

CONSIDERATIONS IN PLANNING FOR JUNIOR CYCLE WELLBEING 2020-2021



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment



THE CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS AND DISRUPTION OF NORMAL LIFE BROUGHT ABOUT BY COVID-19 HAS HEIGHTENED OUR AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING WELLBEING FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

All aspects of wellbeing – social, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual – have been affected by recent events. For many young people, the unforeseen and rapid change in life has presented opportunities. Some will have enjoyed closer family bonds, rich learning experiences, and a greater sense of community. However, for others the prolonged time at home, with the associated separation from peers, teachers and other supports, will have created significant stress. While some students engaged well with remote learning, others will have had limited engagement for a variety of reasons, such as inadequate access to IT, minding younger siblings as parents worked, difficulty managing lack of structure and routine, difficulty finding a quiet space at home.

The majority of students have an enormous capacity for resilience and will bounce back from any negative impacts of Covid-19. However, all students will need some time and support as they adjust to being back at school and get used to new ways of being together.

As schools reopen, there are five key wellbeing messages that the Department of Education recommend embedding within the school community: 1) a sense of safety, 2) calming, 3) self- and community-efficacy, 4) social connectedness, and 5) hope. At a whole school level, all members of the school community can support a positive transition back to school and optimise wellbeing by conveying these messages.

'STUDENT WELLBEING IS PRESENT WHEN STUDENTS REALISE THEIR ABILITIES, TAKE CARE OF THEIR PHYSICAL WELLBEING, CAN COPE WITH THE NORMAL STRESSES OF LIFE, AND HAVE A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND BELONGING TO A WIDER COMMUNITY.'¹

Specifically, schools can support student wellbeing during the coming school year by creating:

- a calm atmosphere where the message is one of 'slow down to catch up'
- positive, supportive relationships
- learning environments that promote collaboration and a sense of connection with peers and teachers
- opportunities for students to consider the strengths and skills they have shown as learners during lock-down and build on these
- a shared sense of responsibility for, and ownership of, changes to the physical and learning environment
- familiar and predictable school routines and rituals (as far as possible) to enhance everyone's sense of security and connection
- a sense of hope and efficacy grounded in a belief in everyone's ability to cope, coupled with assurances that others are there to help too
- opportunities to regularly check-in with students about their experiences of school and learning.

¹ Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle, NCCA, 2017

The junior cycle Wellbeing programme provides a unique space where many of the new and challenging circumstances brought about by the recent pandemic can be addressed. This document has been developed to support planning for the coming school year in response to the unique circumstances that have arisen, which will influence junior cycle Wellbeing planning. This document should be considered alongside other planning and guidance materials already available, which relate to junior cycle planning generally and planning for wellbeing specifically.

USEFUL LINKS

- [NCCA Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle, 2017](#)
- [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 \(Revised October 2019\)](#)
- [Planning for Wellbeing Some Commonly Asked Questions](#)

TIME AND SPACE

The impact of the pandemic on all aspects of life has heightened our awareness of the importance of supporting student wellbeing. Timetable space for all elements of the Wellbeing programme is now more important than ever.

Since 2017, schools have been building, incrementally, towards providing a 400-hour junior cycle Wellbeing programme. Many schools have already achieved this. However, in recognition of interruptions to planning caused by school closure, schools are being given the option to defer the increasing of wellbeing provision to 400 hours by one year, to the 2021/22 academic year. This will allow for additional time for consultation and planning. *Updated Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle* will be published by the NCCA later this year to support planning from 2021 onwards.

SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR CSPE, SPHE AND PE

CSPE provides opportunities to explore some of the wider impacts of the pandemic, at home, in our communities and in the wider world. On the positive side, the Coronavirus crisis has sparked many examples of positive active citizenship as people acted together for the common good, by adhering to government advice; volunteering and supporting vulnerable groups in the community; and by simple acts of kindness. These provide a rich springboard for discussion of everyday heroes within the CSPE class.

Questions which can be explored within CSPE, through the lens of recent events, include:

- *Human needs and human rights.* How has the Covid-19 experience shown our common humanity and how we all share the same needs and rights?
- *Inequalities.* Has the pandemic shown up inequalities between rich and poor? How have poorer communities and countries been affected by Covid-19? What additional problems do they face? And in Ireland, how did socio-economic inequalities facing schools and families become more evident when schools were closed?
- *Interdependence.* How has the pandemic shown our connections and interdependence with people and places in our community and around the world?
- *The law.* What new laws and regulations were needed to deal with the crisis? How were these decided? By whom? Were these measures appropriate? What about a conflict of rights (e.g. right to protection and safety versus right to freedom of movement)?
- *The role of governments and political leadership* in a time of crisis. How has this varied in different countries? Compare different responses.
- *The role of the media.* How was the pandemic reported? What was the role of different kinds of media? What about 'fake' news?

