

2012



Meeting needs, making changes, improving outcomes

Developing a Health Promoting School through the *Healthy Schools Programme*

Policy Brief

This policy brief outlines the learning from the independently evaluated *Healthy Schools Programme*, particularly noting the process aspects which can support and mitigate against the development of a whole school approach, and the implications for process, policy and practice (Lahiff, 2008). This programme was piloted by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), one of the three Prevention and Early Intervention Programme organisations. The brief highlights how implementing evidence-based programmes such as the *Healthy Schools Programme* can go some way to meeting the World Health Organisation's definition of a 'health promoting school'.



Key Points

- A health promoting school is one in which all members of the school community work together to provide pupils with integrated and positive experiences and structures which promote and protect their health (WHO, 1997);
- The development of a health promoting school is recognised internationally as a challenging process that requires time, enthusiasm, and support. Schools already see themselves as involved in health promoting activities, and the *Healthy Schools Programme* builds on this by providing a framework for a health focus within schools;
- There is a need for a strategic and whole-school approach to planning to be undertaken at the school level; one that is informed by self-evaluation and that is inclusive of the views of the entire school community i.e. staff, parents, children, and services that are part of the schools functioning (Weare & Markham, 2005);
- A whole school approach to developing coherence between the school's policies and practices must be undertaken in order for a school to become a health promoting school (Vilnius Resolution, 2009). Making changes at whole-school level will result in the entire school community benefiting;
- The learning from this process in relation to implementing change could inform the Government's public reform agenda.



Background

CDI's *Healthy Schools Programme (HSP)* was developed following extensive collaboration with those living and working in the community, drawing on evidence of what works in addressing children's health, and was delivered in five DEIS¹ Band One Schools in Tallaght West;

Following an examination of whole school evaluations, the Department of Education advocates that all schools in Ireland include a health promotion approach in both the curriculum and in their duty of care for children's health (Department of Education, 2007).

The *Healthy Schools Programme* was implemented by the Childhood Development Initiative to improve children's health and well being, and increase access to primary care services. The *Healthy Schools Programme (HSP)* is a response to locally identified needs in relation to increasing access to, and take up of, health and specialist services and demonstrates the importance of having health promoting schools on the Department's and school's agenda.

Healthy Schools Programme

The focus of the *HSP* is on addressing processes (policy, procedures, and practice) that will facilitate change, leading to a more health promoting school environment. This work is conducted with the support of a school-based *Healthy Schools* Coordinator (HSC). The role of the HSC is to guide the programme by supporting schools to develop their capacity to address areas of health in accordance with each school's uniquely identified needs and priorities.

The *HSP* manual, drawing on international best practice, provides a framework to facilitate an audit of policies, priority areas and setting of targets and timelines. Working with statutory, community, family and school stakeholders, the school is supported to develop sustained processes for the creation of a health promoting school environment.

With salaries being the main cost, the budget for delivery to five schools for one year is €63,250 or €12,650 per school.

¹DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, 2005).

Department of Education and Skills (DES) action plan focusing on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities.

Healthy Schools Programme: Evaluation

The *HSP* was independently evaluated by Trinity College Dublin and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth using a 'comparative approach', involving the five intervention schools and two similar comparison schools.

Data was collected over the course of programme implementation and was drawn from a range of quantitative and qualitative methods including one to one interviews, focus groups, observational data, meeting minutes, and evaluation team feedback into the implementation phase and consequent discussions.

What did we find in terms of the impact of *HSP*?

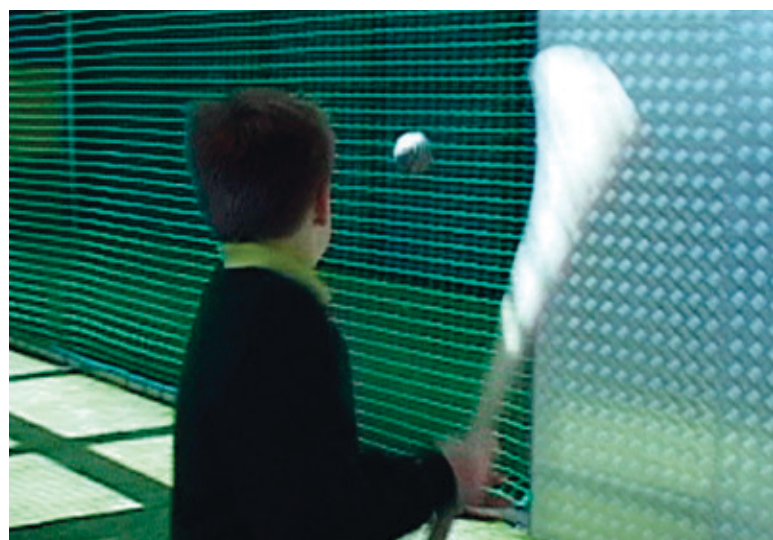
The following conclusions were drawn:

