

The Wellbeing Impact of Outdoor Learning, Sport and Breakfast Clubs

Wellbeing is now recognised as a core responsibility within primary education in England. Schools are expected not only to deliver academic outcomes but also to safeguard and promote pupils' physical, emotional and social development. The duty to promote welfare is outlined in the Education Act 2002 and strengthened through the Children Act 2004, which introduced the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes focusing on being healthy, staying safe and achieving economic wellbeing. More recently, safeguarding guidance from the Department for Education in Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2023) reinforces that schools must create environments that support pupils' emotional security and mental health.

The importance of wellbeing has intensified following the COVID 19 pandemic. National data shows increased levels of anxiety and emotional difficulty among children (NHS Digital, 2023). The government response has included the introduction of Mental Health Support Teams in schools (NHS England, 2023) and funding for Senior Mental Health Leads (DfE, 2021). These policies reflect recognition that wellbeing directly affects learning, attendance and behaviour. Research consistently shows that pupils with higher wellbeing demonstrate improved concentration, motivation and academic attainment (Public Health England, 2021).

WELLBEING

Wellbeing is defined by the World Health Organisation (2022) as a state in which individuals can cope with stress, realise their abilities and contribute to their community. In educational contexts, wellbeing is often described as including emotional, physical and social dimensions (DfE, 2022a). The Department for Education's guidance on promoting children and young people's mental health (DfE, 2023) highlights that supportive school environments, strong relationships and physical health are important for wellbeing.

However, wellbeing is debated. Ecclestone and Hayes (2019) argue that the growing focus on wellbeing may place too much attention on emotional vulnerability, which could reduce children's ability to develop resilience. In contrast, Thorburn (2020) suggests that wellbeing should be seen as shaped by relationships and social environments, rather than only individual characteristics. This links to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which explains that children's development is influenced by their family, school and wider community. From this view, whole school practices such as outdoor learning and breakfast clubs can improve wellbeing by creating supportive and positive school environments.

Importantly, Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2023) now evaluates 'personal development', including pupils' confidence, resilience and physical health. This demonstrates that wellbeing is embedded within accountability systems, reinforcing its importance in school practice.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health refers to emotional and psychological functioning. According to NHS England (2023), good mental health enables children to manage emotions and build positive relationships. Government data indicates that one in six children aged 7–16 in England have a probable mental health disorder (NHS Digital, 2023). This has led to increased emphasis on preventative strategies within schools.

The Department for Education (2023) states that early support and positive school environments can prevent mental health problems from becoming more serious. Research by Kidger et al. (2021) shows that the school environment has a strong impact on pupil mental health. Activities that help pupils feel they belong, reduce stress and improve physical health can protect their wellbeing. However, some researchers warn that schools should not replace health services (Furedi, 2020). Schools have a role in promoting wellbeing, but they are not medical providers. Therefore, activities such as sport programmes and outdoor learning should be seen as ways to prevent problems and support development, rather than as medical treatment.

SELF-CARE AND STAFF WELLBEING

Self-care refers to actions that help people stay healthy and manage stress (WHO, 2022). In schools, this includes healthy eating, regular physical activity and managing emotions. The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (DfE, 2021b) recognises that teacher wellbeing has a direct impact on pupils' experiences in school. High workload and emotional pressure can lead to burnout, which may negatively affect teaching and the classroom environment (Education Support, 2022).

Whole school wellbeing approaches therefore support both pupils and staff. For example, structured morning routines through breakfast clubs can reduce stress at the start of the school day and create calmer classrooms. This can lower stress levels for teachers. Outdoor learning may also reduce behaviour problems by improving pupil engagement, which can improve teacher confidence and morale. Overall, wellbeing should be understood as a whole school responsibility that focuses on prevention, relationships and long term health.

Another important model for understanding wellbeing is the PERMA model, developed by Seligman (2011). PERMA stands for Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement. These five areas explain how wellbeing develops in both children and adults. In schools, positive emotions can develop through enjoyable activities such as outdoor learning and sport. Engagement happens when pupils are actively involved in learning. Relationships are strengthened through teamwork and supportive environments such as breakfast clubs. Meaning develops when pupils feel valued and part of their school.

