



Schools4Health

Policy recommendations

To make every school a health promoting school

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Overarching policy recommendations

1

Integrate health into the core mission and daily life of schools

Health must be recognised as foundational for learning. Schools should integrate health into everyday teaching, culture, and decision-making rather than treating it as an add-on.

2

Building strong and supportive systems *around* schools

Creating health promoting schools is not solely the responsibility of schools and teaching staff. It requires cross-sectoral collaboration among policymakers, public authorities, practitioners, and the broader community.

3

Recognise and invest in Health Promoting Schools as a cost-effective strategy

Health Promoting Schools help reduce social and health inequities, improve the mental and physical well-being of young people, and strengthen academic outcomes. They should be recognised as a cost-effective and efficient strategy that delivers both educational and health benefits for society.



Recommendations at national & regional level

Strengthen legislative frameworks and incentives

Clearer mandatory requirements, frameworks, and resources can help schools integrate health into their curricula and policies.

→ But continue to give schools freedom and flexibility.

Address barriers and support school staff

Address barriers to investing in HPS, such as weak legislation, overloaded curricula, and funding gaps, while reducing teacher workload and involve staff in decision-making.



Recommendations at education system & school leadership level



School leaders should adopt a **whole-of-school approach** and integrate health-promoting principles into **school policies** and **development plans**.

Establish a **central, cross disciplinary coordinating body** within schools and at (sub)national level can help relieve the burden on teachers and facilitate the implementation of health promotion activities.

Foster a **supportive and participatory school culture** by promoting **staff wellbeing** and **collaboration**, recognising that teachers' positive experiences and **sense of ownership** are key to sustaining the Health-Promoting Schools approach over time.



Equity in education

Implement **proportionate universalism** by allocating targeted funding and resources to vulnerable schools, prioritising **needs-based support**, and designing inclusive interventions.



Navigating digital wellbeing

Establish stronger **regulatory frameworks** informed by school and student insights, provide guidance and infrastructure for schools to support **digital wellbeing** and **literacy**.



Health promoting schools

Promoting environmental sustainability

Embed health and sustainability as **integrated curriculum priorities**, and provide funding to support **green school infrastructure** and empower students as agents of change.



Strengthening social connections

Integrate **social wellbeing** into school policies and practices, strengthening partnerships and establishing mechanisms for inclusive student, family, and community **participation**.



Sustainability & scaling

Build capacity and awareness among stakeholders about the benefits of HPS and how to support and implement the approach

Demonstrate impact by **evaluating interventions**, strengthening the **evidence base**, and **calculate the return on investment** to inform and convince policymakers

Ensure **systemic teacher engagement** by embedding health-promotion activities into **teacher accreditation**, professional development, and school support systems

Use national and regional **legislation, EU schemes**, and **multi-sector partnerships** to secure resources, institutional support and scale programmes across all levels



SUPPORT

Allocate adequate funding for HPS as a cost-effective way to boost education and health.

CHANGE

Embed HPS frameworks into national policies, strategies and school cultures.

How to build a health promoting school?



CONNECT

Build partnerships among schools, communities and governments.

EMPOWER

Equip school leaders with tools and support they need to inspire change.



Learn more about our policy recommendations:

Schools4Health

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CONNECTION IN SCHOOLS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY

POLICY BRIEF


MAKING EVERY SCHOOL A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

Declining levels of social connection have become a pressing global issue, affecting people of all ages, from adolescents to the elderly. In recent years, this has escalated, with particular concern for younger populations and adults, who are experiencing this disconnect at alarming rates.¹ Currently, 10% of adolescents report feeling lonely most of the time or always in the past year. This trend worsens as age increases: loneliness more than doubles between ages 11 and 15, from 8 to 15% among boys and 14% to 28% among girls.² Globally, 12.4% of young adults aged 18-29 and a third of older adults aged 60 and above are also estimated to experience social isolation.³

What are the causes and consequences of social disconnect?