- *How can communities 'build back better'?* (This describes a process of capitalising on opportunities that follow a major event or disaster with the aim of making communities stronger). For example, what positive changes to education, work practices, family and community life, and the environment have occurred during the crisis that can be maintained and built upon?

All the above topics and questions can support the achievement of learning outcomes within the CSPE short course. They might also stimulate inquiry and a Citizenship Action Project leading to the Classroom-Based Assessment. As with all short courses, students are required to complete one CBA as part of the CSPE short course and there is flexibility in the timing of this. It can be completed in either 2nd or 3rd year. For full details see the [CSPE assessment guidelines at this link](#) and [sample CBAs at this link](#).

If it happens that students are undertaking the CSPE CBA at home (due to school closures) then requirements to work as part of a group can be adjusted, although some level of collaboration may still be possible.

SPHE provides an important space where students can reflect on the significant personal, social and emotional changes brought about by Covid-19. In addition, SPHE provides a dedicated space where students can examine and make informed decisions about the normal day-to-day opportunities and challenges experienced during adolescence.

The SPHE teacher is uniquely placed to regularly check-in with students on how they are coping and can identify and support children who may have been negatively impacted by Covid-19 or school closures. Two simple questions can be useful when checking in with your students :

- How are you doing?
- What do you need?

In the SPHE class young people's different experiences and feelings can be shared, affirmed and normalized. In so doing, they can come to appreciate that they are not alone as others share similar experiences. Through this process their

wellbeing is promoted and their connection with peers is enhanced. Students can also share coping strategies and learn new strategies and skills to help them cope now and in the future.

In junior cycle, six indicators – Active, Responsible, Connected, Resilient, Respected and Aware – have been identified as central to students' wellbeing. While all subjects and teachers can support the development of these indicators, the SPHE teacher is uniquely placed to foster these indicators, thereby contributing significantly in the process to the school's Wellbeing programme in junior cycle.

[Specially designed SPHE lessons for use across all year groups during the first weeks back in school have been developed by the NCCA and can be downloaded here.](#)

The aim of these lessons is to:

- help students re-connect with school and with each other
- enable students to reflect on the impact of Covid-19 on their wellbeing and on their learning
- develop skills, attitudes and dispositions needed for re-engaging successfully in learning.

Students are required to complete one CBA as part of the SPHE short course, which involves a project and short reflection. The CBA can be completed in either 2nd or 3rd year. [For full details see the SPHE assessment guidelines at this link.](#) If it happens that students are undertaking part of the SPHE CBA at home (due to school closures) then recommendations about working in pairs/ small groups can be adjusted, although some level of collaboration might still be possible. Due to the nature of the subject, it is more suitable to timetable SPHE for in-school learning than remote learning.

PE - Discussion and awareness of the importance of physical and mental wellbeing has come to the fore during recent months. Restrictions on movement, brought about by the pandemic, led to innovative and creative approaches to physical activity as many of the more familiar ways of being physically active were no longer available (gyms, sports clubs, organised sport, etc). While staying active may have been challenging for some young people who don't have access to open spaces and for those who prefer team activities, many of our students found new ways to stay active, both individually and in groups (often virtually). As schools reopen there is an opportunity to capitalise on this experience and draw upon it in planning for PE in the coming year.

The six indicators of wellbeing could be used to frame conversations with students about their recent experiences. To take a couple of examples:

- Active – How easy/difficult was it to stay active during lock-down? What did you try? Did you do any activity while at home that you would like to keep doing now that you are back at school?
- Connected – How did those of you who prefer team-play manage during school closure? What helped you feel part of an active community? What did you discover about your local community (places to walk/exercise)?
- Resilient – What coping strategies did you discover? What/who helped? What skills or coping strategies would you like to develop to help you become more active?

A key aim of PE is to facilitate students in being better able and more motivated to include regular physical activity in their lives, thereby contributing to their overall experience of wellbeing. To achieve this, it is vital that the focus is both on physical education and physical activity. Physical activity provides opportunities for young people to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in physical education.

Planning for PE in the current context will require a considered approach. Some practical considerations include:

- Selection of physical activities should be based on what is safe and practical and in line with current health advice.

- It may be advisable to consider the selection of physical activities that have less contact, such as divided court activities.
- Where possible use outdoor spaces for learning.
- Incorporate equipment stations for ease of access and safe transition to and from equipment.
- Plan for time to clean equipment after use.
- Plan blocks of learning across year groups that use the same equipment for ease of cleaning before and after OR plan learning blocks that varies equipment for ease of cleaning before and after, depending on the individual school context.
- Plan for changing and transitioning from class in a safe manner – guidance for students regarding PE kit and/or changing facilities will be necessary at a school level.

