

Draft framework guidance on embedding a whole-school approach

Consultation response form

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Responses should be returned by 30 September 2020 to:

Health and Well-being in Schools

Support for Learners Division

The Education Directorate

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

e-mail: Mentalhealth.Schools@gov.wales

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

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If you selected ‘Slightly disagree’ or ‘Strongly disagree’, please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

Supporting comments

Natural Resources Wales welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft framework and would like to raise the following general points:

- the absence of acknowledgment of the vital role the natural environment plays in promoting positive mental health and emotional well-being in children and school staff despite worldwide research that demonstrates this.
- the need for improved and expanded guidance on how the natural environment supports positive mental health and emotional well-being.
- the need for explicit reference to the natural environment as an inclusive, cost-effective venue for health and well-being interventions to take place.
- the need for explicit guidance on the opportunities to increase physical activity whilst learning and playing in the natural environment which in turn leads to improved mental health and well-being
- the need to ensure a skilled, confident and knowledgeable work force who understand how to promote health and well-being in nature through relevant activities that also embed pro-environmental behaviours.
- clarity around how the existing Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) will support the narrative of this framework considering its existing intention that states *“Engagement with this Area will help to foster a whole-school approach that enables health and well-being to permeate all aspects of school life.”*

As principal advisor to Senedd Cymru on the natural environment and its sustainable management, NRW would like to see overarching guidance to explain the multiple benefits to the health and well-being of both staff and pupils, of learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment. This is absent from the Draft Framework and any reference to ‘outside’ refers to outside the school day as opposed to the outdoors.

Whilst the use of outdoor space is noted in sections on the ‘Environment and Facilities’, it is not just a space. 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.

Experiences such as residential stays, adventure education, recognised accredited methods like forest school and coastal school, field work, environmental education

and the use of school grounds, local parks, woodlands and beaches - all the places which can “provide rich experiences” for learners - are fundamental to developing emotional literacy, resilience and a sense of self.

Evidence from around the world demonstrates the benefits to health and well-being of a connection with the natural environment. Biophilia hypothesis outlines the idea that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life. American biologist Edward O. Wilson in his work Biophilia (1984), proposed that the tendency of humans to focus on and to affiliate with nature and other life-forms has, in part, a genetic basis and if missing can have a detrimental effect on overall human health. More recently this is particularly evident in research during COVID -19 (Healthychildren.org, 2020; Hayhow et al, 2019)

More information can also be found on the NRW [website](#) terms of the:

- opportunities to increase physical activity
- opportunities to increase attainment
- both of which contribute to improved mental health and well-being

Despite being deemed important enough to include the natural environment throughout the Curriculum for Wales guidance, AoLE’s and in the recent Operational Guidance and Safe Return to School Guidance, with equal emphasis put on the indoor and outdoor classroom, this vital resource is not mentioned as a cost-effective well-being intervention in this framework.

Question 2 – To what extent do you agree 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?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If you selected ‘Slightly disagree’ or ‘Strongly disagree’, please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

Supporting comments

As a public sector organisation and principal advisor to Senedd Cymru on the natural environment and sustainable management of natural resources, we view the guidance as slightly helpful in terms of promoting a two-dimensional whole school ethos but it fails to include the outdoor element, specifically natural spaces undermining the development and embedding of vital best practice.

Teaching children in the natural environment is beneficial for the well-being of school staff and can lay down valuable foundations for future experiences and subject knowledge. Research over the last 10 years indicates that practitioners see children in a different light when teaching them in the outdoor environment and this positively affects the teacher to child relationship which in turn positively influences children’s engagement in their learning (Bilton & Waters 2016; Natural Learning.org 2012).

Research in Scotland also found that children spending their school day covering curriculum subjects in a woodland setting were 2.7 times more active than on a usual school day. More surprisingly, they were found to be 2.4 times more active than a day with timetabled PE. The opportunities for increased physical activity and the realised benefits to mental health and well-being that this can bring are vital and must be understood and appreciated by school staff and leaders.

We welcome a whole school approach however, if we see school staff and senior leadership struggling with how to use the outdoors for learning, there is even more concern about the understanding of the health and well-being benefits of a connection to nature and how to promote positive behaviour change through interaction with the natural environment.

Many Key Stage 2 teachers who attend our professional learning courses do not recognise nature-based well-being or learning opportunities or know how to incorporate basic outdoor activities into their teaching and learning.

The content and experiences within Initial Teacher Education, childcare and youth work courses are going to be critical if the Framework is to serve our learners well. This requires a different pedagogical approach to truly address the intentions set out. There is a need to:

- draw on evidence-based practice for the delivery of well-being in schools
- provide universal professional learning for all school staff
- provide a targeted approach for more specialist well-being coordinators

If our learners are to enjoy positive well-being while meeting the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, experiences must include significant amounts of learning in, learning about and learning for the natural environment to ensure an early connection with nature and an understanding of local action and global consequence. Research shows that there are important positive correlations between human health, well-being intelligence and nature. Various studies have shown children are healthier, happier, smarter and more creative when they have a [connection to nature](#). This connection has positive effects on issues which can affect well-being including:

- children with attention deficit disorder
- children with asthma
- helping to prevent Vitamin D deficiency
- guarding against obesity and type 2 diabetes
- minimising childhood short sightedness
- promoting academic attainment
- reducing the symptoms of stress
- developing employability skills
- opportunities to increase physical activity
- opportunities to lay down a blueprint of pro environmental behaviour

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?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If you selected 'Slightly disagree' or 'Strongly disagree', please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

Supporting comments

The Framework does not go far enough to suggest a role in each setting to act 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. Partnerships such as the Wales Physical Activity Partnership (WPAP) made up of Sports Wales, Public Health Wales and NRW are able to provide support in this area and would be happy to help.

