

LEADING A SKILLS FOR LIFE SCHOOL

Creating a whole school approach to
emotional health and mental wellbeing



Produced by Partnership for Children
Registered Charity Number 1089810

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Foreword

The need for effective mental health promotion in children is more important than ever.

According to statistics from the Centre for Mental Health, 1 in 6 school-aged children has a mental health problem. Common mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, are increasing amongst 16-24 year olds and 75% of adults with a diagnosable mental health problem experience the first symptoms by the age of 24.¹ This is why early intervention is crucial.

As children spend so much of their time in school, schools play a key role in helping children develop resilience and coping skills. By running

the *Skills for Life* programmes and embedding the principles within the whole school, schools are teaching children the skills to communicate effectively, cope with their anxieties and difficulties and develop skills for life. This document has been developed to provide schools with practical advice on how to embed the *Skills for Life* programmes effectively as a whole school approach.

This guidance has been developed using guidance from Public Health England Promoting children and young people's emotional health (2021) and The Whole School and College Approach to emotional health and mental wellbeing in Oldham (2017).

This document was produced thanks to funding from Oldham Opportunity area.

We have also included guidance information relating to children and young people's social, emotional and mental wellbeing developed elsewhere.

A full list of references and supporting documents can be found on [pages 13-14](#).



The importance of using the Skills for Life programmes as a whole school approach

School-based programmes such as *Zippy's Friends*, *Apple's Friends*, *Passport* and *SPARK Resilience (Skills for Life programmes)* are a proven way to promote good mental health and help all children develop skills which will enhance their present and future emotional wellbeing.

The Department for Education (DfE) recognises that the whole school approach will help pupils succeed, as the approach

supports them to become resilient and mentally healthy. It is important to devote time to the programmes and run them across the whole school, academy or trust as a long-term approach which will build coping skills for all children.

To gain the most insight and effectiveness from this document it is recommended

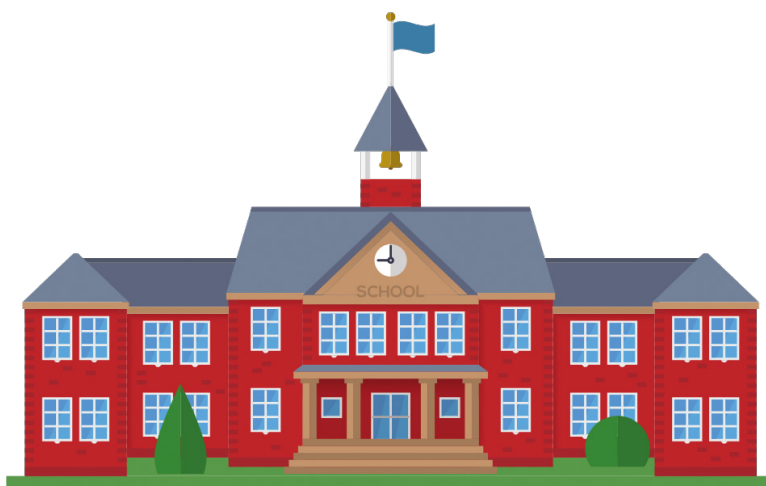
that it is used alongside the current statutory guidance from Public Health England, The Mental Health in Schools Working Group (Scotland) and Health and Well-being in Schools (Wales) and the Department for Education and other supporting documents – Please see [Useful Resources](#) for more details.

Reviews demonstrate that there is a solid group of approaches, programmes and interventions which, when well designed and implemented, show repeated and clear evidence of positive impacts on:

1. Academic learning
2. Staff wellbeing
3. Pupil wellbeing
4. The development of the social and emotional skills
5. The prevention and reduction of mental health problems
6. Improving school behaviour
7. Reductions in risky behaviour³

“

Teaching social and emotional skills in PSHE, tutorial time or circle time should only be one small part of supporting pupils' social and emotional wellbeing. These skills only start to have a real impact on school environments and on school learning when they are implemented and followed and reinforced in all areas of school life.²





How to implement the Skills for Life programmes as a whole school approach

This document outlines the eight key areas that schools need to address to maximise the positive impact of the *Skills for Life* programmes as a whole school approach and makes suggestions for good practice in each of the areas.