Rising levels of loneliness and social disconnection have been linked to a range of factors, including challenging economic circumstances, limited access to education, and inadequate community infrastructure. Among young people, additional drivers include bullying, identity struggles, excessive screen time, and adverse experiences that erode trust and hinder the ability to seek social support. The long-lasting impacts of COVID-19 restrictions have also significantly contributed to feelings of isolation.⁴

The negative impact of social isolation is profound. Beyond its well-documented effects on mental



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HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS AS A LEVER FOR EQUITY IN EDUCATION

POLICY BRIEF


MAKING EVERY SCHOOL A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

Equity in education—defined as the attainment of educational achievements irrespective of the learner's background—is increasingly facing significant challenges. Recent outcomes of international assessments, including PISA scores¹ and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study,² demonstrate an overall decline in student wellbeing and academic performance. Disadvantaged children and youth³ are often impacted the hardest, as limited access to supportive resources can lead to lower wellbeing, poorer academic results, and greater exposure to harmful environments.⁴

These challenges not only affect today's young generation. They also have long-term consequences for education systems and societies at large. A study by Unicef⁵ reflects how inequitable education systems are unable to break existing patterns. Instead, existing systems tend to reinforce social inequalities rather than resolve them.

In the education sector, this is evident in the persistent divide between private and public schools – particularly in disadvantaged areas, where public schools are under-resourced and face numerous competing demands, making it challenging to implement effective health and wellbeing initiatives.

Addressing inequalities during these formative years is particularly powerful in the school setting, as it lays a strong foundation for healthier, more equitable outcomes across the lifespan.



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WHY INVEST IN HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS?

POLICY BRIEF

MAKING EVERY SCHOOL A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

Children and young people spend a significant proportion of their time in schools, which play a big role in their development. The physical and social aspects of schools influence students' norms, values, and health-related behaviours, often leaving a lasting impact on their lives. Within this environment, they can also learn to become responsible, informed, and constructive citizens.

However, EU countries are grappling with declining levels of basic skills amongst students. One-third of fifteen-year-olds struggle to understand and apply mathematics in real-life situations, and one-fourth fail to understand basic texts or apply simple scientific knowledge. Overweight and obesity levels amongst children and young people across Europe are stagnant at best, or increasing, amidst insufficient rates of physical activity.⁶

Studies also reflect more problematic use of social media amongst girls and gaming amongst boys⁷ as well as an overall worsening of mental health and isolation among adolescents since the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ Such worrying trends are further impacted by the growing disabilities between advantaged and disadvantaged students, reflecting that education systems are unable to deliver on equity.⁹

The need for school environments to support health and wellbeing is clear. However, achieving this requires close collaboration across sectors and actors, especially in the fields of health and education. Numerous research outcomes demonstrate that students who feel good in school and are healthy have better school attendance, better academic outcomes, and prospects.¹⁰ When children and young people feel and do better, societies can flourish.



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Making Every School a Health Promoting School

Health Promoting Schools (HPS) integrate wellbeing into every aspect of school life: policies, practices, and culture. They help students, teachers and communities thrive by creating a supportive environment for living, learning, and working. Creating health-promoting school environments can be a cost-effective, evidence-based solution to interrelated challenges, such as teacher burnout, worsening student mental and physical health and social inequalities.

INVEST IN HEALTH, HARVEST SUCCESS
Investing in healthier schools to improve the quality of education increases high returns. For every €1 spent on health promotion interventions, society gains more than €10 back.

HOW TO BUILD A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL?

- SUPPORT:** Allocate adequate funding for HPS as a cost-effective way to boost innovation and health.
- CHANGE:** Embed HPS frameworks into national policies, strategies and school cultures.
- CONNECT:** Build partnerships among schools, communities and governments.
- EMPOWER:** Equip school leaders with tools and support they need to inspire change.

Policies and initiatives supporting HPS approaches

European Education Area
Supports high-quality education systems and integrates mobility into students' and teachers' learning

Pathways to School Success Council Conclusions (2022)
Calls for Member States to address early school dropout and underachievement, promoting wellbeing

European Commission's Expert Group on Wellbeing at School
Guidance for schools and policymakers to implement whole-school approaches to wellbeing

Healthier Together Initiative
Supports Member States to reduce non-communicable diseases through coordinated efforts

European Commission's Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health
Guidance on health services to improve mental wellbeing across the life course

Healthy, Resilient4All Campaign
A major campaign by the European Commission on active lifestyles and better health for all ages

EU Child Guarantee
Supports initiatives to promote social inclusion by ensuring children in need have access to essential services

Updated WHO Regional Strategy on Child and Adolescent Health
Creating vision

It's time to go beyond individual lessons on health and integrate wellbeing into the very fabric of school life. Scan here for the full policy in set on **Why Invest in Health Promoting Schools?**



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Health Promoting Schools

A practical foundation to achieve a 'triple win' for health, equity and environmental sustainability in education

The 'triple win' approach aims to generate simultaneous benefits for health, equity, and the environment. The Health Promoting Schools framework provides a practical pathway by creating healthier physical and social environments and embedding these priorities in school practices and policies. In doing so, schools can boost student wellbeing, narrow health gaps, and foster sustainable habits.



