

A whole-school approach to OSH and education in practice – Sarah Copsey

Objectives

A whole-school approach to OSH and education is where: OSH is an integral part of school life and its management; the school is a safe and healthy place to work and a safe and healthy place to learn; risk education is integrated throughout the school curriculum; teachers are trained and participate in school safety management and risk education and; pupils play an active role in school safety, such as hazard spotting, as part of their risk education. EU-OSHA carried out a project to investigate how this approach can and is being achieved in practice.

Methods

Cases from different countries were collected and analysed to look for common trends, innovative features, success factors and problems. Eight in-depth cases focusing on implementing the whole-school approach and 21 briefer 'snapshots' from different countries were collected and analysed.

Results

Among the wide variety of cases found were: the Irish Labour Inspectorate, who have incorporated a combined approach to supporting schools with risk education and OSH management into their national OSH strategy; a Swedish primary school where pupils act as 'safety detectives' and are represented on the school's safety committee and; a sustainable development action programme for schools in Finland into which OSH and risk education can be incorporated.

Success factors found included: commitment of school management and leadership from the Head Teacher; motivation of staff and pupils; being sensitive to the demands placed on schools and taking account of synergies between different teaching and school management areas; creating consultative forums for pupils/students, parents and staff; provision of simple, practical tools and support and; networking between schools and the use of safety 'champions'.

Conclusion

The ideal model would be a 'combined whole-school approach'. The interacting components of this approach, each covering both pupil education and school management, are: health education and promotion ('healthy schools'); risk education and OSH management; dignity and respect programmes (anti-bullying and violence) covering pupils and staff and; sustainable development and environmental issues. To achieve such a 'combined' whole-school approach requires close cooperation and working between OSH, these other policy areas and education policy in order to develop joined-up approaches that will be appropriate for schools and practical for them to implement.