



Circular to Management Authorities of all Primary Schools

Best practice guidance for primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

This circular supersedes Circular 23/2010

1. Introduction

The Department of Education and Skills has developed a Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice which recognises the unique position of schools in promoting the wellbeing of students. **This policy requires that a Wellbeing Promotion Process is developed and implemented, through the use of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, in all schools by 2023.**

School management, principals and teachers have a duty to provide the best quality and the most appropriate education in order to promote the wellbeing of their students. They also have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources, interventions or programmes. The Department therefore wishes to advise management authorities of the necessity to adhere to best practice when implementing the [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#).

This circular offers best practice guidance in selecting wellbeing promotion programmes and/or external facilitators (both once-off speakers and those delivering programmes over a period of time), to support the implementation of the Wellbeing Promotion Process including, in particular, the selection for social, personal and health education (SPHE), and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) curricula. The advice provided in this circular applies with effect from the date of issue.



2. Responsibility of Schools

The Education Act (1998) states that:

A recognised school shall promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.

Schools are in a unique position to promote wellbeing, and social and emotional learning, and should ensure a whole school approach to wellbeing promotion and early intervention when considering appropriate use of external supports and services. Students flourish where there is a whole school approach to supporting their growth and where there is a shared belief in their potential for development, learning and wellbeing. Boards of management, school leaders and school staff are responsible for providing an environment that nurtures and supports students, and play a central role in providing leadership and direction for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach to wellbeing promotion.

The Department's [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#) assists schools in ensuring that wellbeing promotion is embedded within the school's existing practice. The school's review and development process using the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* provides guidance and practical resources to assist in the further enhancement of whole school approaches to wellbeing promotion in the areas of:

- culture and environment
- curriculum (teaching and learning)
- policy and planning
- relationships and partnerships

To ensure effective implementation of a whole school approach the school needs a structure such as a student support team which has wellbeing promotion as part of its responsibility.

It is essential that school managers and all staff continue to develop their competence and confidence in the promotion of wellbeing. **The qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students and she/he can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values, and behaviour in all aspects of wellbeing education.** This can be achieved through accessing continuing professional development (CPD) which includes the sharing of expertise and learning, and having opportunities to model and engage in collaborative working. The curricular elements of wellbeing promotion should be delivered by staff who are trained for this purpose having completed relevant CPD.



When a need is identified through the implementation of the Wellbeing Promotion Process and schools choose to select a programme or external speaker, it is important that best practice guidance as outlined in this circular is followed.

3. Supporting the School's Self-Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process with Programmes and/or External Facilitators

Use of programmes and/or external facilitators can play a role in supplementing, complementing and supporting a planned comprehensive approach to wellbeing promotion. Programmes and/or external facilitators are most likely to be effective when they:

- are part of a whole school approach and address an identified need
- are delivered to class groups with the involvement of school staff and the appropriate involvement of parents/carers
- enhance protective factors which predispose students to positive outcomes in the face of adversity such as: facilitating supportive adult-pupil relationships, strengthening life skills, helping students believe in their capacity to overcome hardship and building a sense of mastery over life circumstances
- adopt a planned implementation process, for example, incorporate needs analysis, use evidence informed programmes and track and evaluate outcomes for students
- are implemented and used in a school in a sustained way over a number of years in order to bring about lasting effects and benefits

4. Guidance for Engaging External Facilitators

When engaging external facilitators schools are advised to consider the following best practice criteria:

- External facilitators supplement, complement or support an identified component of the school's Wellbeing Promotion Process.



- External facilitators are approved by the principal and board of management in consultation with the relevant teaching staff. All materials proposed for use by the external facilitator must also be agreed in advance by the principal and the board.
- All external facilitators are compliant with the school's child protection policy and other relevant school policies and procedures.
- The school authority satisfies itself, having regard to its own legal advice if required, that it has met any vetting obligations that arise under the Vetting Act and in line with Circular 0031/2016, for such external facilitators.
- Programmes used are delivered by facilitators who are qualified to work within the specific area of content and with the students for whom the programmes are designed.
- Relevant school staff liaise with facilitators in advance of the delivery.
- **External facilitators always work under the guidance and supervision of the relevant classroom teacher who remains in the classroom with the students at all times and retains a central role in the delivery of the subject matter.** Absence of the teacher may undermine the integrity of the curriculum, and the credibility and professionalism of the teacher. It may also compromise the safety of the students.
- Relevant school staff are informed of the details of the programme being provided by external facilitators.
- Parents/carers are consulted and made aware in advance of the content of the programmes provided by external facilitators.
- External facilitators and programmes are evaluated by students and teachers with regard to the subject matter, messages communicated, methodology and proposed learning outcome.