The triple win approach in practice
Experiences from Schools4Health

Spain
The Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MINECO) introduced healthy eating for adolescents by making it fun and social. Focusing on disadvantaged schools ensured support for students most at risk. Using local fruit and vegetables reduced transport emissions and supported regional food systems, showing how healthier diets can also create them accessible for children from disadvantaged families.

Hungary
In Hungary, the National Nutrition and Food Safety Directorate (NNFSD) showed how nutrition education can have multiple ripple effects. Students learned to prepare snacks, and gained entrepreneurial skills selling them. Seasonal, local produce and waste reduction practices further cut environmental impact. Offering snacks at low or no cost made them accessible for children from disadvantaged families.

Romania and Greece
Romanian and Greek schools proved the 'triple win' practice to support children's social-emotional skills. Accessible to all students, these activities support inclusion and help improve classroom relationships. Embedding life skills in curricula can help students develop competences to improve the school social environment and work better together to potentially address health, equity, and environmental issues.

By embedding healthy nutrition, physical activity, emotional wellbeing and environmental responsibility into daily routines, health promoting schools give all students, regardless of their background, the skills they need for a healthy, sustainable life. This 'triple win' approach supports health, equity, and climate goals – empowering students as change-makers and benefiting wider communities.



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NAVIGATING EDUCATION AND WELLBEING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

POLICY BRIEF


MAKING EVERY SCHOOL A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

The places where children and adolescents learn, play, and socialise are increasingly shifting to the digital space. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition, pushing more aspects of our lives online. As a result, technology is increasingly woven into the fabric of both learning and leisure, shaping how children and young people grow and engage with the world around them.

When safe, online platforms can offer valuable opportunities for creativity, connection, and education. Children and adolescents can be empowered to express themselves, strengthen relationships with their peers, and access knowledge like never before. Unlike online platforms, however, can have a detrimental effect, exposing children and adolescents to harmful content such as cyberbullying, violence, and unrealistic or unhealthy lifestyles.

Trends in Europe show that excessive use of social media is on the rise, from 7% in 2016 to 17% in 2022, highlighting an increase in harmful digital behaviours.¹

Psychological screen time, when driven by highly stimulating platform design and content, can impair cognitive, linguistic, physical, and social development. It has been linked to shorter attention spans, lower motivation, increased risk of anxiety and mental health conditions, as well as a decline in real-life interaction and social skills. Intermediated and disembodied experiences, issues faced online may also spill over into offline environments where children and youth frequently gather, such as schools. Research shows, for instance, that there are clear links between cyberbullying and difficulties such as lower school attendance, poor academic performance, and even health complaints.²



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CREATING GREEN AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

POLICY BRIEF


MAKING EVERY SCHOOL A HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

Children and young people across Europe are growing up in a changing world, impacted by the realities of climate change, environmental degradation, and persistent health inequalities.¹ This is reflected in the views of nine in ten young Europeans, who believe that addressing climate change would enhance their wellbeing. Their view highlights the strong link between environmental sustainability and lifelong health.²

Schools hold a unique position of being able to raise awareness and engage in health and sustainability issues from an early age.³ While many schools are already taking on this responsibility by introducing health and environmental initiatives, joint action across these disciplines is often limited due to the nature of education frameworks and funding structures.

In fact, many education systems treat health promotion and sustainability as separate domains and do not recognise the potential of addressing them in a more integrated manner in core curricula. This disconnect can result in fragmented approaches and missed opportunities for greater collective impact.

This challenge reveals a deeper issue: current education systems are often ill-equipped to respond to today's complex social and environmental realities. The dominant focus remains on preparing students for today's labour markets, rather than on fostering critical thinking and engagement about pressing social and ecological concerns. Consequently, mainstream education tends to perpetuate unsustainable behaviour and entrenched inequalities instead of empowering learners to question and transform them.⁴



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Report on the outcomes of Schools4Health best practices and lessons learnt

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Report on Policy and practice to strengthen the Health Promoting School approach across the EU





