



Frequently Asked Questions about the Wellbeing Specification

Time allocation	Strands	Elements
Stage 1: 2 hours 30 minutes per week	Movement competence	Communicating
Stage 2: 3 hours per week	Emotional and relational education	Exploring and applying
Stage 3: 3 hours per week	Health education	Moving
Stage 4: 3 hours per week	Community and belonging	Reflecting and understanding

What is the Wellbeing specification?

The Wellbeing specification is part of the redeveloped primary school curriculum, designed to support children's overall development. It integrates Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to equip children with the knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values needed to lead active, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

What is meant by the term 'wellbeing'?

The Wellbeing specification defines wellbeing as something that is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life.

This means that children's wellbeing develops not only through what they learn in primary and special schools but also through a range of influences within the broader community and society. Wellbeing isn't static – it can change depending on what's happening in a child's life. Children may experience both high and low points in their wellbeing as they grow, learn, and face different situations.

Within school communities, supporting children's wellbeing requires a blend of formal and informal learning. The Wellbeing specification plays a central role in this by providing structured learning 'about' and 'for' wellbeing.

Beyond the Wellbeing curriculum area, the inclusion of the 'Being Well' key competency highlights the role of all curriculum areas and the wider school community in nurturing children's wellbeing.

What will children learn in the Wellbeing specification?

Through PE and SPHE, children learn both 'about' and 'for' wellbeing. Learning 'about' wellbeing involves developing knowledge, understanding, awareness and skills that help children to nurture their own wellbeing. Learning 'for' wellbeing nurturing children's wellbeing through a positive, inclusive and supportive learning environment. The *Wellbeing* specification is organised according to four interconnected strands to support holistic wellbeing. Each Strand has a number of Strand Units, which break the learning down into more specific areas of learning.

Within 'Movement competence' children develop movement skills, concepts and strategies, alongside reflecting on their personal journey, which are developed through a broad range of PE activity areas.

'Emotional and relational education' focuses on identity, emotional awareness and expression, relationships, resilience and learning to make informed and responsible choices.

Within 'Health education', children learn about healthy living, substances, human development, safety and media and digital wellbeing.

'Community and belonging' focuses on connections and developing a sense of belonging, building an understanding of families, rights and fairness and citizenship.

Throughout these Strands and Strand Units, children will develop the knowledge, skills, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values to support them to lead active, healthy and fulfilling lives, now and into the future.

What are some of the key changes in this area from the Primary School Curriculum (1999)?

The *Wellbeing* specification is structured around four key Strands:

- Movement Competence
- Emotional and Relational Education
- Health Education
- Community and Belonging

In Stages 1 and 2, the *Wellbeing* specification promotes an integrated approach to Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). This means that some learning connects both PE and SPHE, while other learning focuses specifically on PE or SPHE. Where learning relates to both PE and SPHE, the Learning Outcome is clearly marked with this symbol:



In Stages 3 and 4, the learning becomes more subject-specific, with distinct Learning Outcomes for PE and SPHE.

The *Wellbeing* specification includes new and important areas of learning, such as:

- Consent (Stages 1-4), supports children to understand bodily autonomy, recognise boundaries and practise seeking, giving or refusing permission effectively in everyday interactions to support the development of respectful relationships and support children's safety.
- Sexual orientation (Stage 4): supports children in beginning to understand the concept of sexual orientation, with a focus on recognising and valuing that attraction can be experienced in different ways - fostering empathy, understanding and respect for difference.
- Recognising diverse family structures (Stages 1-4): encourages children to understand that families can vary in their composition and fosters appreciation for the uniqueness and value of each family unit.
- Learning about media and digital wellbeing (Stages 1-4): equips children to navigate media and the digital world safely and responsibly, helping them to develop a balanced and informed relationship with media and technology.

- A renewed emphasis on emotional and relational learning throughout PE and SPHE (Stages 1-4): supports children to understand, regulate and express emotions and feelings, develop empathy and build and maintain supportive and healthy relationships with others – including family, friends, peers and teammates.
- Movement and Me (Stages 1–4): encourages children to reflect on their movement experiences—individually and with others—recognise the impact of effort and progress, and take greater responsibility for how, when, and with whom they choose to be active
- Active Living (Stages 1-4): encourages children to explore a wide range of physical activities—some of which may be inspired by the interests of children or teachers and/or local community opportunities such as parks, playgrounds, and events.

What will be taught in relation to sexual orientation?

