



# Theory Meets Practice: Introducing Health and Wellbeing into the Classroom



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# 1 Introduction

Mental illness is an epidemic sweeping through the younger generation, whether this is a consequence of social media, diagnostic availability, or the changing socio-environment, children and adolescents need support to tackle these challenges. Wellbeing interventions implemented by schools are not only a tool for improving mental health and reducing behavioural problems <sup>[1]</sup>, but can also help any student flourish. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), it is estimated that 14% of 10 to 19-year-olds have a mental health condition worldwide <sup>[2]</sup>, with suicide being the leading cause of premature death in young people from the EU <sup>[3]</sup>. To support those with mental illness, collaboration between multiple institutions is needed: family, healthcare, education, and more. Access to multidisciplinary mental health support can increase treatment effectiveness and can be more cost-effective <sup>[4]</sup>. Wellbeing is more important than ever, with research indicating the significant benefits high-quality school-implemented wellbeing programmes can have on student stress, coping, and depression <sup>[5]</sup>.

The purpose of this handbook is to demonstrate how the education sector can contribute towards supporting youth facing mental health challenges; health practices from schools across Ireland, France, Greece, and Lithuania have been compiled together to provide insight into how wellbeing practices can be implemented. Those working in education may use the tools in this handbook to adopt wellbeing practices themselves, either within a single classroom or within the entire school.

## 1.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing Interventions

Mental illness can arise for many reasons in a combination of biological and environmental factors. For instance, the environment and one's lifestyle choices can impact the way genes are expressed through epigenetics. These changes can be measured through a chemical process called methylation. A study of over 3000 people found that higher levels of methylation were a predictor of depression <sup>[6]</sup>. In other words, participants with depression were more likely to have had epigenetic changes due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Environmental factors in the home, social circles, socioeconomic background, and digital environments can all impact anxiety and depression <sup>[7]</sup>. For example, children who had experienced physical assault were three times more likely to develop a mental illness than those who had not <sup>[8]</sup>. Such factors may be outside of the control of a school, but it is important to recognise the complicated nature of mental illness, so that students can be met with understanding and support.

Mental illness amongst children can have a devastating impact on them and their families, however, intervention can prevent or minimise these outcomes. Severe depression can lead to suicidal ideation or suicide attempts, which are worryingly high across many countries; with European countries averaging 5.6 per 100,000 15–19 year olds in 2019 <sup>[9]</sup> and 15% of Irish adolescents in school reported thinking about self-harm or suicide <sup>[10]</sup>. The recent COVID-19 pandemic is said to have been a significant contributor to the rising mental health crisis, with the closure of schools and lack of social support reported as harmful to wellbeing (Hossain et al., 2022). However, we are not powerless when faced with these tragic facts. Intervention can greatly improve wellbeing, the earlier the better. Child refugees show a reduction in PTSD, depression, and anxiety after receiving Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) <sup>[12]</sup>. Additionally, play therapy has been found effective for young children to help manage emotions and socialise, particularly amongst those who have experienced abuse or had a developmental disorder <sup>[13]</sup>. Intervention can drastically improve a child's quality of life; such interventions could be implemented through healthcare, but for many children, school might be the only place they can receive support.

School-led interventions are vital for improving student wellbeing. Strengths-based interventions focusing on developing skills to enhance self-regulation, gratitude, perspective, enthusiasm, and kindness found significant improvements in wellbeing<sup>[14]</sup>. A meta-analysis of 24 studies found mindfulness interventions implemented in schools improved mental health in adolescents, and were particularly effective when a combination of mindfulness activities was used<sup>[15]</sup>. Additionally, schools which implemented CBT-inspired programmes found significant improvements in children's emotional and behavioural problems<sup>[16]</sup>. Schools which offered more early identification and mental health resources increased student usage of supports for mild to moderate mental disorders, particularly when identification was emphasised<sup>[17]</sup>. This demonstrates the importance of schools recognising indicators of mental illness and providing the resources for students to use. Young people may not have access to these supports at home, and schools often act as the first port of call for children and adolescents.

Teachers can promote whole classrooms which flourish together at a group level, taking a systems approach in which wellbeing is not just an individual experience, but something collective amongst peers. Flourishing is a state which evokes both positive feelings and functioning, allowing an individual high levels in life purpose, autonomy, social acceptance, or social contribution<sup>[18,19]</sup>. The Flourishing Classroom Systems Model consists of four key elements: cohesion, flexibility, communication, and wellbeing<sup>[20]</sup>. This model can act as a guide for teachers, creating a classroom environment which promotes flourishing. The authors suggest that this system approach to class wellbeing helps teachers understand how wellbeing elements are connected, providing a clear guide to implement better classroom practices. Creating this flourishing environment will have significant positive effects on both the individual and group levels.

Improving student wellbeing can have long-lasting positive effects on their lives. Student wellbeing can consist of hedonic (pleasure-based) and eudemonic (meaning-based) factors such as experiencing joy, school satisfaction, having positive relationships with others, and personal growth<sup>[21]</sup>. High levels of wellbeing can have many positive effects. For instance, university students from Hong Kong with higher wellbeing were more likely to have greater academic performance after 3 years<sup>[22]</sup>. Schools implementing wellbeing programmes, particularly when utilising student-centred and active learning methods, improved wellbeing<sup>[23]</sup>. Additionally, promoting flourishing can result in students who are more mentally healthy and report higher grades<sup>[24]</sup>. Nurturing children and adolescent wellbeing is beneficial to all, as it increases student resilience<sup>[25]</sup>, improves academic performance<sup>[26]</sup>, and may even be linked to parental mental health<sup>[27]</sup>. This highlights the benefits of promoting student wellbeing, as it acts as both a preventative measure for more severe mental illness and can have long-term effects on their academic performance and future coping skills.

## 1.2 Wellbeing in Staff

The mental health and wellbeing of staff within the education sector is equally important; primary school teachers in England reported that poor mental health and stress impacted the quality of their teaching, stating "When I had poor mental health, I was not able to focus on my teaching"<sup>[28]</sup>. Additionally, high scores in teacher depression are associated with worse student mental health and increased psychological distress, with a good student-teacher relationship mediating this effect<sup>[29]</sup>. Working in a school can be challenging, which is why practising wellbeing is paramount. When schools implemented School-Wide Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports for teachers, staff reported significantly lower levels of burnout<sup>[30]</sup>. Not only did these interventions benefit staff on an individual level, but there was also a positive impact at a wider level, with the school system experiencing improved teamwork, collaboration, and positive interactions with both staff and students. Teachers are the backbone of childhood education and growth; poor mental health amongst staff can not

only impact them but also their students. Schools need to provide staff wellbeing programmes to ensure their health and wellbeing are promoted.



### 1.3 This Handbook

This handbook will describe how a teacher or school may implement pre-existing health and wellbeing programmes which can improve student and staff wellbeing. First, it will delve into school-implemented programmes such as health and wellbeing curriculum, wellbeing supports, anti-bullying programmes, and external supports. Next, it will assess Special Educational Needs (SEN) supports which can be tailored to children with additional needs. Finally, it will discuss options for staff wellbeing programmes.



# SCHOOL IMPLEMENTED WELLBEING

## 2 School Implemented Wellbeing

Schools across the world have noticed the need for improved child mental health services and have begun to implement wellbeing programmes within the education system. These interventions aim to improve student resilience, social skills, and physical and mental health. By embedding wellbeing into the fabric of school life, such programmes not only support individual development but also improve overall school engagement and academic performance. This section will synthesise wellbeing practices implemented across schools in five countries. These interventions encompass four key areas within schools; the school curriculum, wellbeing and behavioural supports, bullying and awareness programmes, and external supports.

### 2.1 The Curriculum

The core curriculum in the education system prepares children for the future, teaching them the valuable skills they will need to survive in the real world. Health and wellbeing classes and workshops ensure students learn healthy habits, the importance of healthy eating and exercise, stress management techniques, resilience building, and overall happiness.

#### 2.1.1 Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE)

The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum and toolkit, developed by National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Department of Education, are vital components of the primary school experience in Ireland, designed to support children's personal development, wellbeing, and social skills <sup>[31]</sup>. It focuses on helping teachers prepare effectively, structure lessons appropriately, and select suitable resources across all class levels. It balances structured planning with sensitivity to classroom dynamics, emphasises active learning, nurtures partnerships with parents, and ensures inclusive, age-appropriate resource selection. By embedding reflective practice and accessing ongoing professional development, teachers can build safe, respectful, and engaging experiences tailored to their school context and pupils' needs.