Achievement occurs when pupils build confidence and succeed in tasks. The Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022) reflects similar ideas by aiming to develop healthy, confident individuals. The PERMA model also applies to teachers, as positive relationships, meaningful work and manageable workload improve staff wellbeing and job satisfaction (Education Support, 2022). This shows that the PERMA model is useful for understanding how school practices support wellbeing

OUTDOOR LEARNING AND WELLBEING IN WALES AND ENGLAND



Outdoor learning refers to planned learning experiences that take place outside the traditional classroom. This can include forest school sessions, outdoor lessons, environmental activities or learning in local community spaces. In Wales, outdoor learning is strongly included in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022), especially within the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience. One of the four main purposes of the Welsh curriculum is to develop “healthy, confident individuals.” Outdoor learning supports this aim because it improves emotional wellbeing, physical health, resilience and social development. In England, outdoor learning is not required by law, but it supports safeguarding duties under the Education Act 2002 and Children Act 2004, which require schools to promote pupil welfare (DfE, 2023).

However, the Welsh Curriculum places greater importance on wellbeing as a central part of education rather than an additional responsibility. Educational theory supports the role of outdoor learning in promoting wellbeing. Dewey (1938) argued that children learn best through real experiences. When pupils take part in hands on outdoor activities, they become more engaged in their learning. This increases motivation and confidence, which supports emotional wellbeing. Self Determination Theory explains that wellbeing improves when children feel capable, independent and connected to others (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Outdoor learning gives pupils opportunities to make choices, solve problems and work together. These experiences help pupils develop independence and confidence. Bandura (1997) explains that when children succeed in challenges, their belief in their own abilities increases. This improves resilience, which helps children manage stress and difficulties. The Welsh Government (2022) highlights resilience as an important outcome of the Curriculum for Wales, showing that outdoor learning supports national wellbeing goals.

Outdoor learning also improves mental wellbeing through contact with nature. Research shows that spending time in green spaces reduces stress and improves mood (Tillmann et al., 2018). Studies in Wales and the UK show that children who regularly spend time outdoors report higher happiness and lower anxiety (Natural Resources Wales, 2021). Natural England (2022) also found that outdoor learning improves concentration and emotional control. Emotional regulation is important because it helps pupils manage behaviour, build relationships and focus on learning. The Curriculum for Wales (2022) encourages schools to use outdoor environments to support pupils' overall development, recognising the mental health benefits of nature.

Outdoor learning also supports social wellbeing. Many outdoor activities involve teamwork and cooperation. Vygotsky (1978) explains that children learn and develop through social interaction. When pupils work together outdoors, they build communication skills and stronger friendships. Feeling a sense of belonging is strongly linked to positive mental health (Public Health Wales, 2021). Pupils who feel included are more likely to attend school and take part in learning. This links to Estyn inspection guidance in Wales, which highlights pupil wellbeing and engagement as important measures of school success (Estyn, 2023). Therefore, outdoor learning supports social wellbeing by creating supportive and inclusive learning environments.

Physical wellbeing is another important benefit of outdoor learning. It increases movement and active play. The World Health Organization (2022) recommends that children take part in regular physical activity to support both physical and mental health. Biddle and Asare (2019) found that physical activity can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression in young people. This means outdoor learning supports wellbeing by combining physical movement with emotional and social experiences. In Wales, physical health is part of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience, showing that physical activity supports emotional and cognitive development (Welsh Government, 2022).

Outdoor learning can also improve teacher wellbeing. Research shows that teaching outdoors can reduce behaviour problems and improve teacher-pupil relationships (Education Support, 2022). When pupils are engaged and calm, teachers experience less stress. Teacher wellbeing is an increasing concern in Wales, where workload and stress levels have been identified as challenges (Welsh Government, 2023). Outdoor learning can create calmer and more positive learning environments, which improves teacher job satisfaction and wellbeing.

However, outdoor learning must be carefully planned to support wellbeing effectively. Leather (2018) argues that outdoor activities need clear learning goals and reflection to be effective. Being outdoors alone does not automatically improve wellbeing. Pupils need opportunities to reflect on their experiences so that learning and emotional development can occur. Schools must also follow safeguarding guidance. In England, Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2023a) explains the need for risk assessment and safe supervision. In Wales, safeguarding is guided by Working Together to Safeguard People

(Welsh Government, 2022b). If outdoor learning is not managed safely, it may create risks that could harm wellbeing.