At primary level, learning about sexual orientation takes place within the *Emotional and Relational Education* Strand. This learning is introduced in **Stage 4** (5th and 6th class, ages 11–13), as part of the *Relationships* Strand Unit.

The Learning Outcome at this stage supports children to:

- *Begin to understand sexual orientation as describing attraction to someone of a different gender, the same gender, or more than one gender.*

Within this outcome, children will explore what it means to care about someone, how people form loving and respectful relationships, and how attraction can be experienced in different ways. This learning is designed to be age-appropriate, inclusive, and respectful, and is focused on emotional and relational understanding—not on sexual behaviour.

The goal is to help all children:

- Understand that people can be attracted to someone of a different gender (heterosexual), the same gender (gay or lesbian), or more than one gender (bisexual).
- Appreciate the diversity of relationships and families in our communities.
- Develop empathy, kindness, and respect for people who may be different from them.
- Recognise and challenge unkind or unfair behaviour related to identity or family structure.

This learning builds on earlier topics such as *belonging, relationships, fairness, and diversity*. It supports the development of a **safe, welcoming and inclusive school environment** for all children. To read more about learning and teaching about sexual orientation please see the [support material](#).

Will all children experience the learning contained within the Wellbeing specification?

There is a national curriculum, which includes SPHE and PE, that is taught across all primary, post-primary and special schools. While the *Wellbeing* specification describes the expected learning and development for children; schools and teachers have agency and flexibility to make choices about their approach to learning, teaching and assessment, taking account of children’s individual abilities and their school context. In making such choices, they are aware of the need to teach topics in a way that is sensitive to the age and stage of development of their pupils, and which meets their needs.

How should schools' timetable and allocate time for PE and SPHE within the weekly Wellbeing provision?

The *Wellbeing* specification supports both dedicated and integrated learning experiences in PE and SPHE. In Stage 1, a suggested minimum of 2 hours and 30 minutes per week is allocated to *Wellbeing*, increasing to 3 hours per week at Stages 2 to 4. Within this time, it is recommended that schools use a 2:1 ratio, giving more time to PE than SPHE. This supports a balanced approach across the strands of the specification.

Ultimately, schools are encouraged to use curriculum time flexibly, as outlined in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*. This enables teachers to respond to children's needs, seize unexpected learning opportunities, and provide meaningful, engaging experiences as part of the *Wellbeing* curriculum area.

Can schools use increased time allocated to Wellbeing to extend breaks/recreation?

The increased time allocation for Wellbeing should be used to realise the learning outcomes of the Wellbeing specification. PE on the curriculum is now incorporated into the Wellbeing specification. Sport and physical activity serve complementary roles outside of the curriculum such as in school sports, movement breaks and break times. As such these complementary activities do not fulfil the requirements for the dedicated learning and teaching time for the Wellbeing curriculum that is outlined in the Primary Curriculum Framework. In this way, it is also not permissible to extend breaks/recreation by way of the increased time allocation for Wellbeing education.

Will schools use external facilitators for learning in the Wellbeing specification?

While a school may use external facilitators, the *Wellbeing* specification clearly states that as a result of their established relationship with the children and their pedagogical and curriculum knowledge, the classroom teacher is best positioned to effectively teach the *Wellbeing* specification (Circular 0042/2018).

Where a specific need is identified, external facilitators can play a complementary role in collaborative partnership with teachers for aspects of the curriculum. Any decision to involve external providers should consider the progression of children's learning and whether an external facilitator will complement this. Furthermore, alignment between the external facilitator and the *Wellbeing* specification should be considered. If a decision is made to work with an external facilitator, a collaborative planning approach is essential. This includes following child safeguarding procedures, considering the Learning Outcomes from the *Wellbeing* specification, the school context, links to children's prior learning, and ensuring all children's needs are met. The frequency and duration of external inputs should be balanced to ensure teachers remain central to teaching the *Wellbeing* specification. External facilitators must work under the guidance and supervision of the classroom teacher, who stays with the children at all times.

What are the PE Activity Areas?

The *Wellbeing* specification includes seven PE activity areas which are outlined in Figure 2 in the specification. The PE activity areas are the vehicle through which children can achieve the Learning Outcomes relevant to PE across stages 1-4.

These encompass various activities, social contexts (recreational and competitive), and environments (indoor, outdoor, natural, and built) that promote physical activity during childhood and beyond. At every curriculum stage, PE should offer a broad and balanced range of experiences to help children achieve the Learning Outcomes.

Is 'Aquatics' mandatory?