#### Curriculum Structure and Content

The SPHE curriculum is structured around three core strands:

- **Myself** (focusing on self-awareness, wellbeing, and personal development)
- **Myself and Others** (developing relationship and communication skills)
- **Myself and the Wider World** (citizenship, media education, and social responsibility)

Each strand includes strand units to guide learning across all class levels. While the curriculum is spiral in nature—meaning that topics are revisited and developed at each class level—teachers are encouraged to tailor the content to suit the developmental needs of their pupils.

#### Resources to Support Teaching

The Toolkit offers curated resources for each primary class level, mapped to SPHE strands including:

- Puberty supports (e.g., *Busy Bodies* workbook, *Busy Bodies* guides for pupils and parents) <sup>[32]</sup>
- Guides for parent communication: e.g., *Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks* <sup>[33]</sup>
- Age-level materials: Grouped by infants, lower primary (1st–2nd), middle (3rd–4th), and upper classes (5th–6th), with selectable worksheets and activities.
- Online safety and digital citizenship: Advice for teaching safe, healthy online interactions <sup>[34]</sup>
- Consent education: Helping pupils understand personal boundaries and respectful behaviour.
- LGBTI+ inclusion: Resources and guidance for inclusive classroom practices

- Assessment criteria: Selection criteria guide helps teachers decide whether materials are appropriate for their pupils.

## Approaches and Methodologies

Effective SPHE teaching relies on active and participatory learning methods. Teachers are advised to:

- Use discussion, drama, storytelling, and role-play
- Incorporate co-operative games and group work
- Promote critical thinking and reflection
- Encourage personal expression through art and writing

Children should be actively involved in their learning and given opportunities to relate content to their own lives. Confidentiality and sensitivity are essential, particularly when discussing personal or sensitive topics.

## Creating a Supportive Environment

A positive and inclusive classroom environment is crucial for SPHE. Teachers should establish clear ground rules that promote respect, confidentiality, and listening. A safe space allows pupils to explore values and attitudes without fear of judgment.

Whole-school support is also vital. SPHE should align with school policies on behaviour, relationships, wellbeing, and child protection. Collaboration with parents and the wider community reinforces the curriculum and supports consistency between home and school.

## Time Allocation and Planning

SPHE (Social, Personal, and Health Education) is allocated a minimum of 30 minutes per week as a discrete subject within the primary curriculum. While it may also be integrated into other curricular areas such as Religion, Drama, Physical Education, or Social Environmental Science Education, it is crucial to ensure that the integrity of the SPHE curriculum is upheld. This dedicated time must be preserved to maintain its specific focus and objectives, separate from other subjects. Teachers are encouraged to use a flexible, thematic approach to planning, ensuring all strand units are addressed over a two-year cycle. Planning should reflect the needs and contexts of the pupils, incorporating both formal lessons and informal opportunities for development.

## Assessment in SPHE

Assessment in SPHE is primarily formative and observational. It focuses on pupils' engagement, understanding, attitudes, and skill development. Teachers are advised to:

- Use checklists, teacher observations, and pupil self-assessments
- Reflect on learning outcomes and adjust teaching accordingly
- Avoid grading or comparing pupils' responses, as SPHE is personal and developmental

## Resources and Programmes

Schools may choose to use additional support materials or programmes (e.g. Stay Safe<sup>[35]</sup>, Walk Tall<sup>[36]</sup>, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)<sup>[37]</sup>), but these must be aligned with the SPHE curriculum framework. Teachers should evaluate the suitability of any external resource or visitor and ensure they uphold the ethos of the school and the integrity of SPHE.

The effective implementation of SPHE in Irish primary schools requires thoughtful planning, sensitive teaching, and a whole-school commitment to supporting children's holistic development. By fostering a safe and respectful environment and using child-centred methodologies, teachers play a central role in equipping pupils with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for healthy, responsible living.

## **Relationships Sexuality Education (RSE)**

RSE forms part of the SPHE curriculum in Ireland. Implementing the RSE curriculum in Irish schools requires a thoughtful, inclusive, and age-appropriate approach. Below is a practical guide for teachers, incorporating best practices and resources to support effective delivery of the Programme. The RSE Toolkit supports teachers in effectively delivering the RSE curriculum at the primary level <sup>[38]</sup>.

### *Establish a Supportive Environment*

- Set clear ground rules: Begin each session by establishing guidelines for respectful communication, confidentiality, and inclusivity. This fosters a safe space for open discussion.
- Use circle time: Incorporate circle time to encourage participation and ensure all voices are heard, especially when discussing sensitive topics.
- Address sensitive topics with care.

### *Utilise Age-Appropriate Resources*

- Busy Bodies: This HSE resource provides information on puberty and reproductive health for children aged 8–12. It includes booklets and videos to support both teachers and parents <sup>[32]</sup>.
- Making the 'Big Talk' Many Small Talks: A series of booklets designed to assist parents and teachers in discussing relationships and sexuality with children of various age groups <sup>[33]</sup>.
- RSE Toolkit <sup>[38]</sup>

### *Implement Inclusive Teaching Practices*

- Adapt for Special Educational Needs: Modify teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning needs. This may include pre-teaching vocabulary, using visual aids, or providing one-on-one support.
- Promote Inclusivity: Ensure that materials and discussions are inclusive of all identities, including LGBTQ+ perspectives.

### *Reflect and Develop Professionally*

- Engage in Continuous Learning: Participate in professional development opportunities to stay informed about best practices in RSE.
- Reflect on Practice: Regularly assess your teaching methods and seek feedback to improve your approach.

### *Address Sensitive Issues Responsibly*

- Set Boundaries: Clearly communicate that certain topics may not be addressed in class and refer students to appropriate resources or support services when necessary.
- Respect Parental Rights: Acknowledge that parents have the right to withdraw their children from specific sensitive lessons, and ensure that alternative arrangements are in place.

By adhering to these guidelines, teachers can create a respectful and effective RSE program that supports students' development and well-being.

## 2.1.2 L'École promotrice de santé (Health Promoting School)

L'École promotrice de santé is a nationwide initiative in France, spearheaded by the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education, and Research. The primary goal of this initiative is to integrate health and wellbeing practices effectively within the school curriculum and daily activities of educational institutions. It aims to foster a culture of health and wellbeing among students by providing comprehensive, practical resources directly accessible to teachers and school leaders.

The initiative addresses multiple core values, closely aligned with LifeComp competencies <sup>[39]</sup>. These include promoting healthy lifestyles, mental health awareness, addiction prevention, comprehensive sexual health education, nutrition, and environmental responsibility. By embedding these subjects in daily teaching, educators play a crucial role in developing a sustainable, health-conscious mindset among students from an early age.

### How does it work?

Teachers can access diverse instructional materials through Éduscol <sup>[40]</sup>, the dedicated national portal for educational resources. Available resources include detailed guides, lesson scenarios, interactive games, and specific activity templates. One notable example is a structured empathy kit designed to enhance pupils' psychosocial skills, alongside ready-to-use lesson scenarios and games aimed at engaging students interactively. Additionally, templates for agreements with local authorities facilitate the implementation of practical initiatives such as healthier breakfast programs in schools.

Implementation at the school level requires active participation from management, particularly school headteachers. They lead health and wellbeing projects and coordinate activities via the Health and Citizenship Education Committee (CESC). Their role includes strategic planning, supervision, evaluation, and ensuring seamless integration of health education within the broader educational framework of their institutions.

To support successful implementation, extensive professional development opportunities are provided. Training courses are available through the Magistère platform at master's level, supported by esteemed institutions like the French Institute of Education (IFÉ) and the National Federation for Health Education and Promotion (FNES, for Fédération nationale d'éducation et de promotion de la santé). These courses equip registered educators with essential skills to effectively incorporate health and wellbeing education into their teaching practices.

### Why does it work?

The effectiveness of the École promotrice de santé approach is evidenced by the Édusanté label, awarded to schools that demonstrate significant commitment to health promotion. Reports from regional academies such as Créteil and Poitiers indicate growing participation and recognition. Specifically, the Académie de Créteil experienced an increase from 22 labelled schools in 2021–2022 to 135 in 2022–2023, while the Académie de Poitiers awarded 17 schools in 2024.

By utilising these robust frameworks and resources, educational institutions across France are well-equipped to instil lasting health and wellbeing practices, positively influencing students' lives and enhancing overall school environments. <sup>[40–45]</sup>

## 2.1.3 GoodPlanet Challenges: concrete challenges for sustainable wellbeing

The GoodPlanet Challenges programme is a nationwide Belgian initiative designed to promote the mental, physical and social health of schoolchildren, while raising their awareness of sustainable development issues. Thanks to a series of thematic challenges such as Eat Well, Move, Relax or Connect, teachers can easily integrate into their school curriculum concrete activities that promote healthy lifestyle habits and encourage a positive classroom climate.