Access and equality are also important issues. Research shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds often have less access to green spaces (Natural Resources Wales, 2021). This creates unequal opportunities for wellbeing. The Welsh Government has provided funding to support outdoor learning, but access still varies between schools. Without proper funding, training and planning, not all pupils will benefit equally. This shows that outdoor learning can promote wellbeing, but its success depends on fair access and long-term support.

In conclusion, outdoor learning strongly supports emotional, social and physical wellbeing. It is supported by educational theory, research and the Curriculum for Wales. Outdoor learning helps pupils build confidence, reduce stress, develop friendships and improve physical health. It can also support teacher wellbeing by creating calmer classrooms and improving relationships. However, outdoor learning must be carefully planned, safely managed and accessible to all pupils. When implemented effectively, it is an important whole-school approach to promoting wellbeing.

Outdoor learning also supports wellbeing through the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Outdoor activities promote positive emotions, as pupils often feel enjoyment and reduced stress when learning in nature (Tillmann et al., 2018). They increase engagement because pupils are actively involved in practical learning (Dewey, 1938). Outdoor activities also strengthen relationships, helping pupils feel a sense of belonging (Public Health Wales, 2021). Pupils experience achievement when they complete challenges, which builds confidence and resilience (Bandura, 1997). Outdoor learning can also improve teacher wellbeing by reducing behaviour problems and improving teacher-pupil relationships (Education Support, 2022). This shows that outdoor learning supports wellbeing for both pupils and teachers across all areas of the PERMA model.

SCHOOL SPORT PROGRAMMES AND WELLBEING IN WALES AND ENGLAND



School sport programmes include physical education (PE) lessons, after-school clubs, competitive sports and regular physical activity during the school day. In Wales, sport and physical activity are an important part of the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022), especially within the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience. One of the four main purposes of the Welsh curriculum is to develop “healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives.” Physical activity supports this aim because it improves both physical health and emotional wellbeing. In England, schools receive funding through the PE and Sport Premium to improve sport participation and quality (DfE, 2023b). However, the Curriculum for Wales places stronger focus on wellbeing, making sport part of a wider whole-school approach rather than just a subject.

Physical wellbeing is one of the main benefits of school sport. Regular exercise improves heart health, strength, flexibility and coordination. The World Health Organization (2022) states that children should be physically active every day to support healthy growth and reduce future health risks. However, sport also supports mental health. Research shows that physical activity reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression in children and young people (Biddle and Asare, 2019). This means sport improves emotional wellbeing by reducing stress and improving mood. In Wales, physical activity is directly linked to emotional resilience in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022), showing that movement supports both physical and mental wellbeing.

Sport programmes also support emotional wellbeing by building confidence and self-esteem. Self-Determination Theory explains that wellbeing improves when pupils feel capable, independent and connected to others (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In sport, pupils develop skills and experience success over time. This helps them feel confident in their

abilities. Bandura (1997) describes this as increased self-efficacy. Higher self-efficacy improves resilience, helping pupils cope with challenges. The Curriculum for Wales (2022) highlights the importance of developing resilient learners. Sport supports this goal by helping pupils build confidence and emotional strength.

Sport also improves social wellbeing. Many sport activities involve teamwork and cooperation. Vygotsky (1978) explains that children learn and develop through social interaction. Through sport, pupils build friendships and develop a sense of belonging. Feeling that they belong is linked to better mental health and reduced loneliness (Public Health Wales, 2021). Estyn (2023) also highlights the importance of positive relationships and pupil engagement in Welsh schools. Sport programmes create opportunities for pupils to work together, which strengthens social wellbeing and school community.

Sport can also improve behaviour and emotional control. Research shows that regular physical activity improves concentration and reduces disruptive behaviour (Bailey et al., 2013). When pupils can release energy through movement, they are calmer and more focused in lessons. This improves the overall classroom environment. Improved behaviour also supports teacher wellbeing by reducing stress and workload (Education Support, 2022). Teacher wellbeing is an important issue in Wales, where workload and stress have been identified as ongoing concerns (Welsh Government, 2023). Sport programmes can therefore support teachers by improving pupil engagement and reducing behaviour problems.

However, sport programmes must be carefully planned to support wellbeing for all pupils. Competition can motivate some pupils but discourage others. Thorburn (2020) explains that too much focus on competition may reduce confidence for less skilled pupils. This can negatively affect emotional wellbeing. Schools must ensure sport is inclusive. The Equality Act 2010 requires schools to provide equal opportunities for all pupils. Inclusive sport activities, including non-competitive and adapted activities, ensure all pupils benefit. This supports the Curriculum for Wales (2022), which focuses on wellbeing and equality for all learners.

