

The Icelandic National Curriculum Guides for Preschools, Compulsory Schools and Upper Secondary Schools: Health and Wellbeing One of Six Fundamental Pillars of Education Iceland

Title in original language:

Aðalnámskrár leikskóla, grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla: Heilbrigði og velferð einn af sex grunnþáttum menntunar

Which 'life stage' for CVDs prevention targets the intervention?

Children in pre-schools (2-5 years), compulsory schools (6-15 years) and upper secondary schools (mainly 16-19 years).

Short description:

In 2011 new National Curriculum Guides for pre-, compulsory and upper secondary schools were published in Iceland by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In that policy a milestone is made by defining “health and wellbeing” as one of the six fundamental pillars of education, thereby confirming the importance of health and wellbeing for education and vice versa.

The National Curriculum Guide is a policy framework for Icelandic schools across educational levels. It describes the role of education in schools according to Icelandic laws and regulations, the objectives and organization of school operations and the requirements and rights of everyone in the school community. Six fundamental pillars have been developed within this framework that forms the essence of the educational policy in Iceland. In addition to “health and wellbeing”, the other pillars are “literacy”, “sustainability”, “democracy and human rights”, “equality” and “creativity”.

The fundamental pillars are meant to accentuate the principle of general education and encourage increased continuity in school activities as a whole.

The National Curriculum Guide and particularly the pillar “health and wellbeing” is an important foundation for the Health Promoting School projects (pre-, compulsory and upper secondary HP Schools). The Health Promoting School projects likewise provide an important support for schools to implement the pillar “health and wellbeing” in all their work.

Preschools and compulsory schools are generally run by municipalities with additional funding from the state. Upper secondary schools are run by the state. The Health Promoting Schools Projects for all school levels are becoming well-established. They are run by the Directorate of Health in collaboration with The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, The Ministry of Welfare and many other, key stakeholders. The number of health promoting municipalities is also increasing and one of their priorities is to encourage and motivate their schools to take part in the Health Promoting School projects.

To which type of interventions does your example of good practice belong to?

Policy/strategy. The National Curriculum Guide is a policy framework for Icelandic schools across educational levels. The National Curriculum Guides have the same status as regulations in Iceland.

How is this example of good practice funded?

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture publishes The National Curriculum Guides for preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools and funds the implementation partially, e.g. by publishing extra material and by funding courses and projects in development. Preschools and compulsory schools are generally run by municipalities, with their own funding and with funding from the state. Upper secondary schools are funded by the state.

What is/was the level of implementation of your example of good practice?

Preschools and compulsory schools are run by municipalities. Upper secondary schools are run by the state.

What are the main aim and the main objectives of your example of good practice?

With the implementation of the new National Curriculum Guides for all school levels (pre-, compulsory, and upper secondary schools) the pillar “Health and wellbeing” is now one of the six fundamental pillars of education. As children and youth spend large part of the day at school it is an important setting to create supportive environment that promotes healthy behaviours and lifestyle. With this policy document (National Curriculum Guides) schools now have an even larger role in providing health promoting environments as all school activities are now supposed to encourage health and wellbeing. It is the schools role to create a positive atmosphere and a health promoting environment where health and wellbeing are systematically supported in various ways. The main health factors that are to be encouraged are: positive self-image, physical activity, nutrition, rest, mental wellbeing, positive communication, security, hygiene, sexual health and understanding of one’s own feelings and those of others.

The fundamental pillars, including the pillar of “Health and wellbeing”, refer to social, cultural, environmental and ecological literacy so that children and youth may develop mentally and physically, thrive in society and cooperate with others. The fundamental pillars also refer to a vision of the future, ability and will to influence and be active in maintaining society, change it and develop. The fundamental pillars are based on the view appearing in school legislation that both social objectives and the educational objectives of the individual are to be achieved. They are socially oriented as well as they are meant to promote increased equality and democracy and to ensure well-educated and healthy citizens, both for participating in and for changing and improving society and also for contemporary employment.

The fundamental pillars are meant to accentuate the principle of general education and encourage increased continuity in school activities as a whole.