Using the *Skills for Life* programmes as a whole school approach to emotional health and mental wellbeing will give schools a framework for supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of all staff and pupils. To get the most out of this process the whole school needs to be involved.

Schools should start by familiarising themselves with the different areas of the *Skills for Life* whole school approach. It is recommended that the Senior Leadership Team and PSHE Lead work with teachers, the SENCO, pastoral staff and pupils to implement a review of the current PSHE curriculum and reflect on all interventions in use in the school.

Using the reflection questions throughout the document you will be able to complete the [Skills for Life audit](#) which will highlight key areas of strengths and opportunities for growth. This will enable you to create an individual action plan for your setting.

KEY



Good practice



Reflection questions



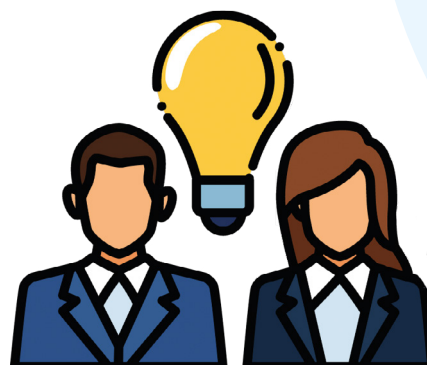
A large review of evidence related to SEL concludes that going beyond the curriculum to consider the whole school (for example, changes to school ethos, professional development, liaison with parents, community involvement, and coordinated work with outside agencies) is needed for maximising positive impacts.

- *EEF Improving social and emotional learning in schools - Guidance Report*⁴

1. Management and leadership of a Skills for Life school

NICE guidance recommends that:

Head teachers, governors and teachers should demonstrate a commitment to the social and emotional wellbeing of young people. They should provide leadership in this area by ensuring social and emotional wellbeing features within improvement plans, policies, systems and activities. These should all be monitored and evaluated.⁵



Nominate a Skills for Life Lead within the school who will:

- Oversee the implementation of the *Skills for Life* programmes
- Hold meetings for staff to share good practice in the *Skills for Life* programmes
- Complete peer observation Skills for Life Class Visit form
- Be the main point of contact between the school and Partnership for Children
- Attend Partnership for Children support webinars and disseminate learning to staff
- Share the school's annual feedback with Partnership for Children

Create or update the school's mental health and wellbeing policy

- Detail the role that the *Skills for Life* programmes play in the school
- Link to other policies such as bullying, behaviour management, bereavement and safeguarding

Appointing and involving the wellbeing governor

- Appoint a wellbeing governor – [Guidance](#)
- Ensure the wellbeing governor and *Skills for Life* Lead work together to review the implementation of the *Skills for Life* programmes
- Invite them on a learning walk of *Skills for Life* classes
- Invite them to attend *Skills for Life* training
- Share the student feedback sheets from the sessions



Are the *Skills for Life* programmes clearly referenced in relevant school plans and key documents e.g. the school health and wellbeing plan?

Is the wellbeing governor supporting the embedding of the *Skills for Life* programmes across the entire school?

How is the school and college providing visible senior leadership for emotional health and mental wellbeing?

2. Creating the ethos and environment of a Skills for Life school



NICE guidance recommends that school and colleges:

- Create an ethos and conditions that support positive behaviours for learning and for successful relationships.
- Provide an emotionally secure and safe environment that prevents any form of bullying or violence.⁵

Links with the Ofsted inspection framework

When judging behaviour and safety, Ofsted looks for evidence of a positive ethos that fosters improvements in the school as well as the promotion of safe practices and a culture of safety. As part of the inspection process inspectors will ask to see records and analysis of bullying, including racist,

disability and homophobic bullying and will ask young people about their experiences of learning and behaviour in the school, including bullying. The school will be judged on the effectiveness of its actions to prevent and tackle all forms of bullying and harassment.⁶



Involve all school staff

- Dedicate time in CPD for all staff who are delivering the *Skills for Life* programmes to complete training
- Have a short meeting to introduce programmes to non-teaching staff or those not delivering the programme including lunchtime supervisors who can reinforce the programmes' problem solving processes outside of the classroom using the presentation in the *Skills for Life* resources.



How are you planning to put your school policies into practice to create these conditions?