### How does it work?

Schools register free of charge on the GoodPlanet Belgium website, choose the challenges that meet the needs of their pupils, and receive a set of ready-to-use teaching resources: activity sheets, videos, lesson plans and proposals for collaborative projects. These tools enable teachers to run practical workshops on healthy eating, physical activity, mindfulness, cooperation and emotional management.

The activities on offer include

- cooking workshops promoting sustainable food (e.g. *GoodCook Workshop*)
- movement games outdoors or in the classroom to stimulate physical activity
- relaxation and mindfulness exercises to relieve tension
- community projects that promote cooperation and social cohesion

### Why does it work?

The programme stands out for its flexibility and practicality. The aim is not to add an extra workload, but to provide teachers with easy-to-use tools that can be adapted to everyday school life. As for the pupils, they are directly involved in the activities, which boosts their motivation and commitment, and above all, their sense of competence and wellbeing. Feedback from teachers indicates that pupils are developing a more critical view of their lifestyles and eating habits. A teacher in Schaerbeek reported that her pupils discovered new fruit and vegetables thanks to the GoodCook workshop and talked about them at home, extending the impact beyond the classroom (Teacher's opinion – 4: GoodCook: the journey towards sustainable food).

### What are the benefits for teachers and schools?

The *GoodPlanet Challenges* are a fun way of tackling psychosocial skills by developing cooperation, emotional management and self-esteem in pupils. By making these actions part of their overall educational project, schools help to establish a positive and inclusive climate, which is beneficial for both pupils and educational teams. What's more, these challenges reinforce the coherence between school learning and contemporary social issues (health, climate, sustainability).

### Areas for improvement

Although the programme is based on a solid foundation and benefits from positive feedback, its impact could be further enhanced by the addition of systematic evaluation tools (satisfaction questionnaires, measuring changes in behaviour) to better document the long-term effects on pupils' wellbeing. <sup>[46–48]</sup>

## 2.1.4 Wellbeing Framework

Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice is a national initiative aimed at promoting the wellbeing of children and young people through a whole-school, evidence-based approach that supports mental, emotional, social, and physical development.

### How does it work?

The framework involves a structured approach that integrates wellbeing into the school's ethos, curriculum, policies, and community relationships. In order to effectively embed this framework:

#### *Understand the Four Key Areas of Wellbeing Promotion*

- **Culture and Environment:** Foster a positive, inclusive, and safe school atmosphere.
- **Curriculum:** Integrate wellbeing into teaching, particularly through SPHE, Physical Education (PE), and RSE.
- **Policy and Planning:** Develop and implement policies that support wellbeing, including anti-bullying and mental health strategies.
- **Relationships and Partnerships:** Build strong connections among students, staff, parents, and the wider community.

#### *Engage in School Self-Evaluation (SSE)*

Utilize the six-step SSE process to assess and enhance wellbeing practices:

- **Identify Focus:** Choose a specific area within the four key areas to improve.
- **Gather Evidence:** Collect data through surveys, observations, and discussions.
- **Analyse Data:** Identify strengths and areas for development.
- **Plan for Improvement:** Set clear, achievable goals.
- **Implement Actions:** Apply strategies and interventions.
- **Review and Reflect:** Evaluate the impact and adjust plans accordingly.

This process ensures continuous improvement and alignment with the wellbeing framework.

#### *Integrate Wellbeing into the Curriculum*

Incorporate wellbeing themes across subjects:

- **SPHE:** Address topics like self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills.
- **PE:** Promote physical health and teamwork.
- **RSE:** Provide age-appropriate education on relationships and sexuality.

Utilise resources such as the <https://pdst.ie/wellbeing><sup>[49]</sup> to support curriculum delivery.

#### *Foster Positive Relationships*

Develop a supportive school community by:

- **Restorative Practices:** Implement strategies to resolve conflicts and build trust. Training in restorative practices is provided by Oide<sup>[50]</sup>. Oide is Ireland's national professional learning support service for teachers and school leaders, providing coordinated, high-quality professional development to support teaching, learning, and leadership in schools.
- **Peer Mentoring:** Establish programs where older students support younger ones.
- **Parental Involvement:** Engage families in wellbeing initiatives and communication.

### *Develop and Review Policies*

Create and regularly update policies that promote wellbeing:

- **Anti-Bullying:** Ensure clear procedures and a zero-tolerance stance on bullying.
- **Mental Health:** Provide guidelines for supporting students' mental health needs.
- **Attendance:** Implement strategies to encourage regular school attendance.

### *Monitor and Evaluate Progress*

Regularly assess the effectiveness of wellbeing initiatives:

- **Surveys and Feedback:** Gather input from students, staff, and parents.
- **Data Analysis:** Review attendance, academic performance, and behavioural records.
- **Adjust Strategies:** Make informed changes to improve outcomes.

### *Prioritise Staff Wellbeing*

A healthy staff is essential for a thriving school community:

- **Professional Development:** Participate in courses/ Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to enhance wellbeing promotion skills <sup>[49]</sup>.
- **Support Services:** Access the **Employee Assistance Service** for confidential counselling and support <sup>[51]</sup>.
- **Wellbeing Policies:** Develop staff wellbeing policies to promote a supportive work environment.

By systematically implementing these strategies, teachers can effectively promote and sustain wellbeing within their schools, aligning with the national framework and fostering a positive educational experience for all.

## **2.1.5 21st Century Skills Labs**

### **What is the 21st Century Skills Labs project?**

The Skills Labs is a new, innovative school module in the Greek educational curriculum, which focuses on the development of soft and digital skills. Its main goal is the cultivation of skills necessary for a rapidly changing world. These skills include both fundamental life skills related to health, safety, and social interactions, as well as more advanced skills associated with education and lifelong learning. Particular emphasis is placed on the 4Cs of 21st century skills: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity – along with digital skills, such as information management, critical thinking, content creation and problem solving.

### **How does it work?**

The program and educational material of the Skills Labs are grouped into four Thematic Cycles: wellbeing, environment, social empathy and accountability, critical thinking and innovation. In each cycle, students approach a major contemporary issue (e.g. mental health, climate change, diversity, robotics) and, through a series of student-centred activities, workshops, presentations, competitions, and other educational interventions, develop related skills.

The teachers responsible for teaching the Skills Labs design the corresponding Skills Workshop Action Plans. The design must necessarily include the implementation of the four Thematic Units for five to seven weeks per Thematic Cycle and from one to three hours weekly, depending on the school grade.

## Why does it work?

This bottom-up approach enhances decentralisation by granting teachers and schools a more active role in designing and implementing curricula tailored to their students' learning profiles, while also fostering further integration of schools with local communities. The Skills Labs introduce innovations in the social learning context and aim to foster self-regulation in learning, collaboration, and self-improvement. Moreover, it is in context with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with particular emphasis on Goal 4.7 related to Quality Education [52]. For this reason, the project has gathered significant attention from international bodies such as UNESCO and was awarded the Global Education Network Europe (GENE) Global Education Award (2020/2021).

A pilot program with 2,500 teachers in 217 schools in Greece was conducted in 2020/21. The evaluation of the first implementation of the Skills Labs showed that the thematic cycles cover all relevant topics contributing to skill development. The group-work method and the laboratory-based approach, which incorporate activities like games, crafts, presentations, and theatrical events, are the most important tools for differentiating the pedagogical methodology. The most significant challenges for implementation were primarily related to the time required for each class to carry out the Skills Labs and the equipment and infrastructure of the schools. Since September 2021, the Skills Labs have been rolled out to all classes throughout the country. [53–58]

### 2.1.6 Life Skills Programme

From September 2023, Lithuanian schools started teaching the new Life Skills Programme (LSP). This programme was officially approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport in Order No. V-1541 (2022) and added to the national curriculum. In practice, this means that all schools are legally required to include it in grades 1 to 10 [59].

What it covers. The LSP combines earlier subjects—health education, sexuality education, prevention, and personal safety—into one framework. Its purpose is to help pupils develop everyday skills: managing emotions, making responsible decisions, recognising unsafe situations, cooperating with others, and living a healthy lifestyle [60]. The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania also supports this by stating in Article 14 that schools must help students grow socially, morally, and culturally [61].

How it works. In grades 1 and 3, pupils learn life skills through other subjects. In grades 5 and 7, it is taught separately once a week, and in grade 9 once every two weeks. By 2024, the programme will be fully implemented in all grades [62]. Unlike earlier initiatives, the LSP is backed by state funding, specific teaching hours, and teacher training requirements, making it a structured and sustainable programme [59].