- In terms of **health and wellbeing** both groups were on average within international range from baseline through to final year;
- In terms of the **Child Depression Inventory** at baseline, both groups were within international range, with improvements seen into year two;
- Intervention schools showed significant differences in Body Mass Index (BMI), with an increase in **overweight and obese** in children aged between four and seven years, from baseline (29,6%) to year two (35.2%);
- Older children in intervention schools self reported a reduction in **bullying** from baseline (31.9%) to year two (26.8%). (All rates of bullying were lower than that recorded by the Growing Up in Ireland study (2009, 40%) for nine year old children).

However, there were no other significant differences found over the three points between the intervention and comparison schools.

What did we find in terms of the development and implementation of *HSP*?

- Schools felt they might not be **equipped to identify** the health needs of the children;
- Schools were concerned that they would be **held responsible** for whether the *HSP* worked or not if they were expected to lead the process themselves;
- Schools felt they needed support from both the **Departments of Education and Skills**, and the **Health Services Executive** to ensure the effort being put into the development of health promoting school environments would have support in the long term;
- The *HSP* inter-agency **Steering Committee** was found to be a positive vehicle for bringing health and education together at the local level;
- Parental engagement was viewed by staff in the *Healthy Schools Programme* as a key factor in the promotion of health in the school setting;
- At the end of the evaluation, the evidence suggests that whilst there were a number of challenges in implementing this model of health promotion, the **schools have begun the process** of change that is required to become a WHO defined 'health promoting school'.





Recommendations

CDI recommends that:

1.

An assessment of the readiness of a school or organisation for an intervention needs to be undertaken prior to the implementation;

2.

An expansion of the culture of joint working and collaboration is required from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health in order to continue the development of children's wellbeing in educational settings;

3.

A National Framework for Health Promoting Schools involving the Departments of Education and Health to be developed;

4.

Establishment of a Health Promoting Committee, with health and local authority participation, building on local inter-agency models of working;

5.

Health promotion and mechanisms to support inter-agency collaboration should be included in training for teachers and related professionals, and as part of continuous professional development;

6.

CDI recommends that all Government Departments commit to using evidence to inform planning and service delivery and that the implications are taken on board.



For the full report please see: C.M. Comiskey, K. O'Sullivan, M.B. Quirke, C. Wynne, P. Kelly and S. McGilloway (2011) *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative's Healthy Schools Programme*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

For more details on the Healthy Schools programme please visit <http://twcdi.ie/healthy-schools-programme/>.

References:

Department of Education, (2007) *Whole school evaluation report: St. Colemans, Co. Clare*. Retrieved 14/09/2009. http://www.education.ie/insreports/report1_19043W.htm.

Lahiff, J. (2008). *TWCDI Healthy School's Manual*, CDI Publication.

Vilnius Resolution (2009). *Better School's Through Health: the third European Conference on Health Promoting Schools*, (SHE Network).

Weare, K. & Markham, W. (2005). What do we know about promoting mental health through school's? *Promotion and Education*, 12, 3, 118-22.

WHO (1997). *Promoting Health through School's*, Report of a WHO Expert Committee on Comprehensive School Health Education and Promotion. WHO Technical Report Series 870, Geneva.



The Childhood Development Initiative,
St Mark's Youth and Family Centre,
Cookstown Lane,
Fettercairn,
Dublin 24.

Phone: 01 4940030

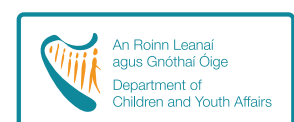
Fax: 01 4627329

Email: info@twcdi.ie

Web: www.twcdi.ie

www.facebook.com/ChildhoodDevelopmentInitiative

twitter.com/twcdi



The
ATLANTIC
Philanthropies