How can you encourage staff to become more involved with the programmes?

Skills for Life peer mentoring

Peer mentoring has been evidenced as having a positive impact on the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. Peer mentors can provide advice and guidance whilst acting as a positive role model for younger children who need their support. Pair up children from the different programmes and give them an opportunity to discuss what they've learnt.

Peer-to-peer learning

Encourage children to learn from each other in lessons by including pair and group activities.

Skills for Life Assemblies

Assemblies provide an opportunity for pupils and staff to pause and reflect on the themes of the *Skills for Life* programmes and build a sense of community. Give children the chance to decide what they

would like to share with the rest of the school.

Creating a Skills for Life Environment

To embed the *Skills for Life* programmes around the school you could create:

A Skills for Life Corner – Encourage staff to choose a corner in the classroom or school wellbeing room where you keep programme materials, children's drawings, completed activity sheets, the mystery box and the Apple or Zippy toy. This could be linked to a space for brain breaks, mindfulness or even your reading corner.

Skills for Life displays – Create displays in classrooms and around the school to remind staff and children of the principles of the programmes.



Elements of programmes used throughout the school:

- Golden Rules
- Follow-up questions
- Mindfulness activities
- 4 Steps to a Good Solution
- Feelings Chart – Used for regular check-ins with pupils
- SPARK technique and FAST SPARK posters



Using the Skills for Life programmes outside of the classroom:

Encourage children to practice the skills they've learnt at break times and lunchtimes. Ensure all members of the staff team are aware of the principles and rules taught through the programmes.

Pupils have been shown to be effective peer educators in teaching social and emotional skills: there has been particular success with buddying and conflict resolution.⁷



How can you include more elements of the programmes in the school day to develop a positive environment?

.....

Who will lead the Skills for Life Peer Mentoring project at your school?

.....

Can you give children the chance to decide which topic they would like to share in an assembly?

3. Embedding the Skills for Life programmes across the curriculum



The *Skills for Life* programmes have the potential to help children develop the skills they need to make good academic progress as well as benefit their health and wellbeing.⁸

By using the activities and principles from the *Skills for Life* programmes across the wider curriculum, children are given opportunities to apply their learning to real life situations and will engage more with the

sessions when they see the relevance of the activities and opportunities for the practical application of the skills.

There will be times that provide opportunities for practice of the coping strategies learnt in the *Skills for Life* sessions such as the transition between classes, year groups or schools or if a child suffers a bereavement or something happens locally.

NICE guidance recommends that primary education providers:

Include a curriculum that integrates the development of social and emotional skills within all subject areas (these skills include problem solving, coping, conflict management/resolution and understanding and managing feelings).⁵



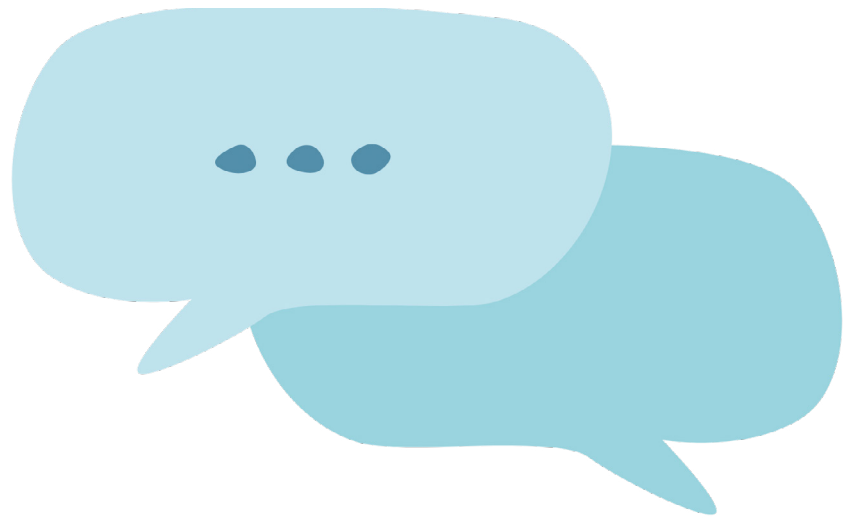
Use the [Skills for Life mapping documents](#) to create a complete PSHE curriculum. Look for opportunities to develop coping skills in all subject areas:

- **English** – How is the character feeling?
- **History** – What coping strategies could the soldiers have used in the trenches?
- **Mathematics** – I can see you are feeling frustrated with this work, which parrots are talking to you, do you trust them?
- **Science** – How would feeling nervous affect your five senses?
- **Physical education** – How does physical activity make you feel? Does it help you to feel better if you feel angry to do something physical?
- **Design and technology** – I can see you're finding this design difficult – what can you do to feel better?