Different views. Many teachers and parents welcome the programme, as it clearly brings together important topics and ensures consistency [63]. However, some critics argue that it focuses too much on risks—such as bullying, violence, or substance abuse—and less on positive values like love, creativity, and friendship [64]. Overall, the LSP is an important legal and educational step forward, though it still needs to balance prevention with positive personal development.

## 2.2 Wellbeing and Behavioural Supports

Sometimes professional training is required to provide adequate mental health support; this is why many schools are using school counsellors and therapists on-site to offer this additional support. This section will explore wellbeing and behavioural supports directly designed to promote wellbeing and improve behaviour in students.

### 2.2.1 Good Behaviour Game (GBG)

The Good Behaviour Game (GBG) is a classroom behaviour management strategy designed to encourage positive socialisation and reduce disruptive behaviours among students without encroaching on instructional time, implemented in France. Originating from educational psychology, GBG fosters emotional, social, and cognitive skills essential for students' academic and personal success.

#### How does it work?

Teachers directly integrate GBG into regular classroom activities. Initially, teachers divide students into balanced teams, considering gender, behaviour patterns (pro-social versus disruptive), and academic abilities. Clearly defined classroom rules are prominently displayed and reviewed with students (for example, raising one's hand to speak, staying in one's seat unless told otherwise to avoid disruptive behaviour). During GBG sessions, these rules become the guidelines for the game itself.

Teams are rewarded if their members collectively adhere to the classroom rules, ensuring that rule-breaking occurrences remain minimal (less than four instances per session). The GBG is structured to ensure all teams have the opportunity to succeed. Teachers periodically reorganise teams, allowing every student repeated opportunities for success. Over time, the duration and complexity of GBG sessions progressively increase, and reinforcement becomes more delayed, thereby embedding a deeper understanding among students that positive behaviour is consistently expected in various contexts and settings.

#### Why does it work?

Research highlights GBG's significant and long-term positive impacts across different life stages:

- **Primary School Students:** Reduction in aggressive, disruptive behaviours, decreased peer rejection among boys, and reduced shyness among girls.
- **Secondary School Adolescents:** Lowered rates of aggressive behaviours, delayed initiation of smoking (ages 11–13), reduced mental health service use, and improved adherence to behavioural expectations.
- **Young Adults:** Reduction in the use and abuse of mental health and addiction services, illicit drug usage, alcohol consumption, and tobacco, alongside fewer health-risk behaviours and enhanced social adaptability.

Initially piloted in Baltimore, USA, in the eighties, the GBG was experimentally implemented in France, in the Alpes-Maritimes region during 2015–2016, 2016–2017, and 2019–2021. Assessments from the initial 2015–2016 phase showed substantial reductions in disruptive behaviours—sessions employing GBG averaged fewer than 10 disruptive instances weekly, compared to approximately 28 in sessions before implementation. By the end of the school year, students exhibited improved emotional management, increased concentration, reduced impulsivity, and less social isolation. Long-term follow-up studies<sup>[65]</sup> demonstrated notable declines in antisocial behaviour, substance abuse, violent crime, and suicidal ideation among participants into young adulthood.

By integrating GBG into regular classroom practice, schools can significantly enhance student behaviour, engagement, and overall wellbeing, establishing a solid foundation for lifelong success. <sup>[65-68]</sup>

## **2.2.2 Psychologists Attending Activities**

According to the "Law for Education of the Republic of Lithuania", all schools in Lithuania must have a school psychologist. This is defined in Part Two of the Law, Article 19 – Psychological Support: "The purpose of psychological support is to strengthen the psychological resilience and mental health of students, to promote the creation of a safe and educational environment at school throughout preventive measures, to help students regain spiritual harmony, the ability to live and learn, in active cooperation with their parents (guardians, caregivers)."

### **How does it work?**

The position of school psychologist must be held only by a person who meets all qualification requirements approved in accordance with the Education Law and the job description. The specialist is available to all students with short-term and long-term mental health conditions, experiencing stress or experiencing strong emotions. Schools should equip the premises for psychologist consultations in accordance with certain requirements. For example, the size of the office cannot be less than 25 m<sup>2</sup>, and the office space should have six zones: the psychologist's personal work space; consulting, diagnostic space; a place for group activities; a calming space; a play and recreation area; a waiting room. Therefore, improperly equipped premises have a negative impact on the relationship between the young person and the psychologist.

### **Why does it work?**

In schools, psychological specialists have the following functions: to assess children's developmental characteristics, psychological problems, difficulties and strengths; to consult children on communication, behaviour, emotional, interpersonal relationships, learning difficulties, and parents and teachers on solving students' problems (to prepare recommendations); to initiate, prepare, and implement problem prevention programs on how to avoid bullying, alcohol, drugs, violence, etc. problems; to educate the school community – children, parents, teachers – on relevant psychological topics; to perform intervention and post-event in cases of crisis; to cooperate with the child's educators and institutions related to child welfare (parents, teachers, other specialists, the Pedagogical Psychological Service, to participate in the activities of the school's Child Welfare Commission); to conduct various psychological tests at school as needed. The student himself, their parents or guardians, or the student's teacher can ask for the support.

### **Areas for improvement**

Studies conducted in 2021 and 2025 showed that about 50% of Lithuanian students need psychological help. During the studies, one of the stress factors identified was the lack of physical activity, which directly affects the mental health and social relationships of young people. Therefore, schools should promote not only preventive programs aimed at emotional well-being, but also encourage physical activity of students through inclusive education. Students should be more involved in the process of creating, improving and implementing mental health services so that the preventive programs created are relevant to students. Create more collaborative programs that bring together educators, parents, psychological support specialists and health professionals. <sup>[69-73]</sup>

## 2.3 Bullying and Awareness

According to the WHO, one in six school-aged children across Europe has experienced cyberbullying, and 11% have experienced bullying in school <sup>[74]</sup>. Bullying interventions can significantly improve the wellbeing and happiness of students, and with the rise of the digital world, it is more important than ever for anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying initiatives. This section will describe some of the current anti-bullying programmes used by schools.

### 2.3.1 Stay Safe

The Stay Safe Programme is mandated by the Department of Education in Ireland and therefore all schools are required to implement the full programme. The Programme is a core part of SPHE aimed at reducing vulnerability to bullying and child abuse. It empowers pupils to recognise, resist, and report unsafe situations

Lessons are age-appropriate and organised across five themes:

- Feeling Safe & Unsafe
- Friendship & Bullying
- Touches (appropriate vs. inappropriate)
- Secrets & Telling
- Strangers

#### How does it work?

Each class level engages pupils through tailored content:

- 4–6 year olds: 9 lessons (20 min each)—distinguishing feelings, basic friendship, safe touches, secrets, and getting lost
- 6–8 year olds: 9 lessons (30 min each)—introducing “yes/no” feelings, bullying rules, stranger awareness, and phone/door protocols
- 8–10 year olds: 9 lessons (30 min each)—privacy and personal boundaries, emergency calling, unsafe touches, and safety strategies
- 10–12 year olds: 5 lessons (40 min each)—more complex topics like body space, on-the-move safety, dilemmas around telling, and coping with peer-related issues

#### Teaching Methodology

Delivery methods include role-play, drama, circle time, discussions, storytelling, artwork, group work, and games—fostering engagement and practice in realistic scenarios.

Safe classroom environment: Establish ground rules for listening, respect, and confidentiality. Ensure children understand the limits—serious concerns must be reported under child protection protocols.

#### Whole-School & Parent Partnership

Before lessons commence, parents are informed and guided to the *Stay Safe* section of the **Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)** website <sup>[35]</sup>. Parents are encouraged to support and reinforce the classroom learning at home through the use of worksheets and open discussion.

**Parental Withdrawal:** While participation in the programme is mandatory, parents retain the right to withdraw their child by providing written notice. Schools are required to keep records of all parental consents and withdrawals.

**Whole-School Approach:** A consistent and well-governed implementation is ensured through comprehensive staff training and formal ratification by the school's Board of Management.

#### *SEN (Special Educational Needs) Adaptations*

**Programme Adaptation:** Teachers are expected to tailor the *Stay Safe* programme to meet the needs of pupils with cognitive, sensory, physical, or behavioural challenges. This includes using custom materials, visual aids, audio supports, and simplified language.

**In-Service Support:** Targeted teacher training is available to equip educators with the skills and strategies needed to deliver the programme effectively and sensitively to all students.

#### *Integration and Review*

- SPHE continuity: Stay Safe is embedded within SPHE and revisited annually or as needed. While typically delivered in term 2, it can be stretched across other terms if required
- Resource kit: Includes teacher handbook, parent guide, DVDs, worksheets, and posters, ensuring varied and supportive implementation staysafe.ie.
- Ongoing review: Schools periodically revisit content, update policies, and reflect on effectiveness, ensuring alignment with child protection norms.

The Stay Safe Programme offers a comprehensive, developmentally and pedagogically sound framework for teaching personal safety in primary schools. It combines clear objectives, structured lesson plans, active learning techniques, inclusive practices for SEN pupils, and strong school–home partnerships. Supported by whole-school policy and consistent CPD, it helps pupils develop essential safety awareness, assertiveness, and resilience—key skills for lifelong wellbeing.

### **2.3.2 National Strategy and Awareness Campaign to Combat Bullying**

"STOP Bullying. Don't tolerate bullying. Speak up. You can." is a Greek national strategy and awareness mindset change campaign to combat school violence and bullying, supported by the Onassis Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports.

The Campaign includes the following:

- the Stop-bullying.gov.gr platform <sup>[75]</sup> for reporting, managing, and tracking bullying incidents,
- increasing the number of social workers and psychologists in schools,
- introducing active citizen programs into the school curriculum,
- establishing a new school regulation,
- reinstating the five-day suspension rule,
- digitalisation of attendance records,
- simplifying the process for changing school environments,
- stricter rules for mobile phone use in schools.

#### **How does it work?**

The "Stop Bullying" digital platform <sup>[75]</sup> serves as a user-friendly and secure reporting tool, providing students and parents/guardians with an alternative and modern way to communicate with the school unit.

After the submission of a report in the platform, the school's special team takes action, investigating and addressing the incidents, while a special four-member team from the relevant Education Directorate can assist the school in managing the incident. The people who have submitted the report have the ability to track the progress of resolving the incidents through their personal accounts on the platform, while their personal data are protected in accordance with the data protection framework.

Moreover, the platform provides approved programs, educational tools (e.g. teaching materials, teaching scenarios), and workshops for primary and secondary school students, as well as protocols for managing school bullying incidents.

### **Why does it work?**

The platform contributes to the swift, organised, and effective handling of school violence and bullying incidents, while also aiding in raising awareness and educating the school community on the issue of school violence.

For the initiative to work effectively, teacher training programmes have been developed for the members of the action teams and educational staff to support schools in managing incidents of school violence and bullying. The teacher training aims at enhancing the skills and competencies of teachers for the prevention and effective management of school violence and bullying incidents and is conducted through theoretical presentations, practical workshops, case studies, and interactive activities.

### **2.3.3 Child Emotional Expression Control**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania has approved preventive programs for controlling children's emotional expression, according to which school communities can develop a culture of communication and children's emotional and social competences. In schools, students are taught to recognize their feelings, manage them, express anger appropriately and make more rational decisions.

#### **How does it work?**

The preventive programme „The Child Emotional Expression Control” (CEEIC) is intended for students aged 8–18, their teachers, and school administration representatives. This programme has a clear structure and interesting, engaging activities for children, led by two CEEIC leaders, such as an educational support specialist and a teacher. Within this programme, the school community aims to develop students' skills and behaviour that would become the norm, supported by the entire school. This programme involves not only the school community but also parents, who are introduced to the basic principles of the CEEIC programme and can try skill-building exercises such as the anger circle or making appropriate decisions in a conflict situation. Other widely used preventive programmes are the social and emotional competence development programmes, "Zippy's Friends and Apple's Friends. These programmes help develop the social and emotional skills of preschool and 1st–3rd grade students to cope with difficulties: it teaches children to understand and talk about feelings, say what they want to say, listen carefully, make and maintain friendships, seek help and help others, overcome loneliness, rejection, bullying or harassment, resolve conflicts, and more easily survive changes, loss, and even death.

#### **Why does it work?**

The programmes have a very clearly defined structure, methodology and activities designed to develop emotional expression competencies in children. The key to success is that the entire school community, including the parents of the students, is involved in the programme. This is defined as a supported norm of behaviour.

#### **Areas for improvement**

Various surveys have highlighted the need for teachers and students to be able to create informal relationships and for teachers to be able to organise the educational process dynamically and in a way that responds to the various needs of students. Therefore, it was concluded that when implementing preventive programs for controlling children's emotional expression, it is important to strengthen teachers' competencies, motivation to recognise students' mental challenges, and their role in improving students' mental health. <sup>[69,76,77]</sup>



# **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

### 3 Special Educational Needs

Children in SEN schools may require additional health and wellbeing support. Many students may be living with disabilities or learning difficulties, which can make mainstream school more challenging. Often, schools will offer additional learning supports such as teaching assistants or occupational therapists. This section will discuss different options for providing SEN support within the school.

#### 3.1 Customised Learning Programmes

Students in SEN schools may benefit from tailored curriculums which can take into consideration their individual needs.

##### 3.1.1 Specialised basic education in the Province of Hainaut: a comprehensive educational response for pupils with special needs

In Belgium, specialised basic education is offered throughout the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, but the Province of Hainaut stands out for its structured and coordinated network of Instituts Médico-Pédagogiques (IMPs), located in the cities of Charleroi, Mons and La Louvière. These establishments support children with a diverse range of needs, including intellectual, physical, sensory, behavioural, and learning differences. They provide a multidisciplinary environment focused on the specific needs of each pupil, promoting their overall wellbeing, inclusion and independence.

###### How does it work?

The system is based on eight types of special education, ranging from mild intellectual disability (type 1) to motor disorders (type 4) or behavioural problems (type 3). Each pupil is assigned to the appropriate type following a rigorous medical and educational assessment, often in collaboration with the Psycho-Medico-Social Centre (PMS).

Once registered, pupils benefit from an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that takes into account their cognitive, emotional, physical and social abilities. The schools have specific human and material resources at their disposal:

- Multi-disciplinary teams made up of specialist teachers, speech therapists, psychomotor therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and social workers;
- Adapted facilities such as Snoezelen rooms, psychomotor areas and digital equipment;
- School transport or accommodation services for students requiring greater logistical support.

The TEACCH method (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children) is also used in some establishments to structure the learning of students with autism, by relying on visual supports, predictable routines, and individualised workspaces, and technological tools (interactive whiteboards, tablets) facilitate pedagogical adaptation.

## Why does it work?

The specialised basic education model in the Province of Hainaut is effective because it combines a structured classification system (eight types of special education, from mild intellectual disability to behavioural or motor disorders) with individualised support through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Each child benefits from adapted teaching methods, multidisciplinary support teams, and tailored facilities, creating a coherent framework that responds to diverse needs.

This comprehensive approach not only targets academic success but also fosters personal development, communication, social skills and independence. By creating personalised pathways, pupils can learn at their own pace, in a reassuring, caring and stimulating environment.

Networking with families, health services, social institutions, and educational staff strengthens the coherence of the pupil's pathway and supports the dynamics of progress.

## What are the benefits for pupils and teachers?

Pupils show significant progress in terms of emotional regulation, the acquisition of life skills and social integration<sup>[78]</sup>. Pupils are supervised by an attentive and trained team, which reduces their stress at school and promotes their well-being. For teachers, working in such an environment encourages teamwork, ongoing training and a strong sense of social purpose.

## Areas for improvement

Although the model is recognised for its richness, there is still a lack of public quantitative studies to assess its long-term effects. Harmonisation between establishments and the promotion of best practice in a common database could enhance the existing range of services.<sup>[78-81]</sup>

### 3.1.2 IMP René Thône in Marcinelle: a holistic approach to well-being for pupils with special needs

The IMP René Thône in Marcinelle is a specialised basic school located in the Walloon region, in the province of Hainaut (Belgium). It caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) or intellectual disabilities. The school offers a structured and caring educational environment, designed to meet the specific needs of pupils through multidisciplinary and individualised support. In particular, the school applies the TEACCH methodology (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children), internationally recognised for its effectiveness with children with ASD.

## How does it work?

As soon as pupils start school, they undergo a rigorous assessment to determine whether they fall into type 1 (mild intellectual disability) or type 2 (moderate to severe intellectual disability) of special education. Based on this assessment, an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is drawn up for each child.

The learning environment is highly structured:

- The classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards and digital equipment (cyberclassroom with computers and tablets)
- Sensory areas such as the Snoezelen room (with light balls, water mattresses, etc.) help to soothe and stimulate the senses
- Psychomotoricity and physical education sessions enable pupils to develop their bodies to the best of their abilities.

The educational team works closely with paramedical professionals (speech therapists, psychomotor therapists, nurses), psychologists and social workers. This multi-disciplinary approach guarantees comprehensive monitoring that encompasses the cognitive, emotional, social and physical dimensions of the student's development.

### **Why does it work?**

The pedagogical structure allows students to feel secure, understand what is expected of them and progress at their own pace. The TEACCH model promotes autonomy through visual routines, clearly defined spaces and appropriate communication, which is fundamental for students with ASD.

In addition, family involvement is encouraged: regular exchanges are organised between the school, parents and the Psycho-Medico-Social Centre (PMS), ensuring consistency between the school and family environments. This helps to better understand children's needs and build solid educational bridges.

### **What are the benefits for pupils and staff?**

Pupils gradually develop communication, cognitive and social skills, and become more independent. The use of educational technologies and sensory methods encourages their engagement. Teaching staff benefit from a stronger collaborative framework and concrete tools for adapting teaching practices.

### **Areas for improvement**

Although the results observed are positive, one limitation is the lack of publicly available quantitative data on the long-term results. Capitalising on this and conducting research could help to measure the overall impact on the emotional well-being and social inclusion of these pupils. [79,80,82,83]

## **3.1.3 Personalised Educational Programme (PEP)**

The Personalised Educational Program, implemented in the Greek educational system, is the cornerstone of special education. It is unique for each student and is based on the student's assessment by Educational and Counselling Support Centres, the teachers' pedagogical review, the curriculum of the student's class, and the needs and skills of the student. Based on these inputs, both the long-term and short-term learning goals of the intervention program are defined along with recommendations regarding adaptations in teaching, means of implementation, materials, equipment (or assistive technology), assessment and feedback to the students.

### **How does it work?**

When a student is diagnosed as having Special Educational Needs by an appropriate educational authority and it is decided that they need a Personalised Educational Programme, an official document specifies the educational needs of the student and suggests the services that need to be provided to the student, as well as specifying how the student's progress will be assessed. Individualised adaptations to the delivery of the education provided involve modifications to the classroom curriculum to enable the student to follow it.

Various specialisations are involved in the creation of a PEP, such as Psychologists, Social Workers and Special Educators (as well as others depending on circumstances or needs, such as physiotherapists, school nurses, etc.). Parents are directly involved and informed -they provide their opinion, agree and ultimately contribute creatively to the programme realisation, from their side. Special care is usually required to support the family environment since the family is often the catalyst in addressing any emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties that the child may have (e.g. emotional disturbance).

## Why does it work?

The implementation of the Personalised Education Program (PEP) offers significant benefits for both students and educators. It fosters strong collaboration among teachers and with parents, enabling consistent support throughout the school year. This approach promotes student autonomy, self-assessment, and self-regulation, while allowing teachers to set and evaluate clear, achievable goals. The use of digital tools and open learning communities has further enhanced cooperation, particularly during the pandemic. Additionally, successful PEP implementation has shown that students with special educational needs can make meaningful cognitive and emotional progress, boosting their self-confidence and helping them see school as a positive and supportive environment. <sup>[84–87]</sup>

### 3.1.4 Child Welfare Commissions in Lithuania

Every Lithuanian school must establish a Child Welfare Commission (CWC), a requirement reinforced by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport No. V-818 <sup>[88]</sup>. This order replaced the earlier 2011 regulation and came into effect on 1 September 2024. The updated framework ensures that CWCs remain an integral part of supporting students' wellbeing and inclusion.

Purpose and functions: CWCs are responsible for creating a safe and supportive learning environment and for coordinating assistance for pupils with special educational needs. Their functions include assessing pupils' needs, recommending customised learning programmes, monitoring progress, and organising preventive measures. They also help schools prepare and implement crisis management plans <sup>[88]</sup>.

Composition: A typical CWC is made up of school leaders, teachers, psychologists, social pedagogues, and other specialists. The inclusion of different professionals ensures that pupils' difficulties are addressed from multiple perspectives—psychological, social, and educational <sup>[89]</sup>. Psychologists play a central role in identifying emotional or behavioural issues, while social pedagogues focus on family and social contexts.

Wider system: CWCs are not isolated structures; they cooperate closely with municipal child welfare commissions, social services, and child protection agencies. According to the Law on Education <sup>[61]</sup>, schools are obliged to provide support for pupils with diverse needs, and CWCs function as the mechanism for implementing this duty at the school level.

Summary: The 2024 reform of Child Welfare Commissions strengthened their legal mandate, clarified responsibilities, and emphasised teamwork among professionals. As a result, CWCs are now better positioned to ensure that pupils with special needs or behavioural challenges receive individualised learning support and that schools can respond effectively to crises and wellbeing concerns. <sup>[61,88–90]</sup>

## 3.2 Classroom Assistants

Classroom assistants, teaching assistants (TAs), or special needs assistants (SNAs) are vital staff for any classroom. They can offer additional guidance and attention to students; particularly, they offer great support for SEN students who may need help with reading, writing, emotional regulation, or focus.

### 3.2.1 Support for Pupils with Disabilities (AESHS)

The French national intervention known as AESH (Accompagnants des Élèves en Situation de Handicap) provides tailored classroom support for students with disabilities. AESHS are recruited under public law contracts and play an essential role in promoting the autonomy and inclusion of students within the classroom and the wider school community. Their support allows children to participate more fully in lessons, social interactions, and school routines.

AESHs are considered integral members of the educational team and work closely with classroom teachers to ensure that pupils' specific needs are addressed daily. They assist with note-taking, communication with peers, physical mobility, and handling classroom materials. Their support can be individual, shared among several pupils, or focused on group support, depending on the needs and the educational plan of each student.

#### How does it work?

To become an AESH, candidates must meet qualification criteria and complete an initial 60-hour training course. They are typically hired on a three-year renewable contract and may secure a permanent position upon renewal. In addition to initial training, AESHS have access to continuing professional development and receive guidance from experienced local educational advisors. These referents offer personalised advice, share teaching tools, and facilitate the exchange of best practices.

Before support begins, a preparatory meeting is held between the teacher, the pupil's family, and the AESH to clarify expectations and ensure alignment with the student's personalised learning plan. Upon arrival, AESHS are welcomed by school leadership and receive orientation resources to support their integration. They may also participate in multidisciplinary meetings that help monitor and adapt the student's educational progress over time.

Their scope of action spans three key domains: daily life assistance, learning support, and social participation. Whether it involves helping a student manage transitions between classrooms, supporting comprehension during lessons, or simply encouraging interaction with classmates, AESHS contribute to a more inclusive and participatory classroom experience. Their presence is particularly beneficial for maintaining classroom continuity and reducing the risk of isolation for pupils with disabilities.

#### Why does it work?

According to national data, more than 121,000 AESHS were employed in France in the 2022–2023 academic year, with women making up 93% of the workforce. Despite their crucial role, many report dissatisfaction due to limited career prospects, modest salaries, and insufficient recognition. The 2024 Cour des Comptes report also noted that their responsibilities vary widely and often exceed their training. In practice, acknowledging these limits and supporting AESHS through clearer roles, targeted training, and stronger teamwork can help schools address these challenges and strengthen inclusion.

AESHs remain indispensable to the functioning of an inclusive school system. By fostering autonomy, providing academic and social support, and enabling access to school life, they help ensure that pupils with disabilities can thrive alongside their peers in a welcoming and equitable environment. <sup>[91–93]</sup>

## 3.3 External Supports

### 3.3.1 Educational and Support Activities

In Lithuania, a student first receives help from a teacher according to an agreed procedure at school. When a student's learning achievements are lower than those of their peers, the teacher applies to the school's child welfare commission to determine the cause of the learning difficulties, as this means that the teacher's help is not enough. Educational help is provided to a student in accordance with the "Description of the Procedure for Assessing a Student's Special Educational Needs (except those arising from exceptional abilities) in Pedagogical, Psychological, Medical and Social Pedagogical Aspects and Assigning Special Education": specialists, after conducting the assessment, discuss the results with the parents and the teacher and assign special education and educational help by recommending program adaptation, special teaching and technical assistance measures, adaptation of the educational environment, assessment of learning achievements, organization of testing and maturity exams, and adaptation of assessment instructions. The service can recommend to parents a school that would best suit the student, have the necessary team of specialists, and an adapted educational environment.

#### How does it work?

The education of students with special educational needs is organized in accordance with the "Description of the Procedure for Organizing the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs". Special education is understood as the adaptation and individualization of the general program, taking into account the identified special educational needs of the student, the wishes of the student, parents or guardians, and in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the pedagogical psychological service or educational support service. A student assistant may be assigned to the student.

#### Why does it work?

The purpose of education is to help a student develop, learn according to their abilities, acquire education and qualifications, therefore the school creates conditions for a student with special educational needs to receive high-quality and needs-based education and necessary educational support, prepares an individual education plan for the school or student, and students with severe or very severe special educational needs can study in general education schools for students with special educational needs up to the age of 21. At the school, various specialists such as typhlopedagogues, speech therapists, surdopedagogues, psychologists, teacher assistants, sign language interpreters, readers, etc. provide students with psychological support, social pedagogical support, and special pedagogical and special support.

[94–96]

# STAFF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## 4 Staff Health and Wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of school staff are just as important as your students. While it is important for school staff to take time to focus on their wellbeing, schools can offer additional ways to improve their health, such as implementing training programmes, offering gym memberships, and providing mental health services.

### 4.1 Training and Workshops

Training has many benefits: it can contribute towards career growth, improve student learning and wellbeing, and also improve staff resilience and management skills.

#### 4.1.1 Canopé: Supporting Teachers' Wellbeing Through Training and Resources

Canopé is a national public network operated by the French Ministry of National Education and Youth, dedicated to improving teacher support and development. It offers a broad range of digital and in-person resources, training courses, and professional development platforms for teachers. While not exclusively focused on mental health, a significant portion of its offer specifically addresses teacher wellbeing, stress management, and professional satisfaction.

##### How does it work?

At the core of Canopé's offer are four main digital platforms:

- **Canotech** provides on-demand training modules designed to be accessed at one's own pace. It includes short videos (2 to 90 minutes) and live or recorded webinars. A key thematic area is "Promoting professional wellbeing," which explores how educators can identify and manage stress symptoms, regulate emotions, and rekindle satisfaction in their work. These resources are ideal for teachers seeking immediate and flexible support.
- **Magistère** is a platform for self-directed learning, used widely across French educational institutions. Among the many courses, one titled "Managing stress in educational establishments" stands out. It offers 90 minutes of structured content, combining relaxation techniques like sophrology with practical teacher testimonials. This balance of theory and lived experience makes the course relatable and applicable.
- **Extra classe** is a podcast-based resource offering over 200 episodes tailored to educators. The series *Les Énergies scolaires* shares short, immersive accounts of school staff experiences, while *Parlons pratiques* features expert-led discussions on effective pedagogical practices. Although not always wellbeing-focused, the emphasis on storytelling and professional dialogue creates a sense of shared community and recognition.
- **E-inspé** serves as a hub for subject-specific teacher training. While its content doesn't target mental health directly, it indirectly contributes to wellbeing by empowering teachers to feel confident and prepared in their pedagogical roles. Topics range from managing information overload with students to improving subject-specific confidence (e.g. maths, swimming).

Canopé's strength lies in the flexibility of its offer: teachers can access support whenever they choose and tailor their development to current needs. This is particularly helpful in times of acute stress or professional fatigue, allowing educators to find tools for both prevention and crisis response.

## Why does it work?

Participation in Canopé's training has increased every year, with consistently high satisfaction and strong transferability to the classroom. The table below shows the key figures from 2022 to 2024. These results highlight both the growing demand for Canopé's resources and their tangible impact on teaching practice.

Year	People trained with Canopé resources	Online self-training users	Satisfaction rate
2022	212,383 (+6% from 2021)	440,000	96.4%
2023	241,187 (+14% from 2022)	439,777	95.5%
2024	~285,000 (+18% from 2023)	570,000	95%

These statistics were taken directly from analytic tools installed on the respective websites of Canopé and its sub-platforms. The level of satisfaction was measured by a questionnaire.

We can see an increase in the number of people who are using Canopé's resources and visiting its websites. This shows that teachers consider Canopé as a legitimate source of information which is both free and, for the majority of the resources, accessible online. <sup>[97–104]</sup>

### 4.1.2 European Education Area

The European Education Area, coordinated by the European Commission, is an initiative that helps European Union Member States work together to build more resilient and inclusive education and training systems.

The resource is implemented on a voluntary basis and serves as a useful tool providing information and practices on how wellbeing can be effectively implemented at schools through frameworks like the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2021–2030).

#### How does it work?

The intervention recognises the key role of schools for the promotion of mental health and wellbeing among young people, as these are environments where they spend considerable time during their developmental years. This is why addressing the wellbeing of both pupils and teachers is at the core of the European Education Area.

The intervention includes:

- promoting physical and mental health
- developing social and emotional competencies
- enhancing the capacity of pupils and educators to make healthy choices
- creating supportive environments that foster positive relationships, collaboration, learning, and personal development

The intervention suggests engaging the whole school as one of the most effective ways to support the wellbeing of children and young people. The whole-school approach also builds stronger cooperation between the school, the local community and a wide range of stakeholders, including municipalities, health and welfare agencies, youth organisations and other stakeholders.

### **Why does it work?**

As a result of decades of close cooperation among EU Member States, significant progress has been achieved in education across Europe. Nearly 95% of children now attend early childhood education from the age of four, over 40% of young adults obtain a higher education qualification, and almost 90% of young people complete their education with either an upper secondary diploma or are engaged in further training. Additionally, 80% of recent Erasmus+ graduates secure employment within three months of finishing their studies. While these milestones reflect strong progress toward the goals of the European Education Area, challenges remain—particularly in reducing the proportion of 15-year-olds with low proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science, and in boosting adult participation in lifelong learning.

These outcomes underscore the European Union's sustained commitment to advancing inclusive and high-quality education. Nonetheless, further progress will depend on targeted efforts to address persistent challenges, particularly in foundational skill development and adult participation in lifelong learning. Strengthening collaboration among Member States remains essential to ensure equitable access and support for all learners. With continued strategic investment and policy coordination, the full realisation of the European Education Area is within reach. <sup>[105–109]</sup>

## **4.1.3 Wellbeing and Mental Health in Primary Education**

The Bien-être et santé mentale dans l'enseignement fondamental (wellbeing and mental health in primary education) project is an initiative developed in Wallonia and Brussels, within French-speaking schools, with the aim of strengthening the mental and emotional health of primary school pupils. The programme is not a national policy, but is supported by a number of regional players, including CRÉSaM (Centre de Référence en Santé Mentale) and Assuralia. It aims to raise teachers' awareness of mental health, provide them with practical tools and promote a school culture that is more attentive to children's overall wellbeing.

### **How does it work?**

The programme is based on an integrated approach to wellbeing in schools. It includes:

- Free training courses for teachers, given by mental health professionals
- Practical workshops on recognising signs of emotional distress in children, caring classroom management and emotional regulation
- Teaching resources: practical information sheets, audio support, podcasts, posters, teaching scenarios, etc
- Support from mental health experts to guide schools in implementing the programme

Each participating school can adapt the content to the specific needs of its pupils. The programme is designed to be part of a whole-school approach, involving the headteacher, teachers and sometimes parents.

### **Why does it work?**

The success of the project rests on three pillars: teacher training, the simplicity of the tools offered, and professional support. Trained teachers report an increased sense of competence in dealing with sensitive issues such as anxiety, stress and conflict. This has the effect of improving the classroom climate, strengthening links between pupils and teachers, and preventing the emergence of more serious problems.

The project also encourages socio-emotional learning (SEL), an essential component of quality education recognised by the WHO and UNESCO. Developing skills such as empathy, managing emotions, and cooperation improves pupils' academic success and resilience.

### What are the benefits for pupils and teachers?

Pupils benefit from a calmer environment, where the expression of emotions is valued. Teachers, for their part, acquire the tools they need to react more effectively to signs of malaise in their pupils, as well as to take care of their own psychological equilibrium. According to the qualitative evaluations carried out by CRéSaM, teachers who have taken the training courses feel better equipped, more confident and more serene in their professional posture.

Events such as *Mental Health Week* in Wallonia, which features more than 70 activities (conferences, workshops, classroom presentations), help to raise awareness throughout the education community. <sup>[110–112]</sup>

## 4.2 Physical Health

Mind and body are closely interlinked; there is an increasing awareness of the importance of supporting staff physical health within school settings. Supporting the physical health of educators not only benefits individual wellbeing but also contributes to improved staff retention, morale, and the overall effectiveness of the school environment.

### 4.2.1 Yoga sessions

In recent years, yoga has gained increasing attention in Lithuania as a tool to enhance students' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing. While it is not part of the official national curriculum, many schools and kindergartens have voluntarily integrated yoga-based activities as part of health education, mindfulness training, or after-school programmes. These initiatives are often supported by municipal health promotion projects, non-governmental organisations, or the Ministry of Health through broader wellbeing strategies <sup>[113]</sup>.