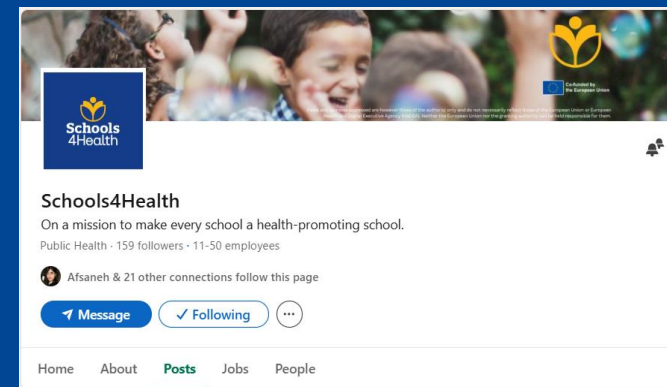
THANK YOU!

For more information:

*Visit the Schools4Health Hub:
<https://schools4health.eu/>*



*Follow Schools4Health on
LinkedIn:*



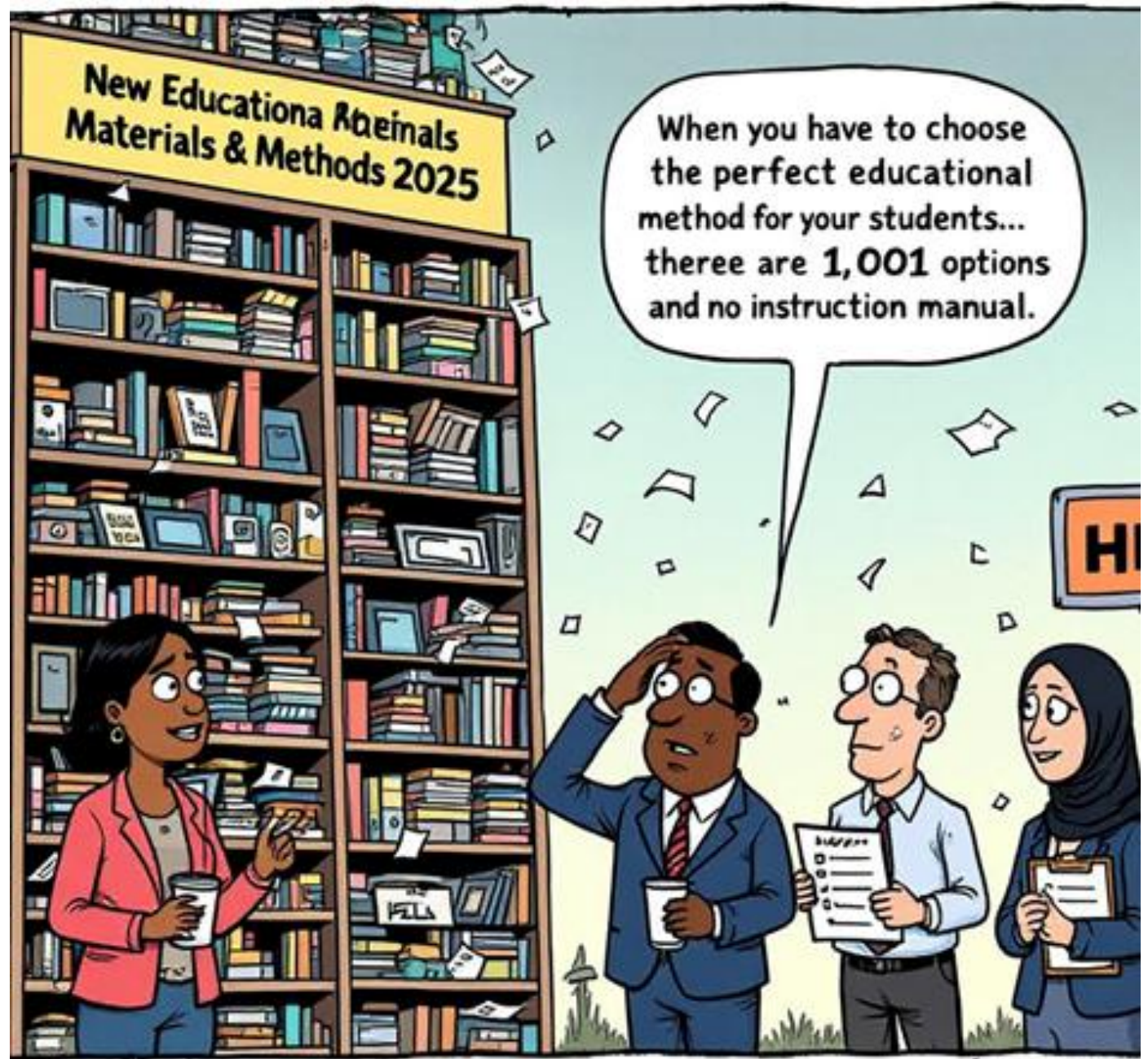


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Your Health Promoting School Journey Starts Now

Launch of the Schools4Health Policy Toolkit & Practitioner's Manual

Sound Familiar?