How much focus is given in the curriculum to social and emotional learning and promoting personal resilience?

Which other programmes and resources can you use to ensure all points of the PSHE Association programme of study are met?



4. Skills for Life pupil voice

Give pupils a voice through the programmes

The *Skills for Life* programmes help children to develop the communication skills to say how they feel and why.

The programmes encourage children to have a voice about brand new topics – such as bereavement.

End of Session Feedback

It's important that children are given the time to assess their experience at the end of each session for themselves and the feedback pupils provide will help staff to adapt the sessions.



Do children have an opportunity to reflect on the sessions?

How do you ensure all students have the opportunity to express their views and influence decisions?



- Add a regular *Skills for Life* slot to the student council meeting where children are able to reflect on wider issues that the programmes may have raised and the whole-school approach – do they have ideas from the programmes that can be implemented across the school? Is the wellbeing governor invited to attend these meetings?
- Remind children about the **class agreement** and **rules** from the *Skills for Life* programmes during student voice discussions.
- Use the **Fairness, Justice and What is Right** module of the *Passport* programme to increase children's awareness of unjust situations such as poverty, war or natural disasters and give them the chance to discuss their reactions and the strategies they can use to cope. This may link with initiatives such as Philosophy for Children or Picture news.
- Encourage activities such as **I give my opinion (Passport Module 4, session 3)** to show children how they can have a voice even in situations where they feel powerless.
- Have structures in place so that all pupils can be involved in decision making, including those with additional learning needs.

Schools with a strong commitment to pupil voice have reported many positive outcomes. These include a reduction in exclusions, better behaviour, better relationships across the whole-school community, and improving attainment and attendance – all of which can also improve your school's rating by the school inspectorate.⁹

5. Supporting staff health and wellbeing through the Skills for Life programmes

In order to be able to support children with their mental health through the *Skills for Life* programmes, it is important that staff also receive mental health and emotional wellbeing support.

Although the teaching profession comes with high levels of reward, school staff have to cope with high levels of pressure and stress.

Good staff wellbeing increases productivity, job satisfaction and retention. It also ensures that staff can be positive role models for pupils, demonstrating their own coping skills.



- Opportunities are provided to staff to enhance their own health and wellbeing and by promoting a work-life balance for staff
- Staff are encouraged to implement the strategies from the *Skills for Life* programmes in their own lives
- Staff are encouraged to download and use [Mental Health Resources for School staff](#) (based on the same concepts and theory as the programmes)
- Monitor staff health and wellbeing with regular check-ins - the topics in the programmes may bring up personal issues for staff, ensure they receive support through supervision or have the opportunity to debrief.
- Look for signs that staff may be struggling with their mental health and wellbeing
- Hold dedicated staff training, signposting information (staff and students), PSHE and library resources and targeted mental health campaigns (including tackling stigma and discrimination)



51% of teachers and 59% of senior leaders told us they had considered leaving the profession during this year due to pressures on their health and wellbeing.¹⁰



How do you promote work-life balance for staff?

Do you hold regular staff mental health check-ins?

Can you spot any signs that colleagues may need support with their health or wellbeing?



My personal THANKS for the programme *Apple's Friends*. Although I am already a 55 year old teacher, this program has taught me myself to search or look and find more different ways out of difficult situations. I have changed myself and my life has become better.

6. Monitoring the impact of the Skills for Life programmes



You will need to ensure there is a clear plan (lead by the PSHE Lead) on how pupil progress and achievement in the programmes is assessed, recorded and reported using your school's chosen evaluation method(s).

