

Report title: Food and fitness in schools - A report on how well schools in Wales support children and young people to be healthy and active.

Report Details

The Additional Needs and Inclusion Division within Department for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning and Skills requested that, as part of Estyn's 2007-2008 remit, that Estyn identify how well primary and secondary schools are doing in Wales in improving pupils' health with an emphasis on physical activity and healthy eating.

Summary of main findings.

Food and drink

Breakfast clubs, particularly in primary schools, have a positive impact on the health and well-being, behaviour, punctuality and attendance of the pupils who participate.

The quality of the dining experience affects whether or not pupils choose to have a school meal. Many schools have kitchens that require investment in new facilities.

Pupils who are allowed off-site at lunch times often buy food in local shops and cafes. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals often do not take up their free meal if they are allowed off-site, because they wish to be with their friends.

All schools have improved the range of healthy food and drinks on offer in recent years.

Almost all schools provide opportunities for pupils to learn about healthy living issues as part of the curriculum.

Many schools do not coordinate learning about healthy living effectively across the curriculum.

Physical activity

Schools that participate in initiatives such as Physical Education and School Sports (PESS) and Dragon Sport are effective in encouraging pupils to be more active. These schools normally provide pupils with the recommended minimum of two hours a week of physical education. However, six out of every 10 of the schools surveyed do not provide this minimum.

Most schools have good arrangements to encourage pupils to be active during break times and lunch times, but only a few are successful in getting pupils to walk or cycle to school.

Many schools use community sport facilities well and often this leads to pupils using the facilities outside school time. Many schools have generally good

equipment for physical activities, although changing areas and shower facilities are of more variable quality.

Strategic approaches for healthy living

School leaders are committed to young people's health and well-being. Most schools are actively developing their policies and practices for healthy living, particularly in relation to food and drink. Many use award schemes as a catalyst for this work. This is particularly true of Healthy School schemes and the Eco-Schools programme.

Nearly all schools rely on extra funding to sustain healthy living work, particularly on targeted funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. Few schools have planned how to continue this work when funding ceases.

Most schools work well with parents, health and social care professionals, police officers, and local and national voluntary organisations to encourage healthy and active lifestyles. Most pupils think that members of staff in their school are good role models for healthy living.

Aspects of toilets are unsatisfactory in half of the secondary schools and in a quarter of primary schools surveyed. Where pupils are not happy with the condition of school toilets, they are more likely not to drink enough water during the school day so as to avoid using them.

The school council in every school surveyed has discussed healthy living in the last two years. In most schools, taking account of the views of pupils has resulted in minor changes to the food and drink available and the arrangements at break times and lunch times.

Most school councils have discussed issues that impact on physical activity, particularly the safety of walking to and from school and the range of after-school clubs on offer. However, only a very few schools have effective systems for evaluating the impact of their healthy living work.

Recommendations 1

Schools should review their lunch time arrangements to ensure that they support healthy living in line with the good practice highlighted in this report;

Welsh Assembly Government Response

In line with the guidance for "Developing a Whole School Food and Fitness Policy", in considering a whole school approach, schools should ensure that the eating environment provides an enjoyable eating experience which underpins the valuing of each pupil, paying careful attention to key factors such as length of the lunch break and management of queuing. The "Developing a Whole School Food and Fitness Policy" guidance was distributed to all schools in September 2007.

Recommendation 2

Schools should plan for and set targets to increase the take-up of free school meals;

Welsh Assembly Government Response

The Welsh Assembly Government will be commissioning a literature review of work undertaken on take-up of free school meal entitlement; and following this, we will consider the need to commission a specific piece of research aimed at identifying the reasons affecting take up of free school meals. This will help inform the development of appropriate strategies to increase take-up of free school entitlement.

The Appetite for Life Coordinator is developing and implementing a marketing and communications strategy to help address issues such as take-up.

From March 2008, we introduced an internet based system for Local Authorities, to streamline the process for Free School Meals eligibility checking, the system will provide a national checking system which will reduce bureaucracy for schools, parents and Local Authorities; encourage take-up of entitlement by removing the perceived stigma of the application process; and reduce the scope for fraud and error.

Recommendation 3

Schools should plan to meet the new nutrient, food and drink standards in the Appetite for Life Action Plan;

Welsh Assembly Government Response

A 2 year action research project involving four local authorities (Ceredigion, Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen and Wrexham) will run from September 2008 to develop and test the guidelines for implementing the food and nutritional standards proposed in the Appetite for Life Action Plan to inform wider application across Wales.

Funding is available for all local authorities, to support schools not involved in the action research project to progress to the new standards proposed in the Appetite for Life Action Plan.

Unique to Wales, nutritional analysis software has been procured by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) following grant funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. This will assist caterers in planning menus using their own recipes and to share recipes and with catering colleagues across Wales. This software will be managed by the Appetite for Life Co-ordinator and will be available to all catering providers not just those participating in the project.