5. Appraisal of Appropriate Use of External Facilitators

When appraising appropriate use of external facilitators, schools should consider the following best practice criteria:

- Facilitators supply comprehensive information to the school about their organisation, programme content and programme methodology.
- Facilitators demonstrate an understanding of the Department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and appropriate educational training and qualifications.
- Facilitators demonstrate skills in facilitating and managing groups and students.
- Facilitators demonstrate an understanding of the general organisation and structure of schools.
- Facilitators show an understanding of the role of school management, school support structures, roles of support staff and other relevant support services in the event of a challenging situation arising.

6. Appraisal of Appropriate Use of Programmes

When appraising the appropriate use of programmes, schools should consider the following best practice criteria:

- The programme or input supports/complements the whole school Wellbeing Promotion Process which includes the social personal and health education, physical education and civic, social and political education curricula.
- Consideration is given to the programme's sustainability and whether the programme will bring about lasting effects or if its benefits will end on the completion of the programme.



- The programme is appropriate for the educational stage of the students, and includes evidence informed content and methodology with clear educational outcomes.
- The programme content is appropriate for the age, gender and cultural background of students.
- The programme does not focus on a single topic or use shock tactics, and does not directly or indirectly raise an unhealthy awareness of, for example, topics such as suicide*, self-harm or eating disorders.
- The programme and its outcomes have been independently evaluated and/or informed by research and evidence.
- The programme does not place an unreasonable onus on students to take an unduly high level of responsibility for the wellbeing of their peers.

*Schools can be increasingly concerned about suicide prevention and may consider offering suicide related programmes provided by external agencies or individuals. In particular, in the aftermath of a suicide tragedy, there may be an impetus to introduce suicide prevention programmes to the school. This could be at a time when the students are particularly vulnerable and may require a very different and specialised support or intervention. Such decisions should be taken in close consultation with those involved in coordinated responses from the relevant services such as the National Educational Psychological Service, the Health Service Executive's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and others in the community.

Programmes that aim to reduce suicidal behaviour among young people may have positive outcomes for some students but unintended negative consequences for others. Safety and appropriate support of all students is paramount and particular consideration should be given to:

- the potential risks of delivering the proposed programme
- any vulnerabilities that exist within the group of students
- how any programme on suicide awareness/mental health promotion ensures safety and support for the audience during and after the delivery of the programme



The checklist (Appendix) provides guidance for schools when using external programmes or engaging external facilitators to support the implementation of the school's Wellbeing Promotion Process.

7. Further information

Teachers who require information, advice, guidance and support should contact the relevant Department of Education and Skills support services in order to meet their professional development needs. The local Health Service Executive's Health Promotion personnel are also available to provide information, guidance and support.

Dalton Tattan

**Assistant Secretary
Department of Education and Skills
July 2018**

Please bring this circular to the attention of teachers and members of the school board of management.

This circular may also be accessed at www.education.ie under www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms



**Appendix:
Checklist: Use of Programmes and/or External Facilitators**

<i>Engaging External Facilitators in the School:</i>		✓	✗
1.	The facilitators have the necessary training/qualifications and expertise to deliver the agreed programme or training		
2.	At least one member of the school team is available to facilitate planning, joint delivery and evaluation of the programme or external input		
3.	Facilitators are suitably qualified to work with the profile of students in the school		
4.	Facilitators delivering the programme or input have a written child protection policy and a safeguarding statement		
5.	The school is satisfied that it has met any vetting obligations that arise under the Vetting Act and in line with Circular 0031/2016, for the external facilitators		
<i>When Considering a Programme:</i>		✓	✗
6.	A need has been identified through the school's Wellbeing Promotion Process that could be addressed by using a specific programme		
7.	The programme is consistent with the school's whole school approach to wellbeing promotion		
8.	The Board of Management has approved the delivery of the programme		
9.	The chosen programme is informed by research and/or evidence		
10.	The programme uses evidence based/informed methodologies and promotes active learning		
11.	All relevant staff members have been informed about the proposed programme.		
12.	The programme is suitable to meet the needs of the targeted cohort of students.		
13.	In the selection of programmes, the opinions of parents/carers and students have been ascertained		
14.	An evaluation form will be completed by students and staff		
15.	The impact of the programme will be monitored		
16.	The programme delivery is sustainable over time within the school		
17.	Consideration has been given to the possible vulnerabilities of students and the minimising of any potential negative impact of the programme		
18.	Supports are available for the students during and after the programme delivery		