Ofsted inspection framework: key judgement

Quality of teaching

Links to pupil health and wellbeing

Assessing and responding to the emotional health and wellbeing needs of children and learners, and taking steps to mitigate the impact this has on their capacity to learn could provide supportive evidence in relation to all key judgement areas: the achievement of pupils in the school, the quality of teaching in the school, the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school and the quality of leadership and management of the school.⁶

Examples of validated assessment tools to enable schools to measure the impact of interventions*:

- Stirling children's wellbeing scale
- Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)
- The Boxall Profile
- The Butler Self-Image Profiles (SIP)
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

*These tools should not be used in isolation but as part of your school's chosen evaluation process and overall holistic assessment



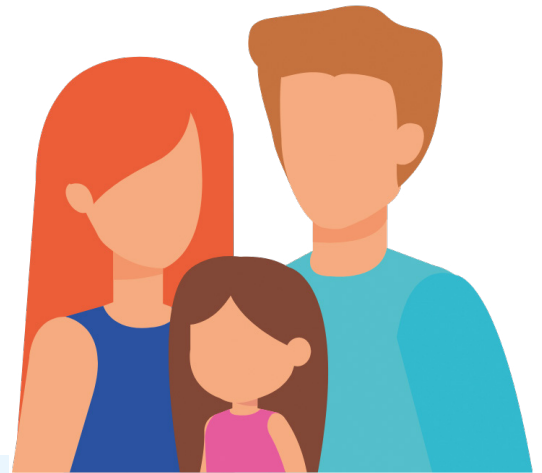
- Use the *Skills for Life* evaluation forms to monitor individual pupil or whole class progress
- Use the session feedback time in each session to allow children to assess their own experience of each session



Are the programmes highlighted in your school's provision map?

How do you assess the needs of students and the impact of interventions to improve wellbeing?

7. Involving parents and carers in the Skills for Life programmes



Links with the Ofsted inspection framework:

The Ofsted inspection criteria expects schools to engage parents in supporting pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.⁶



- **Parents' meetings** – Hold an in-person or online event for parents and carers before starting about the programme(s)
- **Parents' Guide** – Send home this guide which explains the background to the programme, introduces the topics that it covers, and explains how they can help their child to get the most benefit from it. Consider how this will be best received by your parents and carers and whether you need to consider aspects such as translation
- **Home Activities** – These help parents and carers to understand what their child is learning and give children the chance to practice the skills they have learnt outside the classroom. Ensure parents, carers or other family members are supported to enable them to participate in these activities
- **Zippy at Home** – A series of four workshops for parents or carers to look at the *Zippy's Friends* programme in more detail which is part of the *Skills for Life* online resources
- **Additional activities for parents/carers** – Help parents/carers to support children's social and emotional learning at home
- **Communication** – As part of your regular communication provide parents and carers with regular opportunities to give their views on the programmes



There is nothing about this activity that they didn't enjoy & nothing that didn't work. As a parent I found it an incredibly helpful tool in learning more about what the children are thinking & feeling & would certainly recommend it to fellow mums. - Parent using *Skills for Life resilience activity*



How do you currently work in partnership with parents & carers to promote emotional health and wellbeing?

What can you do to maintain and strengthen these partnerships?

8. Coordinating support with the Skills for Life programmes



The *Skills for Life* programmes are whole-class social and emotional learning programmes which are suitable for all children. This includes those who have been identified as needing additional support and the programmes can work alongside other interventions. It's important to discuss the programmes with all those involved in supporting a child.

The programmes also support children who are at risk of developing mental health issues that have not yet been identified. Children may show early signs in how they interact or what they share in the sessions.

The *Skills for Life* programmes are not designed to be mental health treatment or prevention programmes and therefore schools which identify children

as having emotional health and wellbeing needs must work with your local Children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) to provide selected or targeted support alongside the setting's universal offer.

Supporting vulnerable children

Social and emotional levels of development and maturity in vulnerable children often may not match their age and some will have gaps in their social and emotional development.

Partnership for Children are piloting several projects with Young Carers Services and Looked After Children - if you are using the programmes with these groups of children, please get in touch with us for support.

Please consult your local Children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) for more information and resources.



How do you ensure timely and effective identification of pupils who would benefit from coordinated support?

How do you ensure an appropriate response takes place?

How do you plan to record, monitor and evaluate the impact of additional support?