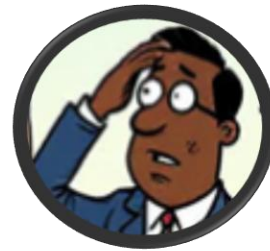


Meet



Ariale—a teacher and care coordinator

Matt— The principal at Ariale’s school



*Abdinor & Clara—
policymakers in the region*



An HPS story inspired by two tools



1. The Discovery

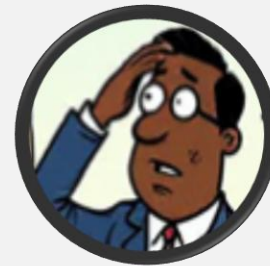
2. The Talk



3. The Bridge

4. The Decision

5. The HPS effect



**Facing similar challenges?
Want to make this story yours?**



Identified pain points



Practitioners say:

- *Where do we even start?*
- *Who needs to be involved?*
- *How do we sustain this long-term?*

Policymakers say:

- *How do we support without micromanaging?*
- *What evidence justifies the investment?*
- *How do we scale across our region?*

**Today you get
answers**

**Two tools. One
ecosystem. Real solutions.**



The Practitioner's Path

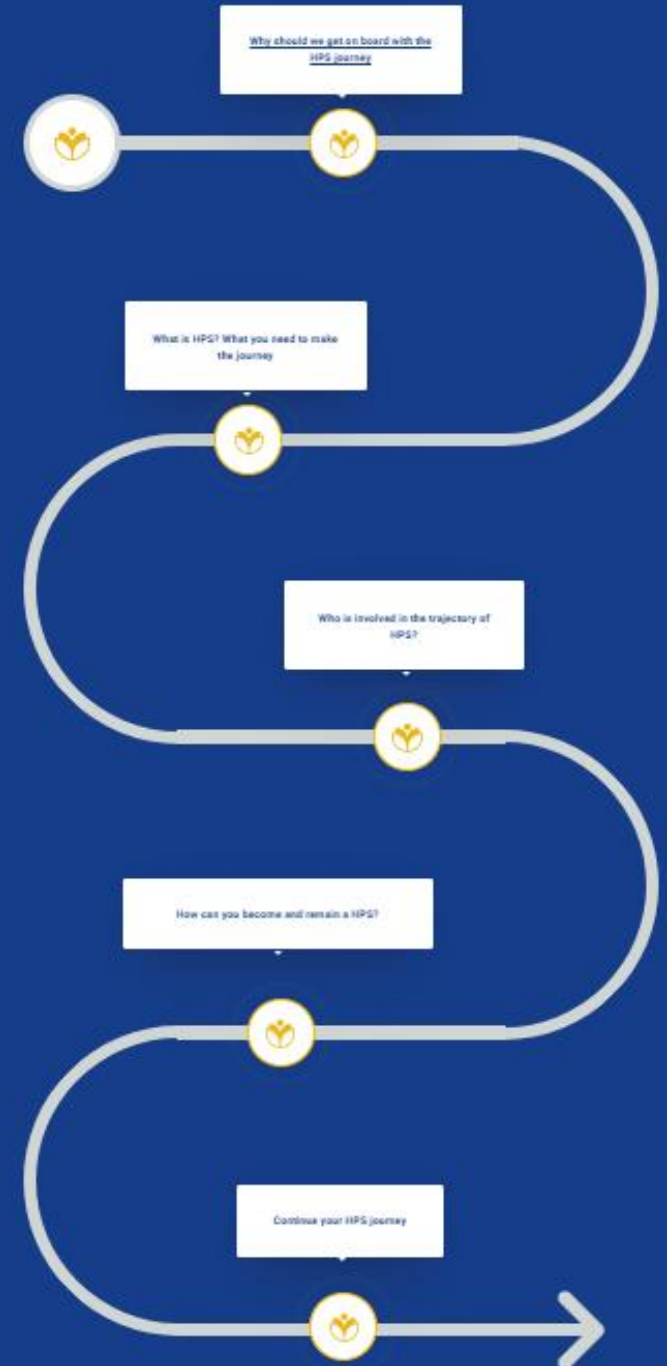


1. Why

2. What

3. Who

4. How



Training tool for practitioners –

- **Getting started**
 - *do we have a common language?*
 - *who is supporting you?*
- **Assessing your starting point**
 - *do you know the schools' priorities?*
- **Action plan** – *do you know any good practices?*
- **Taking action** – [checkpoint](#)
- **Monitor and evaluate**
 - *do you monitor processes?*
 - *do you evaluate outcomes?*
 - *do you celebrate successes?*



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Taking Action: Checkpoint

- School community members have a sense of ownership and are committed to the Health Promoting School plan.
- The Health Promoting School approach has been promoted in the local community.
- Staff feel confident in their ability to implement the plan.
- Sufficient time, human resources, and funding are available to support implementation.
- Tasks, targets, and timelines are clearly defined and communicated.
- A system is in place to provide ongoing support and motivation for staff.
- Plans are in place to inform and engage new pupils, staff, and teachers.
- Conditions exist to ensure long-term continuation of Health Promoting School activities.





**From
overwhelmed
to action**

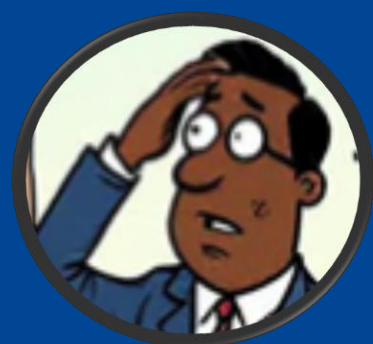


Before:

- ~~X~~ *Fragmented efforts*
- ~~X~~ *Unclear priorities*
- ~~X~~ *Working alone*
- ~~X~~ *No proven models*

After:

- ✓ *5-step pathway*
- ✓ *Evidence-based priorities*
- ✓ *Stakeholder collaboration*
- ✓ *20+ European examples*



The Policymakers' Path