In evaluating school activities, the influence of the fundamental pillars on teaching, play and studies have to be taken into consideration. The fundamental pillars are an intrinsic part of school activities. The concepts that the fundamental pillars are based on are to be reflected in the working methods, communication and atmosphere of schools. They should be evident in all educational activities and in the content of school subjects and fields of study, both regarding the knowledge and the skills that children and youth are to acquire fields of study. This can be specialisation of the tasks of school activities, across subjects and school levels. The fundamental pillars are an intrinsic part of all curriculum guides at all school levels and their stipulations for all school activities:

- Choice of material and content of study, teaching and play should reflect the fundamental pillars
- Working methods and techniques that children and youth learn are influenced by ideas which appear in discussions of the fundamental pillars
- Procedures of teachers and other school personnel are to be based on the fundamental pillars and thus encourage independence, initiative and development of school activities
- When school activities are evaluated, it should be observed whether and how the fundamental pillars are reflected in study, teaching and play

Please give a description of the problem the good practice example wants to:

By placing “Health and wellbeing” as one of the six fundamental pillars in the curriculum guides, the government highlights the important role of health and wellbeing in achieving the main objectives of education in Iceland. At the same time this emphasis is also a very important step towards implementing Icelandic health policy and Health 2020. In Health 2020 one of the key messages is that improvements in health are the product of not only the actions of the health system but of effective policy across all parts of government (HiAP) and collaborative efforts across all levels of society.

Is your example of good practice embedded in a broader national/regional/ local policy or action plan?

Yes. The National Curriculum Guide is based on the Preschool Act, No. 90, 12 June 2008, the Compulsory School Act, No. 91, 12 June 2008, and the Upper Secondary School Act, No. 92, 12 June 2008.

The Guide is issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in the same manner as regulations and serves diverse purposes. It is both a means of control to execute provisions of these law, instructions of the educational authorities on school policy and a compilation of the common objectives for school activities in the whole country.

Implementation of your example of good practice is/was:

Continuous (integrated in the system)

Vulnerable social groups:

Ethnic minorities; Migrants; Disabled people/children; Low income groups

Who implements/implemented the policy?

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the implementation of legislation for all school levels and the operation of secondary schools. The municipalities are responsible for the pre- and compulsory schools and the implementation of this policy; usually the schools have some liberties within the framework.

What core activities are/have been implemented?

To introduce the six fundamental pillars of education and support their implementation, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has developed a website and videos (Icelandic). <http://namtilframtidar.is>

The Ministry of Education promotes the Health Promoting Schools Projects, coordinated by the Directorate of Health, as a suggested means towards success in implementing the “Health and wellbeing pillar”.

The Home and school association has on behalf of the Ministry introduced the national curriculum guide throughout the country (in 2013).

The city of Reykjavik introduced for example all the six pillars, including “Health and wellbeing”, at The Reykjavik Children’s Culture Festival in 2014.

Who did the evaluation?

Internal and external parties. Included in the Compulsory Schools Act nr 91/2008 there is a section on Evaluation and quality assurance in compulsory schools with a discussion on

- a) the objectives of the evaluation,
- b) internal evaluation,
- c) external evaluation by municipalities,
- d) external evaluation by the Ministry. The external evaluation is outlined in the regulation nr. 658/2009.

The implementation is done by the institute “Námsmatsstofnun”.

What has been measured / evaluated?

The Ministry of Education makes a plan for evaluation at all school levels and places it on its website. The national Curriculum Guide is the basis for criteria on evaluation of school activities but school curriculum guides, created by each school, further detail the objectives and criteria that are stipulated in the national Curriculum Guide and, depending on circumstances, school curriculum guides.

The national Curriculum Guide is to serve different parties. It describes the objectives and requirements common for all pupils, teachers and school authorities and other school personnel at the same time, it is criteria for standardised assessment in compulsory schools, evaluation of school activities, guidelines for those who produce study material or are engaged in teacher education, it is the basis for writing school curriculum guides and self-evaluation in schools and for the policy making of local authorities.

Evaluation of school activities is by law part of the supervisory work of schools and school authorities in order to ensure the rights of pupils and promote school improvement.