Planning for PE, as with all elements of the Wellbeing programme, will be greatly enhanced by students' input. Talk to your students about how they stayed physically active during recent months. Draw on their experiences, perspectives and suggestions to help in planning PE for the coming year. If students are reluctant to engage in PE, be sensitive to factors that might currently impact on student participation, such as reluctance to engage in contact sport due to vulnerable family members or physical activity habits that have developed during restrictions.

For the Classroom Based Assessment in PE, students are generally required to complete two of the four assessments related to the four strands of learning within the PE course. The CBAs are carried out in 2nd and 3rd year. [For full details, see the assessment guidelines at this link.](#)

In the exceptional circumstances prevailing, due to the disruption of learning and school closures during 2019/2020, students currently entering 3rd year will be required to complete one Classroom-Based Assessment in PE rather than the usual two. While it is anticipated that PE CBAs are undertaken during in-school learning, adjustments to the assessments can be made to capture remote learning if this becomes necessary during the coming school year. Selection of physical activities for the Classroom-Based Assessment should be based on what is safe and practical and in line with current health advice.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to CSPE, SPHE and PE schools can also incorporate shorter **UNITS OF LEARNING** within their Wellbeing programmes. These units allow schools to respond to identified needs and can change from year to year to reflect different student cohorts and circumstances. Recent experiences, including remote learning, may have highlighted some skills that students now feel a need to develop or deepen, such as skills in self-management, time management, goal setting, self-regulation and independent learning skills. Short units of learning focused on learning how to learn could be developed in response to these needs and included as part of the Wellbeing programme.

According to John Hattie, schools can use the pandemic as an opportunity to learn more about their students learning strengths and needs and the learnings from the experience of learning remotely can be used to build back better teaching and learning. For this to happen, students need to be facilitated in reflecting on what they have learned from learning remotely, what aspects of this experience would be helpful to continue and what they struggled with. [To help you gather information about students' learning during the recent school closure a sample survey can be found at this link.](#)² When this link opens, you will be given an option to duplicate the form for your own use. You will then have an editable version of the survey that you can adapt or use. Responses will be collected to your own MS Forms platform and no data will be support collected or stored by the NCCA.

CONSULTING WITH STUDENTS is essential as young people know what aspects of Wellbeing they need to learn about. Combining this expertise with that of their teachers and the curriculum as specified, will enable more relevant and engaging learning in Wellbeing. If students are involved in shaping the Wellbeing programme it is more likely to provide the kind of learning that young people need to deal with current challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, consulting with students in relation to their learning helps build their sense of efficacy, improves their engagement with and connection to school and promotes positive student-teacher relationships. Practical tools to support and assist

schools in promoting the student voice can be downloaded from the *Our Voices Our Schools* website developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) at www.ourvoicesourschools.ie. See also ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/wellbeing for examples of how schools have involved students in planning for wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Planning for Wellbeing programmes in 2020 is an opportunity to take stock of and affirm the strengths and skills that school communities have shown during the pandemic. The changes to schooling and daily life may also have highlighted particular needs or skills that can be taught to help students in the future. The pandemic has provided many 'teachable moments' for the Wellbeing classroom, some of which are suggested in this paper. Each school will also find their own.

'SCHOOLS, NO MATTER VIA WHAT MEDIUM, CAN BE HUBS OF RESPONSE AND RECOVERY, A PLACE TO SUPPORT EMOTIONAL RECOVERY AND PROMOTE SOCIAL TOGETHERNESS AND THIS IS AS IMPORTANT AS ANY ACHIEVEMENT GAINS.'

(JOHN HATTIE)

²You will require a Microsoft 365 login to access this survey

USEFUL WEBLINKS

- <https://ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/back-to-school-lessons-to-support-student-wellbeing>
 - <https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/wellbeing>
 - [Visit www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) for DES/NEPS Guidance for schools
 - [NCCA Guidelines for Wellbeing in Junior Cycle, 2017](#)
 - [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018 \(Revised October 2019\)](#)
 - [Planning for Wellbeing Some Commonly Asked Questions](#)
 - [Teacher wellbeing and self-care](#)
https://www.pdst.ie/teacher_wellbeing
 - John Hattie, Visible Learning Effect Sizes When Schools Are Closed: What Matters and What Does Not (April 2020)
<https://corwin-connect.com/2020/04/visible-learning-effect-sizes-when-schools-are-closed-what-matters-and-what-does-not>
 - John, Hattie, The New Normal of Learning: Build Back Better (May 2020)
<https://corwin-connect.com/2020/05/the-new-normal-of-learning-build-back-better/>
 - www.spectrum.life
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