits to health and well-being which go hand in hand with global learning (within which we include global citizenship, environmental learning, outdoor learning, peace education and right-based learning).

There are regular links to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Documentation and recommendations from WHO but insufficient mention of linking learning to a wider global community - there are opportunities for learners to connect digitally with people from around the world (for example through CCGL, or Wales Lesotho links) and build solidarity through shared experiences of COVID and other global challenges nature and climate emergencies, inequality, etc). As learners' wellbeing has been so significantly impacted by a global issue (a pandemic) it is key that they have opportunities to understand such global issues, how they can navigate these matters and make a positive difference through personal and collective behaviour and action, including possibilities of social action projects. Whether learning is taking place in bubbles, at home in isolation or in a blended way, a rich set of opportunities to connect to the wider world are essential.

We are supportive of the inclusion youth groups in the school network and feel there is opportunity to link these to possible joint projects and activities between youth groups and schools.

For example, while COVID is mentioned as a definitive factor behind the document there is no mention of any of the significant social movements that have happened during the quarantine period while learners have been away from schools. For instance the Black Lives Matter Movement, which may well have raised concerns in learners in regards to their emotional well-being. The opportunity to open discussion and these issues and to incorporate a more inclusive and diverse environment in schools is there and guidance can and should be implemented.

We support NRW's call for outdoor learning to be portrayed as a fundamental pedagogy, a way of teaching and learning, a unique space in which to promote learner well-being and resilience through connection to nature and the social aspects of playing and learning outdoors. Evidence from around the world demonstrates the benefits to well-being of a connection with and learning in the natural environment.

More could be made in the guidelines of the exploration that children undertook in lockdown with regards to their identity, immediate surroundings, heritage and belonging – looking beyond Wales at the wider world, for example in relation to the pandemic.

Conversations about well-being should be both trauma-informed and rights informed and discuss the importance of things such as self-care, and coping strategies for everyone, not just as a tool for those experiencing poor mental health - this should also show awareness of local, national and global contexts which will be relevant to many of our pupils who have family, friends and connections around the world.

Learners should have opportunities to take ownership of environmental spaces and places – greening of communal areas, planting trees – work in conjunction with the third sector and raise understanding of global issues such as climate change which can cause undue stress.

Question 2: To what extent do you believe that the guidance provides the right level of support for school staff and senior leadership teams to develop and embed best practice for delivering a whole-school approach to emotional well-being and mental health?

Slightly disagree

If you selected 'slightly disagree' or 'strongly disagree', please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

We welcome a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing, but feel more specific support and guidelines will be needed for staff and leadership teams, for example, in global citizenship pedagogies, outdoor learning and similar.

Identification and recognition of the various projects and opportunities available in Wales to support staff and leadership teams would be valuable (for example, there are multiple programmes schools can access - some fully funded - to support wellbeing and to provide professional learning (e.g. Peace Schools, CCGL, Show Racism the Red Card training, etc).

We endorse NRW's response about the centrality of outdoor learning support and guidance.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree that the guidance provides sufficient direction to promote collaboration between schools and key partners such as statutory bodies, the third sector and parents/carers?

Slightly disagree

If you selected 'slightly disagree' or 'strongly disagree', please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

Named individuals should act as plan co-ordinators, and sources of advice and support to others within the school and externally. They should advocate and champion well-being. Larger schools may find that this is too much work for any one individual and may choose to share the workload across a number of staff. This would also have the advantage that institutional knowledge and experience is maintained during times of staff 'churn'.

In addition, there should be specialists within consortia and LEAs to act as links to third sector organisations to be able to work with the students most in need in the local areas. These individuals should make efforts to interact with the third sector, youth bodies and others to gain a full picture of what is available to schools and help to signpost and support to ensure schools access all available opportunities for support.

There doesn't appear to be an existing single entity as a 'specialist' across well-being to collaborate with. Additional guidance is needed to identify what this would look like within a whole school approach.

Stakeholders and partners need time to analyse the framework and devise new supporting strategies and resources. Additional guidance on working with the third sector would be valuable.

It is important for the WP Education Department to highlight those bodies and organisations who can offer high quality, reputable and free support, advice and guidance.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree that the guidance provides the right balance between focusing on promoting and building emotional well-being and addressing the needs of those requiring targeted support for their mental health?

Slightly disagree

If you selected 'slightly disagree' or 'strongly disagree', please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

There is a lack of acknowledgement in the draft framework of how it will meet the requirements re global citizenship needs and issues such as poverty, inequality, unconscious bias, ACEs and trauma, multiculturalism, BAME, additional first language, etc.