It is important for Senedd Cymru to highlight those public-sector bodies and organisations who can offer high quality, reputable and free support, advice and guidance.

For example the [High Quality Outdoor Learning for Wales](#) document has been included in recent Safe Return to School guidance and includes sections on:
 Outcome 2 – confidence and character
 Outcome 3 – health and well-being
 Outcome 4 – social and emotional awareness
 Outcome 5 – environmental awareness
 Outcome 6 – activity skills
 Outcome 7 – personal qualities
 Outcome 8 – skills for life
 Outcome 9 – increased motivation and appetite for learning
 Outcome 10 – broadened horizons

Other members from the main learning networks in Wales also have tried and tested resources and training opportunities. Schools across North Wales are using outdoor approaches to mitigate trauma and lessons can be learnt from this practice.

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?

Strongly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly agree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Slightly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If you selected 'Slightly disagree' or 'Strongly disagree', please expand on what further amendments you think are necessary.

Supporting comments

The guidance does suggest examples of those requiring targeted support and studies have highlighted the benefits of learning in a natural environment for those with additional learning needs and existing mental health issues. However, it needs to be clear that the benefits of engaging, learning and playing in the outdoors are applicable to all learners and can be preventative as well as restorative.

Question 5 – Following the introduction of remote learning as a result of Covid19, 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.

Blended learning can be very successful and is already being utilised well in some settings. Blended learning must be seen as three-fold – the indoor classroom, the use of technology and the outdoor classroom. The important role of the outdoors has been recognised in the Operational Guidance which states:

It also has important benefits during the COVID-19 outbreak as:

- *evidence indicates that the risk of infection is reduced outdoors*
- *evidence suggests that the virus suffers in sunlight*
- *social distancing is easier to observe and maintain outside, which Practically, it may be easier for practitioners to manage larger groups of learners outdoors.*

However, **all** practitioners need to know and understand the ways in which this can work and how technology and the outdoors can be used together in an engaging way. Recent research also offers ways in which technology can be used to actually reconnect children with nature (Sakr, 2020, Boulton, 2020) when used as part of a blended approach. Listed suggestions of how this can be applied including case studies and resources would be useful for practitioners to consider as part of the guidance. Statements that simply describe or suggest offering a blended approach are not particularly helpful and at a time when teaching staff are dealing with the unknown, practical help is required. NRW and members of the learning networks it facilitates would be happy to support this development.

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. Many may have limited experience or exposure during initial teacher education to health and well-being pedagogies including outdoor learning.

Consistent training for teachers and education practitioners will need to be made available to help them adjust and implement practice that can confidently support children’s health and well-being. This should include workshops on mental health and well-being for all with the uptake of accredited qualifications for those who wish

to take their learning further. Agored Cymru have a range of recently reviewed certificates and awards in outdoor learning pedagogy and well-being in nature.

Webinars or restrictions allowing, face to face courses can be provided on:

- How to survey, develop, use and maintain the outdoor classroom
- How to develop and use the outdoor classroom to increase physical activity which in turn has a positive effect on mental health and well-being
- Approaches to blended learning and the use of digital technology to reconnect children to the natural environment
- Understanding the benefits of learning outdoors on children's health and well-being
- Confidence in basic risk assessment and risk benefit analysis for outdoor learning

All courses would include cost effective, low resource activities and games, linked to and teaching across the curriculum.

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.

NRW would like to see every setting with at least one appropriately trained and qualified member of staff who fully understands outdoor learning pedagogy and the wider determinants of health and can implement interventions in order to gain the multiple benefits for staff and learners the natural environment can realise.

This would be a cost-effective method of ensuring both pupil development and local environmental gains.

Question 7 – Are our proposals for governance and accountability enough to ensure the guidance is embedded in practice? In particular, are Regional Partnership Boards best placed to hold all stakeholders to account?

No comment

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?

Supporting comments

No comment

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.

Supporting comments

No comment

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.

Senedd Cymru and Natural Resources Wales have declared a climate change and nature emergency. The current state of the natural environment will have impacts on children’s well-being and hopes for their future. With the natural world currently under levels of stress unparalleled in human history, children are witnessing environmental degradation and destruction in real time, hearing about global threats like species loss and developing fears and worries about environmental risks and the future.

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 environmental threats and uncertainties, while finding positive meaning in taking action. 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 at a young age, to enable a better future for Wales.

In Operational Guidance to Schools, Senedd Cymru has advocated the use of the *High Quality in Outdoor Learning in Wales* document to underpin pupil health and well-being. This would continue to be a valuable resource to support this framework.

NRW would be happy to support the development of further resources as required.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: