

## **Developing a school health policy**

An integral part of developing a health-promoting school is creating a health policy that underpins the work. It follows that with a settings approach, a school health policy should include all the aspects of school life mentioned previously.

It also needs to be developed locally so that it reflects local issues, interests, problems and priorities. One school may consider bullying and well-being to be most important, whilst another may consider that food provision is the highest priority. It cannot be stressed enough that local commitment and ownership are needed for a health policy to be relevant and meaningful. It should also be an on-going process, with strategies and tools that enable pupils, teachers and parents to continually review, develop and sustain the policy. Everyone in the school, including pupils, needs to have ownership, so that it is embedded into people's consciousness, practice, action and behaviour at school. The main conclusion from health-promoting schools is that more participation leads to more ownership. This idea is also explored in the section on values.

One way that pupils can contribute to a health policy is through their own education. If education on health and social matters results in them drawing up proposals for action to change the school's social environment, these can be an important input to the development of the school's health policy. Obviously there are certain issues that pupils cannot change directly. There may be existing legislation (such as smoke free environments) or a local policy that has to be adhered to, but pupils can still be informed and the policy can be debated.

It is important to discuss and justify how different stakeholders might be involved. What is appropriate and desirable may vary depending on the issue. What can be discussed and what cannot and why? What is merely information, what is open to discussion, what can be decided collectively and with what justification?

### **Criteria for a health policy**

A school's health policy must reflect the following three dimensions:

- Developing a policy takes attention, time and resources, if it is to be taken seriously. It needs to be on the educational agenda in the school and given priority as an important theme. It must also be integrated into the educational process.
- A policy presents visions of what we want in future, both regarding the type of school and society. Visions are subject to public discussion in a democratic society, with people arguing for what they consider valuable and why.
- A policy also defines problems and sets out a framework to solve problems. Defining problems answers the question of which problems are most important and investigates the reasons and causes for the problems arising. Solving problems includes principles, guidelines and proposed action to counteract, prevent and solve problems.

A school health policy should:

- contribute to the implementation of the schools' educational mission;
- promote the health and well-being of all school users;
- include factors related to both lifestyles and living conditions;
- promote a clear vision and provide a framework for solving problems;
- contribute to pupils developing skills and action competences;
- be monitored and reviewed regularly.

### **A conceptual framework for a health policy**

The conceptual framework given here illustrates all the components needed in developing a health policy. They all influence one another and all need careful consideration. If any are missed out it is likely to be ineffective, but a school may choose to start at any of the places in the framework and can address the components in any chronological order. Nevertheless, a 'theme' or a 'challenge' is a good place to start.

This framework should be used in a dynamic way: with each component being assessed in relation to the others. This ensures continual assessment of whether the components are in accordance and coherent and makes the justifications for the 'who, what, how and when' of the health policy explicit and clear.

## A conceptual framework for developing a school health policy

### Planning and coherence questions

What do we want? Who should participate?

How should we do it? When should we do it?

What justification do we have for what, who, how and when?

How do we want visions, values, objectives and action to interact?