A Guide for policymakers to support the adoption of Health-Promoting School (HPS)



Why this Toolkit and how can it benefit you?

As a policymaker, you play a vital role in shaping the environments in which children learn and grow. This toolkit is designed to enhance your understanding of the Health-Promoting Schools (HPS) approach—a proven framework that integrates health into all aspects of school life.

By using this toolkit, you will gain:

- Practical guidance on how to support schools in becoming more health-promoting, equitable, and sustainable in the long-term.
- Evidence-based insights to inform your policy decisions.
- Real-world examples of successful implementation across Europe.

What Will You Find in This Toolkit?

This toolkit offers a comprehensive yet accessible overview of the HPS approach, including:

- A clear introduction to its purpose, principles, and added value.
- Policy briefs backed by evidence on how HPS contributes to:
 - Health and well-being
 - Equity and inclusion

1. Clear Political Commitment
2. Enabling Conditions
3. Backing of robust M&E systems

The guide for policymakers –

5 policy brief, 5 pathways to impact

- *Why invest in Health Promoting Schools?*
- *HPS as a Lever for Equity in Education*
- *Creating Green & Healthy Schools*
- *Navigating Education in the Digital Age*
- *Working Together to Improve Social Wellbeing*





From challenge to strategy



Before:

- X Policy in vacuum*
- X Schools struggling*
- X Siloed departments*
- X No scaling plan*

After:

- ✓ Evidence-based framework*
- ✓ Equipped schools*
- ✓ Cross-sector coalition*
- ✓ Proven scale models*

THE POWER OF INTEGRATION



Policy and practice working in tandem.



What if – The tools can help you to go from one-off actions to a systematic, structured, sustainable health program for your school?

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS:

- Take first module by the end of the week, and share your experiences with us on social media #Schools4Health
- Plan an introduction session with colleagues who are interested or during a plenary school meeting
- Join our Community of Practice on LinkedIn



Join the Journey

-

Scan to participate!



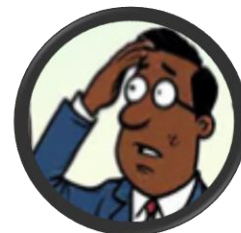
PRACTITIONERS

*Like Ariale the School Coordinator &
Matt the school principal*



POLICYMAKERS

*Like Abdinor and Clara the Policy
Leaders*





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