Aquatics is one of the seven PE activity areas within the *Wellbeing* specification. Every effort should be made to offer at least one block of water-based aquatic experience during their time in primary school. A school's approach to aquatics will reflect its context, taking into account factors such as access to suitable environments, transport and qualified instructors.

What equipment will be required by schools for learning and teaching in PE?

The equipment needs for PE in the *Wellbeing* specification are largely similar to those in the 1999 PE curriculum, meaning most schools will already have much of the necessary equipment. However, schools may need to invest in new equipment for some of the new PE activity area of Active living. In many cases, existing equipment can be adapted to support these new activities. In relation to the PE activity area of Gymnastics, the equipment previously used by schools to support the 1999 curriculum will continue to be sufficient. Best practice would include access to mats and benches to support safe and varied movement experiences. However, gymnastics can also be effectively taught using basic equipment such as cones, polyspots, skipping ropes, and ribbons.

Will the *Stay Safe* programme still be taught in SPHE?

Yes, all primary and specials schools must fully implement the *Stay Safe* programme. The Learning Outcomes in the *Wellbeing* specification have been designed to align with the *Stay Safe* programme and all schools are still required to teach the programme in full.

Can parents withdraw their child from aspects of SPHE, such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)?

Yes. Under the *Education Act* (1998, Section 30, subsection 2(e)), parents have the right to withdraw their child from any aspect of the school curriculum that is contrary to their conscience or beliefs. Parents are recognised as the primary educators of their children and are valued partners in the education process.

Schools are encouraged to engage openly with parents who have concerns about aspects of the curriculum. Parents who wish to withdraw their child from particular elements of *Wellbeing* are advised to meet with their child's teacher and/or school principal to discuss their concerns.

How does the Wellbeing specification align with the *Bí Cineálta* procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools?

Ensuring alignment between the *Wellbeing* curriculum area and the *Bí Cineálta* procedures was a key consideration during development. The *Wellbeing* specification supports schools in creating the conditions to prevent and address bullying behaviour consistent with *Bí Cineálta*. It provides a broad and enabling framework within which schools can address bullying in ways that are developmentally appropriate and suited to their unique contexts. A Learning Outcome related to recognising and responding to bullying is present at every stage of the curriculum. The specification also includes Learning Outcomes focused on empathy, respect, rights and responsibilities, inclusion, and equality – all of which are essential to supporting a whole-school approach to wellbeing and underpin the implementation of *Bí Cineálta*.

Is 'gender identity' part of what children learn in the *Wellbeing* specification?

The *Wellbeing* specification does not include explicit Learning Outcomes related to gender identity. These are addressed at post-primary level in the Junior Cycle SPHE Specification. At primary level, the focus is on developing a positive sense of self-identity, recognising and valuing the diversity of all individuals, challenging gender stereotypes, and addressing issues such as discrimination and bullying.

The *Bí Cineálta: Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2024)* provide guidance on preventing and responding to bullying. They include a non-exhaustive list of bullying types which include gender identity-based bullying. The *Wellbeing* specification includes Learning Outcomes that support children to understand and address bullying. The *Wellbeing* specification and the *Bí Cineálta* procedures are aligned in their shared aim of promoting wellbeing, inclusion, and respect for all.

What is the *Wellbeing* Online Toolkit?

The *Wellbeing* Toolkit offers practical support to teachers in creating enriching *Wellbeing* learning experiences for children. It includes a range of support materials and examples of children's learning. Designed to be accessible, user-friendly, and adaptable to various school settings, the toolkit will be continually developed and updated to assist teachers across mainstream and special schools.

How is consent addressed in the *Wellbeing* specification?

Building on children's early learning in *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, the *Wellbeing* specification supports children to continue learning about consent throughout all four stages of primary education.

Consent is understood as the giving of permission or agreement for something to happen or to do something. It involves communication, mutual respect, and awareness of personal and others' boundaries. At primary level, this includes helping children recognise their right to bodily autonomy, practise seeking and giving permission in everyday situations, and understand that everyone has the right to say yes or no.

In addition, through the *Stay Safe* programme (a mandatory element of the curriculum), children are supported to recognise that under Irish law, they cannot legally consent to sexual activity. This legal protection is in place to help keep them safe from harm.

While sexual consent is addressed in greater detail at post-primary level through the Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum, the foundations for understanding consent – including respect, communication, and personal boundaries – are laid throughout the primary years.

Where can I find more information?

Parents and teachers can access the *Wellbeing* specification and the Wellbeing Toolkit here on www.curriculumonline.ie. Schools will also provide updates on how they implement the *Wellbeing* specification.