POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Building sustainable well-being ecosystems in European schools

Practical recommendations for schools, school authorities and education systems across the European Union

From educator well-being to learner well-being and whole-school change

Final WINS policy recommendations | 2026

1. Purpose and evidence base

WINS – Well-being In Networking Schools is an Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership involving organisations from Portugal, Italy, Greece, France, Lithuania and Romania. The project starts from a simple principle: sustainable learner well-being is closely linked to the well-being, emotional competence and working conditions of the educators and professionals who support them.

This document translates the national partner contributions into a common set of practical recommendations for European schools and school authorities. The synthesis draws on contributions available from Portugal, France, Greece, Lithuania and Romania, together with the implementation experience of WINS. The Italian contribution was not available at the time of synthesis; consequently, the document does not make country-specific claims about Italy and avoids presenting the recommendations as a comparative ranking of national systems.

WINS principles for policy and practice

1. **Start with educators:** staff well-being and professional capacity are foundational conditions for learner well-being.
2. **Use a whole-school approach:** well-being should be embedded in curriculum, leadership, relationships, services and school culture.
3. **Prioritise prevention:** universal support and early intervention should reduce reliance on crisis response.
4. **Combine evidence with adaptation:** effective approaches need quality assurance, but they must fit local context and culture.
5. **Design for equity:** access, disability, language, rurality and socio-economic differences must be considered from the start.
6. **Include participation:** pupils, staff and families should help shape priorities and evaluate progress.
7. **Plan for sustainability:** networks, funding, monitoring and professional learning should continue beyond individual projects.

The recommendations are organised around the 14 policy pillars used by the WINS partnership.

2. Executive action framework

Across the partner contributions, the same message appears repeatedly: school well-being is strongest when it is systematic, participatory, preventive and supported by trained professionals. The following seven actions capture the cross-cutting priorities of WINS.

01 Embed well-being in the core mission of the school
Move from occasional projects to coherent curriculum, school-plan and whole-school approaches.

02 Invest in educators first
Provide sustained training, peer support and organisational conditions that protect staff well-being and professional capacity.

03 Guarantee progressive SEL for every learner
Use sequenced, experiential learning reinforced by everyday relationships and routines.

04 Build connected support systems
Link schools with families, health, social care, community services and school networks through clear roles and referral pathways.

05 Measure what changes, not only what happens
Use proportionate monitoring that looks at outcomes, equity, implementation quality and access to support.

06 Use evidence responsibly
Strengthen research, validated tools and data protection while avoiding high-stakes labelling or simplistic rankings.

07 Make successful practice last
Fund networks, hubs, professional communities and routes for validated European project results to enter mainstream training and policy.

3. Learning and professional capacity

Well-being becomes sustainable when it is embedded in what schools teach, how educators learn and the practical resources available for everyday implementation.

1 Curriculum Integration

Embed well-being and social-emotional learning (SEL) as a coherent, age-progressive entitlement across the curriculum and school life, rather than as isolated activities.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Map where well-being and SEL competences are already developed across subjects and year groups.
- Protect regular time for experiential activities, reflection and cross-curricular work.
- Give particular attention to transitions between education stages, when belonging and emotional security can be challenged.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Define a clear progression of age-appropriate well-being and SEL outcomes across compulsory education.
- Provide practical implementation guidance while allowing local adaptation.
- Check implementation through the learner experience and school practice, not only through the existence of programmes.

> **Suggested signs of progress:** a documented curriculum progression; protected time; evidence that learners experience regular and connected activities across year groups.

2 Teacher Training & Professional Development

Make educator well-being, emotional competence and relational practice a core part of initial education, leadership development and continuing professional development.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Use team-based, experiential training rather than information-only sessions.
- Create peer-coaching, reflection or supervision opportunities so that learning is transferred into daily practice.
- Include staff well-being, workload and emotional demands as legitimate professional-development topics.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Guarantee access to accredited training in SEL, emotional intelligence, conflict management, inclusion and staff well-being.
- Fund sustained professional learning with follow-up, coaching and peer exchange.
- Evaluate whether training changes practice and supports staff well-being over time.

