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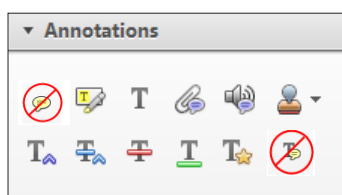
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# In Practice

## Developing HAPPEN (Health and Attainment of Pupils involved in a Primary Education Network): working in partnership to improve child health and education

*Schools are well positioned in driving change to improve children's health and wellbeing, an important factor in determining achievement and employment prospects in adulthood. In this article, Danielle Christian, Richard Tyler, Gareth Stratton and Sinead Brophy from Swansea University discuss how the implementation of a Health and Attainment of Pupils involved in a Primary Education Network can improve child health and wellbeing through schools.*

Good health and wellbeing of children is of paramount importance in maximising achievement, employment prospects and health and wellbeing as adults. As such, schools are positioned as drivers for change in reducing inequalities in health and education<sup>1,2</sup> and are the target of numerous health interventions. However, recent research shows that an intense focus from educational inspectorates on literacy and numeracy and delivery of ad-hoc, short-term initiatives with little consideration of school needs is resulting in programmes being sacrificed or poorly implemented:

*We know physical activity is hugely important but when we're getting measured by Welsh Government on our performance in literacy and numeracy, you can tend to push physical activities out to one side.*

While headteachers believed that they had an important role in child health, they felt that they were being treated as the only solution.<sup>3</sup> In order to overcome this and ensure that the health of today's children is not neglected, a more consistent partnership approach to addressing health was advocated, with greater consideration of educational outcomes and school needs.<sup>4</sup>

Multidisciplinary working is common practice in National Health Service (NHS) environments with practitioners from an array of backgrounds working together with one common goal: to improve quality of life of their patients. Should

departments of health and education place greater emphasis on these principles and work more collaboratively with a joint aim of creating healthy, well-educated young people? Many argue that the answer is YES, and establishing effective partnerships is fundamental to concurrently improving education and health outcomes among children.<sup>5-7</sup>

### BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The project team at Swansea University is developing such a partnership through HAPPEN (Health and Attainment of Pupils involved in a Primary Education Network), a network of education, health and research professionals aimed at improving child health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. The network involves children aged 9–11 years completing health and wellbeing assessments; data are collected on body mass index, fitness, nutrition, physical activity, sleep, wellbeing, concentration and child recommendations on improving health in their area. This is collected in collaboration with the local councils' sport development team as part of Swan-Linx (a fitness fun day and online questionnaire, Child Health and Activity Tool (CHAT), designed and piloted with local children). So far, data have been collected on 1,500 pupils. Results are fed back to network schools and organisations (dietitians, sport development, local charities and public health professionals). The report to schools is aligned with curriculum frameworks to enhance learning and enables schools to see how they compare to Swansea wide statistics, to identify areas of need. For example, high percentages of children in their school reporting not eating breakfast. Through accessing an online page on 'Edunet', developed by the team, schools can find providers and resources to address needs: *'the Edunet site will be a fantastic way for teachers to find new resources'*. Furthermore, practitioners can better

direct interventions, making them more aligned with school needs and ensuring curriculum requirements are addressed in delivery.

Researchers hope to use data collected to anonymously link to routinely collected health and attainment data (general practitioner (GP) records, hospital data, key stage results) to answer many questions such as are children with poor sleeping habits less likely to achieve key stage results? Does being part of HAPPEN lead to improvements in health and attainment? We plan to examine early predictors of children at risk of low attainment or poor health and inform policy and practice in enhancing child health and attainment. This project centres on building a shared vision through removing isolated silos and creating a single network with cyclic feedback and knowledge exchange.

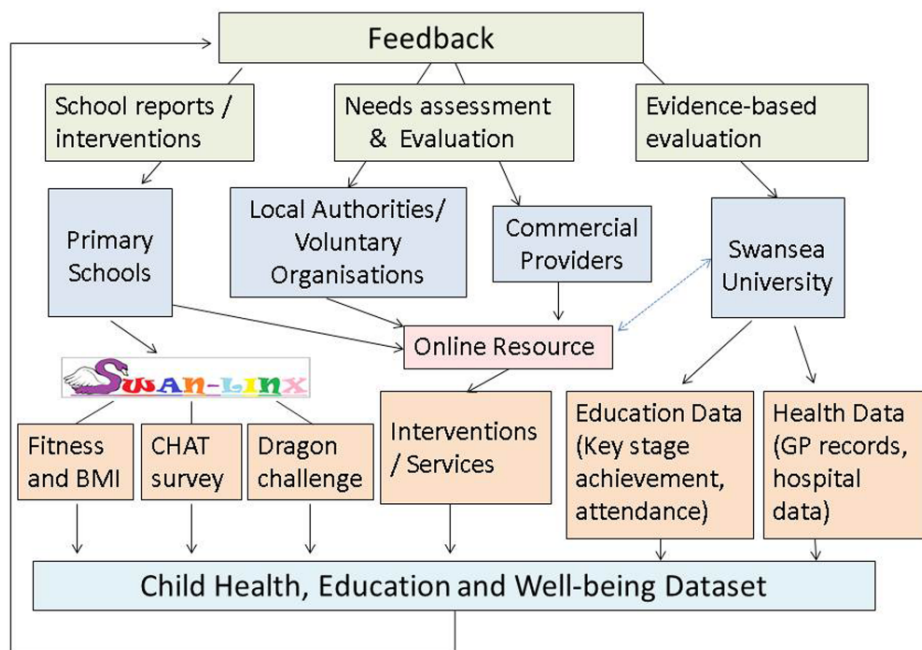
### A CYCLICAL APPROACH AIMED AT IMPROVING CHILD HEALTH AND ATTAINMENT

The network has met three times over the last 2 years and is continuing to grow. The last meeting involved 50 representatives from schools and public health organisations coming together to discuss the data. Examples of how the network has impacted on practice can be seen below:

#### Deputy Headteacher, Swansea Primary School

*When receiving our data pack, we were concerned to discover that in year 5 and 6, approximately a third of our children were overweight and that despite our school outperforming the average shuttle score across schools, there were some children who struggled to run 9 shuttles (9 x 20 metres). Additionally, 38% of children reported they were not happy with their fitness.*

*Despite the school placing great emphasis on health, fitness and wellbeing, we clearly needed to*



health inequalities that exist'. (Swansea Healthy City Programme Co-ordinator)

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increase the profile by putting it into our School Development Plan; which identifies school priorities for the next 3 years. We have increased the opportunities that children receive, developing new partnerships with 360 Sports Centre and Dragon Sports, who provided staff training in delivering activity. We have reflected on our PE lessons and planned to bring more active elements to other lessons, such as spelling, where children run to match up words with phonemes. Finally, children are managing their own fitness, through working with partners to set personal goals.

**Senior Sport Development Officer, Swansea**

The network provides a platform for us to liaise with schools, create links and discuss results. We are actively involved in delivery of Swan-linx and

the results enable us to inform sport and physical activity delivery across the City, ensuring young peoples' needs are considered.

The multi-faceted approach to the network enables our team to work in partnership with other organisations and draw on resources across Swansea. We have seen links in other areas, not just education following these meetings. Many organisations are providing similar services and it is vital we work together to achieve aims.

The strong utilisation of consultation, engagement and collaboration has enabled the networks' success to date. HAPPEN is changing the approach to addressing child health on a local basis and continuing to develop strong partnerships is key to further success and expansion: 'Only by having a joined-up approach will we be able to reduce the

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