



A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU

NESET Analytical Report, 2021

Summary

This analytical report is in response to the recognised need for schools in Europe to prioritise and actively promote the mental health and well-being of school children within safe and inclusive contexts. It provides a framework on how well-being and mental health in schools may be promoted through a systemic, whole-school approach, with illustrations of how this may be implemented in the curriculum, the classroom context and the whole-school ecology.

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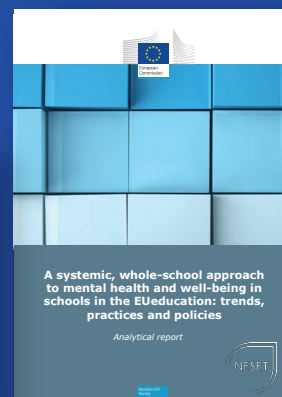
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Context

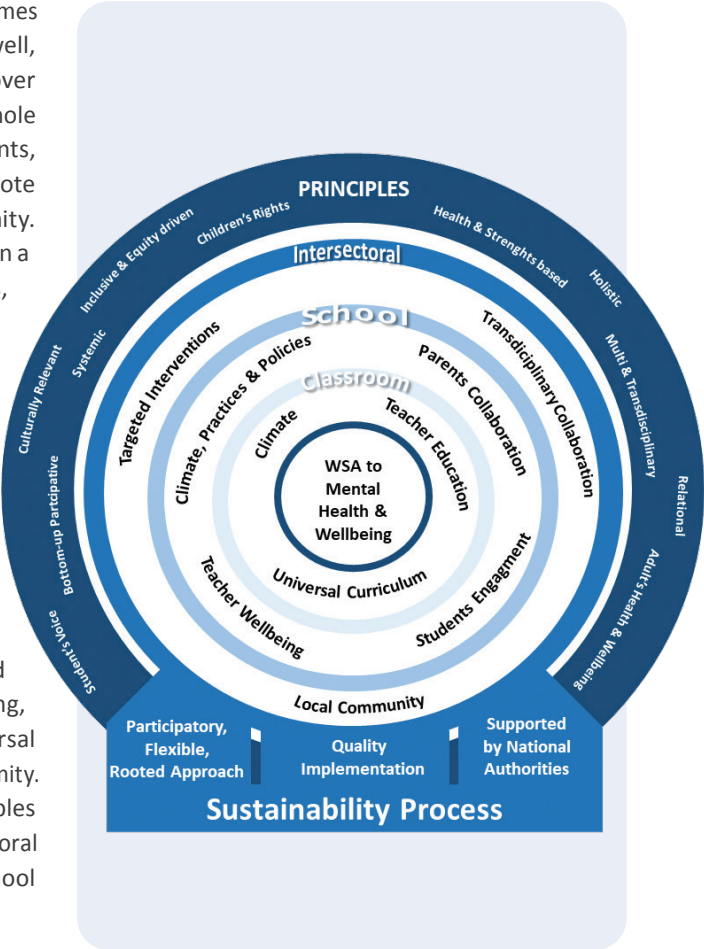
There is a general consensus among Member States that academic knowledge on its own is not enough for young people to achieve active citizenship and face the socio-economic realities in their lives so as to avoid inequity, poverty, discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion. Twenty-first-century education needs to go beyond narrow sectoral goals such as academic achievement and contribute actively towards the health and wellbeing of children and young people, whose mental health needs are becoming more evident and demanding.

The report

This report responds to the emerging need for schools across Europe to prioritise and actively promote the mental health and well-being of school children within safe and inclusive contexts. Its aim is to provide an evidence-informed framework for how the whole school system, in collaboration with the community, may be mobilised at various levels to promote mental health and well-being. It makes a number of specific recommendations as to how this transformation of education can take place in schools across Europe.

Key findings

Whole-school interventions have a more positive impact on student outcomes than single or individual components, provided they are implemented well, are integrated into the fabric of the school context, and are sustained over time. A whole-school approach mobilises the various resources of the whole school community, including the active engagement and voices of students, staff, parents and professionals, towards a collaborative effort to promote the mental health and well-being of all members of the community. Well-implemented, whole-school interventions have a positive impact on a range of mental health, social, emotional and educational outcomes, including increases in mental health literacy, social and emotional competences and positive mental health, as well as decreases in mental health symptoms and problems such as depression, anxiety, substance use, violence and bullying. Mental health promotion also helps to challenge negative views of mental health issues, leading to a reduction in stigmatising behaviour. Various reviews have also reported an impact on children’s commitment to school and sense of belonging, as well as enhanced learning motivation and academic achievement. Lastly, positive impacts are also seen among children who are at risk of or experiencing mental health issues, thus serving to promote resilience and reduce socio-economic inequity. This report presents an integrated framework for a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being, with interventions at curricular and contextual levels, integrated universal and targeted interventions, and the involvement of the whole school community. The framework consists of three components – namely, a set of principles informing the framework; key elements at classroom, school and intersectoral layers; and the sustainability processes that support the whole-school approach.



Key recommendations

This analytical report identifies the following key recommendations:

Mental health promotion as a mandatory key learning goal in 21st century education	Mainstreaming of mental health and well-being into the formal curriculum and pedagogy	Adapting the metrics of school success to prioritise mental health and well-being	Adopting a systemic, whole-school approach	Relatedness and connectedness at the heart of mental health promotion	A bottom-up, participatory approach	Developing a mental health and well-being curriculum for school children in Europe
Providing school-based intersectoral support for students with mental health needs	A strategic focus on the mental health needs of vulnerable and marginalised students	Involving the whole school community in tailoring interventions to prevent bullying	Prioritising teacher education in mental health and well-being	Addressing the mental health and well-being of adults working with children	Strengthening evidence and evidence-based practice	