Recommendation 4

Schools should improve the coordination of healthy living work across the curriculum, provide more opportunities for pupils to learn how to prepare food and use a consistent approach to teaching what makes a balanced diet;

Welsh Assembly Government Response

As part of the revised Design and Technology Order in the new school curriculum to be implemented from September 2008, food will become a compulsory material in the programmes of study for both Key Stages 2 and 3.

Pupils will have opportunities to practise, safely and hygienically, a broad

range of practical food preparation and cooking tasks and to consider current healthy eating messages and nutritional needs. This information was sent to schools in Wales in January 2008.

It is the responsibility of schools to plan and deliver broad, balanced curriculum to meet the specific needs of all learners.

Guidance is being prepared on 'Food and Fitness' in order to help schools plan and provide effective education on this important aspect of health and well being. This will be sent to all schools alongside the "In Perspective" case studies booklet.

The Welsh Assembly Government's Cooking Bus visits primary schools in Communities first areas to provide practical cooking sessions for pupils. A teacher training session is also provided, and cooking utensils are provided, in order to assist teachers in implementing practical cooking sessions following the Cooking Bus visit.

Recommendation 5

Schools should provide pupils with the recommended minimum amount of physical education and offer pupils a wider range of physical activities;

Welsh Assembly Government Response

The physical education National Curriculum has been amended to allow greater flexibility in relation to what activities can be offered. It is hoped that this will allow activities to be more aligned to pupil's interests thereby creating improved participation.

The PE and School Sports Initiative (PESS) is also raising standards and opportunities in PE particularly in primary schools where it is often taught by non-specialists; the Sports Council for Wales is leading on implementation of PESS with support from Welsh Assembly Government. Working with LEAs, the central element of this work lies in the establishment of PESS Partnerships – which bring together clusters of schools to make best use of facilities and expertise with a target of 2 hours curriculum time PE each week.

The target is that by 2010 all schools will be involved in PESS Partnerships. Practical guidance (training and resources) have been developed to support the more technically difficult aspects of PE including Gymnastics and Dance. Guidance on health-related exercise has also been developed; this is being revised to align with the new curriculum from September 2008. Specialist projects are providing improved training and development opportunities for practitioners (over 15,000 development opportunities provided to January 2008). Among creative initiatives to emerge from PESS is the *In the Zone* playground package which is encouraging children to engage in more active and constructive play during break times and is making a significant contribution to ensuring the recommended levels of physical activity for children.

Dragon Sport continues to provide a range of extra curricular clubs across 7 sports in the vast majority of primary schools and subsequently offers a key

link for pupils into community clubs.

In secondary schools curricular PE is complemented by the extra curricular 5 x 60 programme which particularly targets those pupils that have been dis-engaged with physical activity and sport by offering a diverse range of activities identified by the pupils themselves.

An increasing percentage of schools are offering the recommended minimum of 2 hours of curricular PE per week but there are still various factors that inhibit this target including curriculum planning, staffing and facility issues.

As part of the One Wales commitments there will be a pilot programme of Saturday and summer schools in sport, art and music during 2008/09 with the aim of further extending opportunities through schools and the community for young people to be physically active throughout the week and vacation periods. Schools should be encouraged to engage with this initiative as part of their community focussed provision and holistic approach to the development of young people.

Recommendation 6

Schools should ensure that toilets and changing facilities meet appropriate minimum standards.

Welsh Assembly Government Response

The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 prescribe the minimum standards as far as school premises are concerned both new and existing, these are currently being reviewed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families with input from the Welsh Assembly Government.

The '*Mind the Germs*' leaflet was distributed to nurseries, playgroups and other childcare settings throughout Wales during June 2006, provided simple, practical advice which to aid staff in their understanding of infection control and how to prevent it spreading in settings where young children are in contact with other children and staff.

A second booklet called '*Teach Germs a Lesson*' was distributed to all primary and secondary schools in Wales in October 2006 and gives simple, practical advice to enable staff in primary and secondary schools to better understand infections, what they can do to reduce the risk of them occurring as well as what to do to reduce infections spreading.

Guidance on achieving Phase 6 of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes stipulates that schools should have covered a range of health topics including hygiene, requiring compliance with the advice in '*Teach Germs a Lesson*' and considering the standards of the school toilets.

Recommendation 7

Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of their actions to improve pupils' health

Welsh Assembly Government Response

Schools which are participating in local healthy school schemes as part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes are required to plan their actions to improve health, and to set targets against which they are assessed within the agreed timescale.

They may also look at outcomes e.g. number of pupils buying fruit; incidences of bullying recorded. However, it is felt that it is not realistic for an individual school to look at improvements in health per se. It is important to note that health related policies delivered in schools should be informed by robust national research and evaluation activity. Recent examples of this include the evaluation of the Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative and the planned Appetite for Life Action Research Project.

Guidance will be produced on the assessment of schools at Phase 6 of the WNHSS (which will only be achieved after at least 9-years involvement). This guidance will provide clear process and outcome indicators to be assessed.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Assembly Government should work with schools and local authorities to ensure that all schools meet the new nutrient, food and drink standards in the Appetite for Life Action Plan as soon as is practicably possible and set a target date for this;

Welsh Assembly Government Response

Reflecting on all the information gathered through the Appetite for Life consultation process including lessons learnt from other parts of the UK and detailed discussions with the Local Authority Caterers Association we have decided, at this stage, not to introduce the new nutrient, food and drink standards through legislation.

A 2 year action research project involving four local authorities (Ceredigion, Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen and Wrexham) will run from September 2008 to develop and test the guidelines for implementing the food and nutritional standards proposed in the Action Plan to inform wider application across Wales. Draft guidance to support the practical implementation of the food and nutritional standards proposed in Appetite for Life will be developed and tested through the two year Action Research Project and amended as lessons are learnt.

Funding is also being made available via a specific grant scheme to support, across all authorities, schools not involved in the action research project who wish to progress to the new standards proposed in the Action Plan. Total funding available is £6.6m between 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Assembly Government should work with schools and local authorities to fund improvements to catering and dining facilities and facilities for teaching pupils how to prepare and cook food.

Welsh Assembly Government Response

All authorities in Wales receive significant Assembly support for improvements to buildings and associated facilities in schools. There are a number of sources of funding available to local authorities to fund major works of a capital nature – their own general capital funding – provided by the Welsh Assembly Government on an unhypothecated basis, access to prudential borrowing and capital receipts.

The Welsh Assembly Government also provides School Buildings Improvement Grant (SBIG) to Local Education Authorities which is ring-fenced and can only be used for school buildings improvements. Each authority receives an allocation of grant and decides which schools are to benefit in the light of local priorities. The funding for the Assembly's SBIG currently stands at £90 million annually, and it is set to continue at this level to the end of the decade to underpin our commitment that all schools in Wales will be in good physical shape and properly maintained.

Recommendation 10.

The Welsh Assembly Government should work with schools and local authorities to introduce minimum standards for school toilets and changing facilities

Welsh Assembly Government Response

The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 currently prescribe the minimum standards as far as school premises are concerned both new and existing, these are currently being reviewed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families with input from the Welsh Assembly Government.

Following the E-coli outbreak, '*Mind the Germs*' a basic hygiene leaflet to reinforce the importance to children and teaching staff of preventing and dealing with infections efficiently and effectively was distributed to nurseries, playgroups and other childcare settings throughout Wales during June 2006. This provided simple, practical advice which to aid staff in their understanding of infection control and how to prevent it spreading in settings where young children are in contact with other children and staff.

Following the success of '*Mind the Germs*', a second booklet called '*Teach Germs a Lesson*' was launched in October 2006 and gives simple, practical advice to enable staff in primary and secondary schools to better understand infections, what they can do to reduce the risk of them occurring as well as what to do to reduce infections spreading. The booklet highlights the need to check that schools and other settings are clean before children arrive, and the importance of establishing a daily cleaning routine, including classrooms, play areas, toilets, kitchens, toys and other equipment. It also gives clear advice on teaching children about what they can do to reduce infection.

Guidance on achieving Phase 6 of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes stipulates that schools should have covered a range of health topics including hygiene, requiring compliance with the advice in '*Teach Germs a Lesson*' and considering the standards of the school toilets.

Recommendation 11.

The Welsh Assembly Government should work with schools and local authorities to provide guidance for schools on how to evaluate the effectiveness of their actions to improve pupils' health

Welsh Assembly Government Response

Schools which are participating in local healthy school schemes as part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes are required to plan their actions to improve health, and to set targets against which they are assessed. Many of the targets set are process targets by date.

They may also look at outcomes e.g. number of pupils buying fruit; incidences of bullying recorded. However, it is felt that it is not realistic for an individual school to look at improvements in health per se.

The Welsh Assembly Government also monitors changes in health behaviours using the 4-yearly Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey which is undertaken with pupils in Years 7, 9 and 11; and for which we have data from 1986. Information on children and young people's health is also now collected through the Welsh Health Survey.

The current Review of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes will provide an indication of the effectiveness of work across Wales to date. An early draft of the Review has indicated that we should provide more guidance on outcomes. This will be incorporated into the next all-Wales Healthy School Co-Ordinator training in October 2008.

We are currently drafting guidance on the assessment of schools at Phase 6 of the WNHSS (which will only be achieved after at least 9-years involvement). This guidance will provide clear process and outcome indicators to be assessed.

It is important to note that health related policies delivered in schools should be informed by robust national research and evaluation activity. Recent examples of this include the evaluation of the Primary School Free Breakfast Initiative and planned action research built into the Appetite for Life case studies.

Publication Details.

The report "*Food and Fitness in schools - A report on how well schools in Wales support children and young people to be healthy and active*" is scheduled for publication on 6 May 2008 and will be available on Estyn's web site at www.estyn.gov.uk