Gender stereotypes can also affect participation. Research shows that girls may be less likely to take part in sport if they do not feel supported (Women in Sport, 2022). Schools must create inclusive environments where all pupils feel confident to participate. Inclusive sport improves confidence, relationships and emotional wellbeing.

Funding and sustainability are also important concerns. In England, sport funding depends on government support through the PE and Sport Premium (DfE, 2023b). In Wales, wellbeing is part of the curriculum, but schools may still face funding and resource challenges. Without proper funding, schools may struggle to provide quality sport programmes. This could reduce the wellbeing benefits for pupils and staff. Long-term investment is needed to maintain positive outcomes.

Sport also supports long-term wellbeing. Research shows that children who enjoy physical activity are more likely to continue being active later in life (Public Health Wales, 2021). This improves both physical and mental health over time. Schools therefore play an important role in developing healthy habits that support lifelong wellbeing.

In conclusion, school sport programmes strongly support physical, emotional and social wellbeing. They are supported by research, educational theory and the Curriculum for Wales. Sport helps pupils build confidence, resilience and friendships while improving

physical health and reducing stress. It also supports teacher wellbeing by improving behaviour and classroom environments. However, sport must be inclusive, well-funded and focused on participation. When implemented effectively, sport is an important whole-school approach to promoting wellbeing.

School sport programmes also support wellbeing through the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Physical activity promotes positive emotions by reducing stress and improving mood (WHO, 2022). Sport increases engagement because pupils are actively involved in physical activity. It strengthens relationships as pupils work together and support each other (Public Health Wales, 2021). Pupils experience achievement when they improve their skills, which builds confidence (Bandura, 1997). Sport also improves teacher wellbeing. When pupils are active, behaviour and concentration improve, which reduces stress for teachers (Education Support, 2022). This shows that sport supports wellbeing for both pupils and teachers across all areas of the PERMA model.

BREAKFAST CLUBS AND WELLBEING IN WALES AND ENGLAND



Breakfast clubs are school programmes that provide food and supervision before the school day begins. In Wales, free breakfast provision has been supported by government policy for many years to improve child health and reduce the effects of poverty (Welsh Government, 2022). The Curriculum for Wales includes the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience, which recognises that physical health, emotional security and social belonging are essential for learning. Providing breakfast in school supports these goals. In England, the Department for Education funds the National School Breakfast

Programme to support disadvantaged pupils (DfE, 2023c). While both Wales and England recognise the importance of nutrition, Wales places stronger focus on wellbeing as a central part of education.

Breakfast clubs strongly support physical wellbeing. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs explains that basic needs such as food and safety must be met before children can learn effectively. If pupils arrive at school hungry, they may struggle to concentrate, manage emotions or take part in lessons. Research by Hoyland et al. (2009) shows that pupils who eat breakfast regularly have better attention, memory and learning performance. The World Health Organization (2022) also states that good nutrition supports energy levels and emotional stability. This shows that breakfast clubs support both physical and emotional wellbeing by helping pupils feel ready to learn.

Food insecurity can negatively affect wellbeing. Public Health Wales (2021) reports that children living in poverty are more likely to have poor diets and related health problems. Hunger can increase stress, irritability and behaviour problems. By providing reliable access to food, breakfast clubs reduce stress and help pupils manage their emotions. This supports a stable learning environment. In Wales, reducing child poverty is a national priority, and breakfast provision is part of this public health approach (Welsh Government, 2022). This shows that breakfast clubs help improve wellbeing by addressing inequality. Breakfast clubs also improve emotional wellbeing by providing routine and stability. Many pupils benefit from predictable daily routines. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that stable environments support emotional development. Breakfast clubs provide a calm and supportive start to the day. Research shows that structured morning routines reduce anxiety and improve readiness for learning (Graham et al., 2017). This helps pupils feel safe and supported, which improves emotional wellbeing.

Social wellbeing is also improved through breakfast clubs. Pupils can interact with friends and staff in a relaxed environment. This helps build friendships and positive relationships. Public Health Wales (2021) explains that feeling a sense of belonging protects mental health. The Curriculum for Wales (2022) also highlights the importance of positive relationships in developing healthy, confident individuals. Breakfast clubs support this by creating inclusive environments where pupils feel valued.