#### What does it cover?

School yoga programmes focus on improving flexibility, concentration, and emotional balance through breathing exercises, stretching, relaxation, and guided mindfulness. Lessons typically include 10–30-minute sessions that help students manage stress and develop self-awareness. Yoga is commonly implemented in primary schools as part of physical education or morning routines, while older students may participate in specialised wellbeing or relaxation classes. Teachers or instructors receive basic training in child-friendly yoga methods, often provided by professional associations such as Vaikų joga Lietuvoje <sup>[114]</sup>.

#### How does it work?

Yoga sessions are designed to be inclusive and non-competitive. Pupils learn simple breathing and posture techniques that promote calmness, focus, and empathy. Some schools combine yoga with emotional literacy or meditation practices, linking physical and psychological wellbeing. Research by Vilnius University <sup>[115]</sup> suggests that regular yoga participation can improve children's emotional regulation and classroom behaviour, while reducing anxiety and hyperactivity symptoms.

#### Why does it matter?

In the context of increasing mental health challenges among young people, yoga offers a low-cost, preventive, and holistic intervention. It supports national priorities for emotional wellbeing and aligns with EU recommendations for social-emotional education in schools. Although the programme is not yet standardised or evaluated nationally, local success stories indicate growing recognition of yoga as a valuable complement to Lithuania's broader health and wellbeing policies. <sup>[113–117]</sup>

## 4.3 Wellbeing Resources

Schools are placing greater emphasis on staff wellbeing by introducing dedicated resources and support systems to better promote mental health and wellbeing. These may include access to counselling services, wellbeing workshops, support networks, and workload management.

### 4.3.1 Focus on Healthy Life, Organisations, and Wellbeing in Society (F.L.O.W.S)

The F.L.O.W.S. programme (Focus on Healthy Life, Organisations, and Wellbeing in Society) is an interdisciplinary initiative set up by the VIVES University of Applied Sciences in Belgium. Aimed at professionals from a variety of sectors, it is aimed in particular at primary school teachers who want to improve their mental health, life balance and job satisfaction. The starting point is simple but fundamental: to support pupils effectively, teachers themselves need to feel good about their role and their working environment.

#### How does it work?

Teachers can register individually or through their school. The programme consists of training sessions, practical workshops and online resources, focusing on the following areas:

- Stress management and prevention of burnout
- Work-life balance
- Nutrition, physical activity and healthy living
- Mindfulness and relaxation strategies

The activities can be taken face-to-face or remotely, providing valuable flexibility for teachers with busy schedules. Follow-up support is also offered to help participants put the strategies they have learned into practice in their professional environment.

#### Why does it work?

F.L.O.W.S. is based on research in positive psychology and well-being sciences, and offers evidence-based tools. The programme not only raises awareness, but also gives teachers the means to take lasting action in their daily lives. The content is tailored to the school context and takes into account the specific challenges of the teaching profession, including emotional workload, classroom management, and the lack of recognition sometimes felt.

A teacher who is better prepared to recognise his or her own signs of stress, to establish routines for emotional regulation, or to set clear professional limits is also a teacher who is better able to create a secure and motivating environment for his or her pupils.

#### What are the benefits for teachers and pupils?

Feedback points to an improvement in participants' overall wellbeing, better management of stress in the classroom, and a reduction in signs of burnout. Teachers report greater resilience in the face of the unexpected, better communication with colleagues and an increased ability to create positive relationships with pupils.

This dynamic has a direct impact on pupils: a teacher who is more serene and in better mental health is more emotionally available, more patient, and better able to encourage a calm school climate.

#### Areas for improvement

Although F.L.O.W.S. offers high-quality support, its accessibility is sometimes limited by a lack of time or institutional recognition. It would be useful to include this type of training in schools' professional development plans, and to officially recognise participation in teachers' careers. <sup>[118-120]</sup>

### 4.3.2 Employee Assistance Service (EAS)

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) for teachers in Ireland provides confidential counselling, support, and wellbeing services to help teachers manage personal or work-related issues. The EAS is available 24/7, 365 days a year, and can be accessed through the following channels in Ireland:

- **Freephone:** 1800 411 057
- **SMS:** Text 'Hi' to 087 145 2056
- **WhatsApp:** 087 369 0010
- **Online Portal:** [Spectrum.Life](https://spectrum.life) <sup>[121]</sup>

These services are available to teachers and immediate family members (partner, spouse, or adult child aged 18 and over residing at the same address) and are free of charge.

#### How does it work?

- **Self-Referral:** Contact the EAS directly using any of the above methods. No prior approval is needed from school management.
- **Confidentiality:** All interactions are confidential. Information will not be shared with school management or other parties without your explicit consent, except in situations where there is a risk of harm or legal obligation.
- **Support Offered:** The EAS provides short-term counselling, legal and financial advice, stress management, relationship support, and assistance with critical incidents.

#### *For School Leaders and Managers*

School leaders can utilise the EAS to support staff wellbeing, including:

- **Consultation:** Seeking advice on staff welfare issues.
- **Critical Incident Support:** Accessing support for staff affected by traumatic events.
- **Workshops and Webinars:** Participating in sessions on stress management and wellbeing promotion.

Managers can also refer staff to the EAS with the employee's consent.

#### Additional Wellbeing Resources

Beyond the EAS, teachers can explore other resources to support their wellbeing.

- **Stress Control Programme:** An online, evidence-based program offering practical skills to manage stress.
- **Teaching Council Wellbeing Resources:** Access to professional learning materials and supporting teachers and schools.

By utilising the EAS and these additional resources, teachers and school staff can access comprehensive support to manage personal and professional challenges effectively. <sup>[121–123]</sup>



# PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

# 5 Practical Implementation

Improving student wellbeing is not only beneficial for students' academic growth, it is also an essential component of their personal growth now and in the future. For many, education is the first or only safe place where students can receive the health and wellbeing supports that they need. Now that we have synthesised current health and wellbeing practices, this handbook will describe how similar interventions may be implemented in your own classroom or school today.

## 1. Needs Assessment

Before implementing a wellbeing intervention, it is important to identify the needs of your students. There are several ways you can identify student needs:

- Focus groups – ask students what they want, what challenges they are experiencing, and what current features they like
- Anonymous surveys or polls – these can be sent out to staff, students, and parents to identify health and wellbeing needs
- Behavioural records – review current reports within the school, are there recurring mentions of exam stress, behavioural issues, or bullying which can be addressed
- Observation – what have staff members noticed in their students?

## 2. Planning and Goal Setting

Once you have identified the key wellbeing elements you wish to address, set clear and achievable goals. This can be done alongside all staff to ensure the whole school understands your new goals. These may include increasing student resilience, reducing bullying, or improving classroom relationships.

Using the SMART<sup>[124]</sup> framework may help create these goals:

- Specific – what will be the outcome, and what actions will be taken?
- Measurable – how will you measure this goal?
- Achievable – ensure the goal is feasible, and that you have the appropriate resources required
- Relevant – does the goal align with your broader goals of the school
- Time-Bound – what is the time frame for implementing and achieving your goal

## 3. Training and Resources

Consider if specific training or resources are required to implement the intervention. It is important to seek out appropriate training programmes for staff to ensure programmes are implemented correctly. There are plenty of online resources and mental health charities, such as the Anna Freud Centre, or JIGSAW. Additionally, your school may already have on-site professionals such as counsellors or psychologists who can offer guidance or co-facilitate training sessions.

## 4. Implementation

With a clear plan and appropriate resources in place, begin embedding your chosen wellbeing practices into your daily teaching. Collaboration with other staff, parents, and students can ensure the intervention is running smoothly.

## 5. Evaluation

Health and wellbeing are continuous, therefore, it is vital to constantly monitor and improve wellbeing facilities. Think back to your SMART goal – have you achieved it in the time frame you set? What are the measurable outcomes? You can use this to assess how impactful the intervention has been, and where it may need improvements. Additionally, more focus groups and surveys can offer insight into staff and student opinions on the programme.

## 6. Don't forget yourself

Exposure to mental health challenges of students can impact you too. Never forget to look after your own health and wellbeing.

- Assess your emotional wellbeing
  - Keeping a diary
  - Introspection
  - Mood trackers
  - Recognising the signs of stress or burnout
- Seek feedback

Speak to a trusted friend, family member, or colleague if you are experiencing mental health challenges. Your workplace may be able to offer supports such as EAS/ EAP.

- Looking after yourself
  - Healthy Eating
  - Exercise
  - Relaxation time and hobbies
  - Social life
- Seeking Mental Health Support
  - EAP/ school resources
  - Therapy/ counselling
  - Stress management i.e. exercise or meditation
  - Work-life balance

Overall, this handbook offers an overview of the current health and wellbeing practices used in schools across Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, and Lithuania, showing how each practice is utilised by schools. Taking inspiration from current strategies and implementing them using this step-by-step guide, schools and teachers can transition from theory to action.

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