

Building a vision for the school of tomorrow

Healthy Schools is currently celebrating its tenth anniversary year, and within this time it has established itself as one of the country's most widely embraced, non-statutory government initiatives in schools



RICHARD SANGSTER



Jointly funded by the Department of Health and Department for Children Schools and Families, and delivered through a network of 150 local programmes grounded in partnerships between primary care trusts, local authorities and their schools, Healthy Schools has generated widespread popularity, offering guidance and support on a broad range of issues affecting children and young people; from childhood obesity, to teenage pregnancy, substance misuse and bullying.

Over the past ten years we have taken some very healthy steps forward. Many of our schools are now world-leading in their creative approach to health promotion. School meals are a far cry from what they used to be, with huge investment in ingredients and kitchens, as well as fresh training for catering staff, and more children are benefitting from a minimum of two hours a week of high-quality PE and sport than ever before.

Today 98% of schools nationally are involved in the National Healthy Schools Programme and we estimate that over four million children – in 72% of our schools – are already attending a Healthy School. But the success of Healthy Schools also marks a broader shift in school culture. Ten years ago, the primary focus in schools was around academic standards, and rightly so, but more recently this focus has broadened,

with the government placing increasing emphasis on children and young people's wider health and wellbeing.

This approach isn't about giving up on high educational standards, because they really do matter, but it also recognises that a child who is healthy is likely to perform better in school, and a child who feels they're achieving is less likely to get involved in harmful behaviour.

The health and wellbeing agenda is still growing. The government's vision of the 21st Century School as outlined in the Children's Plan, the recent Child Health Strategy, ministerial pushes on healthy eating and statutory PSHE, as well as current consultations on pupil wellbeing indicators and wellbeing as part of the school report card all pay testament to this.

Against this backdrop, Healthy Schools reinforces the close integration of health promotion, intervention and education and

will play a key role in translating the government's vision of the 21st Century School into practice. Building upon the 41 criteria which schools have already met in order to become a Healthy School, from September 2009 schools will be invited to enhance their existing work, with a refreshed vision.

This enhanced Healthy Schools programme will better equip schools to promote universal health improvement for all pupils, as well as providing additional support specifically targeted to those identified as most at risk. It will also coincide with the new Ofsted inspection framework and will incorporate the new wellbeing indicators.

The approach will include a mixture of school-based, local and national priorities, flexibly developed by schools with key partners including Children's and Young People's Services, Primary Care Trusts, parents/carers, and children and young people themselves.

Ultimately, our vision is that by being part of an enhanced Healthy Schools programme, schools will be able to access support and guidance to make sense of this burgeoning health and wellbeing agenda, and to successfully embed healthier behaviours and wellbeing outcomes into the everyday business of school life. ●

Richard Sangster, head of the National Healthy Schools Programme. For more information, please visit: www.healthyschools.gov.uk



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