Breakfast clubs also support safeguarding. In Wales, safeguarding responsibilities are guided by Working Together to Safeguard People (Welsh Government, 2022b). In England, similar guidance is provided through Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2023a). Breakfast clubs allow staff more time to observe pupils and identify any concerns. Early support can prevent problems from becoming more serious. This improves both emotional and physical wellbeing.

Breakfast clubs can also improve attendance and punctuality. Research shows that pupils who attend breakfast clubs are more likely to arrive at school on time (Defeyter and Graham, 2015). Starting the day calmly improves behaviour and learning. This also supports teacher wellbeing. Education Support (2022) explains that behaviour management and workload can affect teacher stress. When pupils arrive calm and ready to learn, teachers experience less stress and improved working conditions. However, breakfast clubs also have limitations. Gill and Sharma (2020) argue that breakfast clubs help reduce hunger but do not solve the wider causes of poverty. Schools may take on additional responsibilities beyond education. Funding is also a challenge. In Wales, breakfast provision is supported, but schools still face financial pressure (Welsh Government, 2023). In England, funding often depends on short-term government

programmes (DfE, 2023c). Without stable funding, breakfast clubs may not continue, which could affect pupil wellbeing.

Stigma can also be an issue. If breakfast clubs are only offered to disadvantaged pupils, some children may feel embarrassed. Public Health Wales (2021) suggests that universal breakfast provision reduces stigma and improves participation. Inclusive breakfast clubs support wellbeing more effectively because all pupils feel equal and supported. This aligns with the Curriculum for Wales focus on equality and wellbeing for all learners (Welsh Government, 2022). Breakfast clubs also support long-term wellbeing. Developing healthy eating habits in childhood increases the likelihood of maintaining healthy lifestyles later in life (WHO, 2022). This shows that breakfast clubs contribute to long-term physical and mental health.

In conclusion, breakfast clubs support physical, emotional and social wellbeing. They provide nutrition, create routine, improve relationships and strengthen safeguarding. They also improve attendance and support teacher wellbeing by reducing classroom stress. Although funding and poverty remain challenges, breakfast clubs are an important part of whole-school wellbeing approaches. In Wales, breakfast provision strongly supports the Curriculum for Wales and national wellbeing priorities.

Breakfast clubs also support wellbeing through the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). Providing food improves positive emotions, as pupils feel calmer and less anxious (Maslow, 1943). Breakfast clubs strengthen relationships through social interaction (Public Health Wales, 2021). They create meaning by helping pupils feel valued and supported. Good nutrition improves engagement because pupils can concentrate better (Hoyland et al., 2009). Breakfast clubs also improve teacher wellbeing. When pupils arrive calm and ready to learn, behaviour improves and teacher stress is reduced (Education Support, 2022). This shows that breakfast clubs support wellbeing for both pupils and staff.

CONCLUSION

This portfolio has examined outdoor learning, school sport programmes and breakfast clubs as ways to promote wellbeing in primary schools, with focus on Wales and the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022). The evidence shows that wellbeing is closely linked to learning. When pupils feel physically healthy, emotionally safe and socially supported, they are more likely to engage and succeed in school (WHO, 2022; Public Health Wales, 2021).

Outdoor learning improves wellbeing by building confidence, resilience and positive relationships. Educational theory and research show that learning through real experiences and nature supports emotional and mental health (Dewey, 1938; Tillmann et al., 2018). It also supports teacher wellbeing by improving engagement and classroom behaviour (Education Support, 2022).

School sport programmes support wellbeing by improving physical health, confidence and social relationships. Physical activity reduces stress and improves mental health (Biddle and Asare, 2019). Sport also improves classroom behaviour, which reduces teacher stress (Education Support, 2022). However, sport must be inclusive to support all pupils (Thorburn, 2020).

Breakfast clubs support wellbeing by meeting pupils' basic needs. Nutrition improves concentration, emotional regulation and behaviour (Hoyland et al., 2009). Breakfast clubs also improve safeguarding and teacher wellbeing by creating calm starts to the day (DfE, 2023; Education Support, 2022).

Overall, outdoor learning, sport and breakfast clubs are most effective when used as part of a whole-school wellbeing approach. The Curriculum for Wales places wellbeing at the centre of education. When these practices are inclusive, well planned and properly funded, they improve both pupil and teacher wellbeing. This shows that promoting wellbeing is a key responsibility of schools in Wales and England.

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