Question 5: Following the introduction of remote learning as a result of COVID-19, please explain what (if any) changes to the guidance could be made to ensure it fully supports a 'blended learning' approach which combines remote and traditional classroom learning.

As an advisor body on ESDGC principles, WAGL would like to see overarching guidance to explain the multiple benefits to health and well-being of global learning.

Outdoor learning should be portrayed as a fundamental pedagogy, a way of teaching and learning, a unique space in which to promote learner well-being through connection to nature and the social aspects of playing and learning outdoors.

Blended learning approaches must also embed these principles.

Remote learning makes everyday monitoring wellbeing of learners difficult as there is more limited interaction between learners and school staff (domestic abuse situations being a significant issue during COVID). This is not touched upon at all within the framework which seems to rely on physical interactions between staff and learners which is all based on the assumption of no second wave limiting this, there is an opportunity within the blended learning experience of remote and traditional classroom to account for this. We know multiple learners are already in and out of self-isolation with highly variable levels of interaction between schools and pupils.

There are multiple examples of materials adapted for blended or home learning, for example, Size of Wales, WWF, and Natural History Museum produced home learning resources. WCIA ran online Model UNs and climate summer schools for pupils - this kind of interaction and pupil enrichment should be actively encouraged, particularly as learners are restricted to their bubbles limiting external interaction - digital opportunities for engaging with other learners but also other inspirational people from all over the world have been enhanced as digital competency has increased. For example, school partnerships between Wales and Lesotho continued throughout COVID enabling pupils and teachers to build solidarity and share experiences.

On a purely practical note, the ability of to provide and interact with external bodies in the delivery of high quality blended learning is hampered by differering, blanket unnecessary restrictions regarding some remote software (e.g. Zoom) which has prevented some students from taking part in pupil enrichment experiences during lockdown with rules varying hugely across schools and counties. More robust guidance from Welsh Governmnet on appropriate online safeguarding alongside removing barriers to participation should be considered. This should take the starting point of enabling rather than blanket bans.

Question 6: Following publication of the guidance, what (if any) implementation activity (e.g. training and/or awareness-raising for specific audiences) do you consider will be necessary?

This will be a new mandate for the majority of school staff and senior leadership at a time of great change and with the embedding of the new curriculum already resulting in an existing deficit in confidence and competence across school staff. There is a risk of inflating this further. They may/will have limited experience or exposure during initial teacher training to health and well-being pedagogies including global learning ato promote well-being.

WAGL would like to see every school in Wales, facilitated by its own coordinator role, encompassing the development, use and maintenance cycle of outdoor learning spaces for health, well-being and attainment. This would be a cost effective method of ensuring both pupil development and local environmental gains. To act as a link between school, local authority and third sector organisations.

The new curriculum may require specialist practitioners in health and wellbeing to enable the realisation of the Health and Well-being AoLE, requiring a new, professional development pathway from initial teacher education through to leadership development.

Question 8: We would like to know your views on the effects that the guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on: i) opportunities for people to use Welsh ii) treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

WAGL welcomes parity given to Welsh, English and all first languages used by learners in Wales.

Question 9: Please also explain how you believe the guidance could be formulated or changed so as to have: i) positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language ii) no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language

WAGL would like the guidance to be expanded to include opportunities for parity across all global languages for first language learners.

Question 10: 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:

There is a climate change and nature emergency which will have impacted on children's well-being and hopes for their future. Inequality and poverty is still pervasive.

Children are witnessing environmental degradation and destruction in real time, and hear about global threats like climate change and species loss combined with continuing challenges of poverty and inequality. Children have fears and worries about environmental risks and losses and inequalities they and those around them face.

These stresses can have detrimental effects on pupil well-being. A whole school approach could play a significant role in supporting children's well-being by providing conditions to form constructive hope and find the capacity to face challenges, while finding positive meaning in taking action individually and collectively - the more these actions can be connected into communities (local, national and global) the better.

A whole school approach needs to encompass the vital role to human health and well-being, that the natural environment plays, embedding pro-environmental behaviours through nature connectedness to enable a better future for Wales. Local national and international contexts should be emphasised too in order for learners to reduce anxieties around COVID 19 and to be able to deal with their own sense of identity and belonging.

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

CF10

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

Name Susie Ventris-Field

Organisation (if applicable) Wales Alliance for Global Learning

If you want to receive a receipt of your response, please provide an email address. Email address

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