

Why Do We Need a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice?

The Department of Education and Skills has a key role to play in promoting the wellbeing of children and young people in Ireland, in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Children and Youth Affairs, and with other Government Departments and Agencies. The promotion of wellbeing in the education community is a priority for the Department of Education and Skills. This statement sets out the policy of the Department of Education and Skills in relation to its role in the promotion of the wellbeing of our children and young people in schools and centres for education.

Schools play a vital role in the promotion of children and young people's academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development. Our education system is key to equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills and competencies to deal with challenges that may impact on their wellbeing.

The Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice sets out the Department's ambition and vision for wellbeing promotion, building on the many guidelines and frameworks that are already available to support and promote the wellbeing of children and young people.

This document has been informed by extensive consultation with stakeholders and international research and practice. They include:

- Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009)
- Get Active Physical Education: Physical Activity and Sport for Children and Young People – A Guideline Framework (DES, 2012)
- Well-Being in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH & HSE, 2013)
- Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (DES, DOH & HSE, 2015)

- Framework for Junior Cycle (DES & NCAA, 2015)
- Looking at Our School: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools (DES, Inspectorate, 2016)
- Looking at Our School: A Quality Framework for Post Primary Schools DES, Inspectorate, 2016)
- Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (DES & NCCA, 2017)
- A Whole School Guidance Framework (NCGE, 2017)
- Youthreach Soft Skills Framework (Gordon & County Meath ETB, 2015).

Children and young people learn more effectively and have better academic outcomes if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves and feel acknowledged and supported in their schools. National and international research highlights that the wellbeing of our children and young people is critical to their success in education and in life.

It is clear from the research, which includes feedback provided by young people, that there are areas where improvements can be made. This Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice draws from that research and acknowledges the considerable strengths already in the system and in current practice. This policy statement provides an overarching structure encompassing existing, ongoing and developing work in this area.

Its implementation is an ongoing process that will ensure the necessary focus on supporting children and young people in having a sense of purpose and fulfilment, and the skills necessary to deal with life's challenges. Data on the success and impact of this policy will emerge after a period of time from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other sources in the 9 longer term.

Evaluation and measurement of success is a challenge internationally and the Department is actively collaborating with international partners in developing a framework for evaluation. Schools and centres for education are supported in this

document to identify their own targets for development and track their own success in implementation through use of statements of effective practice set out in the Wellbeing Framework for Practice.

This approach is aligned to the already familiar School Self-Evaluation process. Key Principles The development of this policy has been guided by key principles, which in turn will guide its implementation and monitoring:

- **Child/Young person-centred:** The wellbeing needs and the best interests of our children and young people are a central focus of this policy. This requires us to respect and value the voice of children and young people and foster their belonging and connectedness to the school community. This ensures a sound developmental base for present and future wellbeing, as well as academic achievement.
- **Equitable, fair and inclusive:** All children and young people need access to equitable, fair and inclusive opportunities to develop their wellbeing in ways that are responsive and suitable to their particular needs and contexts. Practices need to be tailored, responsive and relevant, building on the existing strengths of children and young people, school staff, families and school communities. This means that practices will vary across schools and centres for education and from student to student.
- **Evidence-informed:** This policy promotes the use of evidence-informed practice, which brings together local experience and expertise with the best available evidence from research. It acknowledges that what works in one context may not be appropriate or feasible in another.
- **Outcomes focused:** This policy promotes continuous improvement practices and the use of data relating to outcomes to guide practice in our schools in relation to the promotion of wellbeing for all children and young people. This policy and framework for practice will ensure the use of a self reflection process for the identification, monitoring and review of outcomes.

- **Partnership/Collaboration:** The wellbeing of our children and young people is a shared responsibility. Working in partnership with other departments and agencies is key to ensuring this policy is implemented.

Supporting the Implementation of the Wellbeing Promotion Process

Wellbeing Resources, to support the Wellbeing Promotion Process will provide practical tools and information to support schools and centres for education. These Wellbeing Resources will include:

- Statements of Effective Practice for Wellbeing Promotion
- Evaluation Tools: Parent/Carer, Child/Young Person and Staff Questionnaires • Focus Group Guidelines to facilitate access to the voice of key stakeholder
- Exemplars of good practice
- A Wellbeing Practice Recording Template
- List of current supports and resources relevant to wellbeing promotion for each of the four key areas
- Revised circular for schools to provide strengthened guidance on the use of programmes/external facilitators in school wellbeing promotion.

Using the Wellbeing Resources, schools and centres for education should monitor their work to improve wellbeing promotion. Progress on addressing the Statements of Effective Practice are specific and tailored to the wellbeing needs identified by stakeholders. They are evaluated by each individual school using the Wellbeing Promotion Process.