The objectives of evaluation and supervision are primarily divided into three parts:

- 1) Firstly, it is to examine whether school activities are in line with the provisions of law, regulations and the national Curriculum Guide;
- 2) Secondly, to improve the quality of educational work and encourage improvements, ensure that the rights of pupils are observed and that they are provided with the service that they are entitled to in accordance with law;
- 3) Thirdly, it is to provide information about school activities, their results and development. Schools are responsible for internal evaluation but the Ministry of Education, and depending on circumstances, local authorities carry out the external evaluation.

External evaluation

The institute “Námsmatstofnun” conducts external evaluation on behalf of the Ministry of Education. The goals of the external evaluation is to be guiding and reform-based. External evaluation comprises, for example, evaluations of school activities as a whole or specific aspects of these activities, comprehensive evaluation of the activities of individual schools, evaluation of school subjects and aspects of learning, and supervision of internal evaluation of schools. Additionally, the Ministry is responsible for supervising that local authorities fulfil their relevant responsibilities created by laws on schools. Furthermore, the Ministry is to supervise the status and development of the educational system to that end.

Compulsory schools

External evaluation in compulsory schools is done according to criteria on quality in compulsory schools. The main theme in external evaluation is that it is supposed to be guiding and reform-based and that it promotes improvements in the schools. The basis of the external evaluation in compulsory schools are quality criteria in these three areas:

I Management, II Learning and teaching, and III Internal evaluation. The criteria are built on laws and regulations on schools and the national curriculum guide for compulsory schools.

Upper secondary schools

There is an external evaluation in each upper secondary school every five years. Criteria for external evaluation is being implemented.

Internal evaluation of compulsory school

The Ministry of Education publishes detailed directions on internal evaluation that schools can use, if they wish. Internal evaluation should specify the connection with the objectives stipulated in the school curriculum guide. Each school develops methods that take into account the unique emphases of the school in order to determine to what extent these objectives have been achieved. The methods of internal evaluation take into account the educational work that is being carried out. In each case the internal evaluation of each school is based on a systematic method that is described in the school curriculum guide. Each school year, the school operation plan presents what aspects are to be targeted in the internal evaluation. The school internal evaluation is an effective part of everyday work and includes all aspects of school activities, such as administration, teaching, study requirements, assessment and communication within and outside the classroom. Emphasis should be on the active

participation of personnel, pupils, parents and other interested parties, depending on circumstances. Information has to be collected by various means in order to evaluate school activities realistically.

The internal school evaluation is based on diverse data. The selection of information and data that the evaluation is based on is determined by the research topic each time. Objectives and means are to be evaluated regularly. Internal evaluation gives information about the strengths in the activities of the school and where improvement is needed with regard to the findings of the internal evaluation, improvements are defined and planned. Schools publish the outcomes of the internal evaluation and improvement plans. Personal information is exempt from publication.

It is important that internal and external evaluation incorporates all the objectives of school activities stipulated by law, including the role of schools to encourage pupils to participate in democratic society, support initiative and independent thinking, social skills and other factors that are, among other things, related to the fundamental pillars of education. Further information about quality assurance in school education: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Iceland:Quality_Assurance_in_Early_Childhood_and_School_Education

What are the main results/conclusions/recommendations from the evaluation?

Evaluation reports (Icelandic):

Preschools: <http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/mat-og-uttekir/leikskolar/>

Compulsory schools: <http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/mat-og-uttekir/grunnskolar/>

Upper-secondary schools: <http://www.menntamalaraduneyti.is/mat-og-uttekir/framhaldsskolar/>

Web page related to the intervention:

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (English):

<http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/publications/curriculum/>

Legislations that the curriculum builds on:

The preschool act http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/MRN-pdf_Annad/Preschool_Act.pdf

The Compulsory School act <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/law-and-regulations/Compulsory-School-Act-No.-91-2008.pdf>

The Upper Secondary Education Act <http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/law-and-regulations/Upper-Secondary-Education-Act-No.-92-2008.pdf>

The Health promoting school projects (Icelandic):

HP compulsory schools: <http://www.landlaeknir.is/hgs>

HP upper secondary schools: <http://www.landlaeknir.is/hef>

Contact details

National Curriculum Guides:

Bjorg Petursdottir

Head of Office

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

mailto: Bjorg.petursdottir@mrn.is

[Health promoting school projects:](#)

[Ingibjorg Gudmundsdottir](#)

[Project manager](#)

[Directorate of Health](#)

mailto: ingibjorg@landlaeknir.is