Do you know and engage with your advisor from the mental health in education team?



- Offer 1:1 support with the programmes to children who have been identified as vulnerable
- Take the time to complete pre or post work around the sessions to ensure vulnerable children are fully supported in topics that they may find difficult
- If you need to talk to a pupil about an issue the programme has raised, choose the time and environment carefully to avoid conflict
- Use either the Additional Activities or for Zippy, the Inclusion Supplement to build on and support learning within whole class activities

Useful Resources

- [Peer Mentoring Toolkit from Headstart Kent](#)
- [Governors for schools](#)
- [The Whole School and College Approach to emotional health and mental wellbeing in Oldham](#)
Oldham Council (2017)
- [Pupil Voice – Mentally Healthy Schools](#)
- Public Health England (2021) [Promoting children and young people’s emotional health and wellbeing: A whole school and college approach](#)
- Welsh Government (2021) [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being](#)
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Skills for Life Audit

This audit is designed to support PSHE Leads and colleagues to assess the use of the *Skills for Life* programmes as a whole school approach. The columns set out the topics and content bullet points from the *Skills for Life* as a whole school approach document, with columns for you to 'RAG rate' each bullet point in red, amber or green depending on the extent to which you currently meet that requirement. There is also a column for you to input evidence. Once you have completed the audit, identify your top three areas for action and then use the Action Plan to document actions taken in these areas.

TOPIC AND CONTENT	RAG RATE	EVIDENCE – WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?
1. Management and leadership of a <i>Skills for Life</i> school		
Is there visible senior leadership for emotional health and mental wellbeing?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Is the wellbeing governor supporting the embedding of the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes across the entire school?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Have you nominated a <i>Skills for Life</i> Lead within the school?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
2. Creating the ethos and environment of a <i>Skills for Life</i> school		
Are the programmes referenced in relevant school plans and key documents e.g. the school health and wellbeing plan?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Are the programmes embedded in school policies such as the bullying policy, behaviour policy, PSHE and RSE policies?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Are all staff including non <i>Skills for Life</i> staff aware of and supporting the programmes?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Are the <i>Skills for Life</i> programme resources and principles used throughout the school?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Is <i>Skills for Life</i> peer mentoring taking place?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	

Are <i>Skills for Life</i> assemblies run regularly?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Have <i>Skills for Life</i> environments been created?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
3. Embedding the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes across the wider curriculum		
Has a full curriculum been created which includes the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes and ensures all points of the PSHE programme of study are met?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Are staff encouraged to use elements of the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes across all subjects?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
4. <i>Skills for Life</i> pupil voice		
Are pupils given regular opportunities to give feedback in <i>Skills for Life</i> sessions and is it acted on?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Do all pupils have opportunities to express their views and influence decisions within the school?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
5. Supporting staff health and wellbeing through the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes		
Is work-life balance promoted to all staff?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Do staff have the opportunity for regular <i>Skills for Life</i> supervision and debriefs?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Is there dedicated staff training, signposting information, PSHE and library resources and targeted mental health campaigns (including tackling stigma and discrimination)?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Is staff wellbeing being monitored across the school?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	

6. Monitoring the impact of the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes		
Has a clear plan been created (lead by the PSHE Lead) for how pupil progress and achievement in the programmes is assessed, recorded and reported?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Are <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes highlighted in the school's provision map?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Are assessment tool(s) being used to monitor progress and achievement?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
7. Involving parents and carers in the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes		
Are parents and carers aware of and involved in their child's experience of the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
Is there regular communication with parents and carers about the programmes?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
8. Coordinating support with the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes		
Are there tools in place to ensure timely and effective identification of pupils who would benefit from coordinated support alongside the <i>Skills for Life</i> programmes?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	
How do you plan to record, monitor and evaluate the impact of additional support?	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	

Top three focus areas

1.	2.	3.
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Skills for Life Action Plan

Planned Outcome(s) What are you aiming to improve?	Success Indicators How will you know you are on track to achieve your outcome?	Actions What actions will you take to achieve this outcome?	CPD needed? What training or support will be needed to achieve this outcome?	Lead person Who will lead this work?	Timescale What is the predicted timescale?	Monitoring & Evaluation How will you measure success and evidence your achievements?