> **Suggested signs of progress:** staff participation in sustained training; follow-up after 6–12 months; evidence of transfer into classroom and organisational practice.

5 Resources and Materials

Ensure that schools can easily find practical, inclusive and quality-assured resources for well-being and SEL.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Select tools that fit the age group, context and staff capacity rather than adopting resources because they are fashionable.
- Adapt materials for accessibility, language and inclusion needs.
- Record what worked, what needed adaptation and what should be shared with others.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Maintain a searchable repository of reviewed resources with clear information on age, evidence base, accessibility, duration and preparation required.
- Regularly review and update materials.
- Provide implementation grants or targeted support to schools with fewer local resources.

> **Suggested signs of progress:** equitable access to resources; regular use; quality review; evidence of adaptation for diverse learners and settings.

6 Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programmes

Provide every learner with access to continuous, progressive and evidence-informed SEL, reinforced through everyday school routines and relationships.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Prioritise sequenced and participatory learning over one-off workshops.
- Connect explicit SEL activities with classroom routines, conflict resolution, pupil voice and staff modelling.
- Use targeted additional support for learners who need more intensive help, while maintaining a universal offer for all.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Establish quality criteria for SEL programmes and frameworks.
- Support implementation over sufficient time to allow habits and culture to develop.
- Scale programmes only after examining outcomes, equity, safeguarding and implementation quality.

Suggested signs of progress: regular universal provision; continuity between year groups; active participation; evidence of implementation quality and learner benefit.

4. Whole-school environment and partnerships

School well-being is relational. It depends on culture, belonging, networks and meaningful cooperation with families and community services.

3 Educational Networks

Develop sustainable networks and regional or national well-being hubs that help schools learn from each other and connect with expertise beyond the individual institution.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Designate a well-being contact person and participate actively in peer exchange.
- Share tested resources, implementation challenges and lessons learned with neighbouring schools and partners.
- Use networks to access specialist advice and avoid working in isolation.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Recognise and resource territorial hubs or networks with clear coordination responsibilities.
- Provide time and modest operational funding for regular cross-school exchange.
- Connect education networks with training providers, health, social services, local authorities and research organisations.

Suggested signs of progress: active network participation; regular meetings; shared resources; documented collaboration and referral links.

7 Supportive & Mindful School Environment

Treat well-being as a whole-school responsibility that includes belonging, emotional safety, inclusion, relationships and the well-being of staff as well as pupils.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Carry out an annual participatory diagnosis of school climate and agree a small number of priorities.
- Create inclusive spaces, routines and relational practices that strengthen belonging and psychological safety.
- Give staff and pupils meaningful opportunities to influence how well-being is supported in the school.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Include well-being and school climate in quality-improvement frameworks.
- Support leadership practices that reduce avoidable administrative burden and protect time for relational work.
- Target additional support where disadvantage, discrimination or territorial inequalities affect well-being.

Suggested signs of progress: improved belonging and safety; staff climate; pupil voice; reduction in repeated concerns; evidence that improvement actions are reviewed annually.

8 Parental Involvement

Build inclusive partnerships with parents and carers so that well-being is supported consistently across school, home and community contexts.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Co-design priorities with a parent/carer group that reflects the diversity of the school community.
- Offer accessible, multilingual and flexible ways to participate.
- Share practical guidance on emotional development, digital life, relationships and help-seeking.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Fund outreach, mediation and parent-education approaches where participation barriers are high.
- Encourage schools to monitor whose voices are missing.
- Provide common guidance that supports partnership without shifting professional responsibilities onto families.

Suggested signs of progress: diverse family participation; co-designed actions; improved communication; targeted outreach to under-represented groups.

9 Collaboration with Community

Move from ad-hoc crisis response to stable local cooperation between education, health, social care, child protection, youth services and community organisations.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Maintain an up-to-date map of local services and named contacts.
- Use clear prevention, referral and follow-up procedures understood by relevant staff.
- Invite community partners into preventive activities, not only crisis intervention.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Formalise cross-sector protocols, including response responsibilities and continuity of support.
- Fund multi-year prevention partnerships rather than relying only on short projects.
- Pay particular attention to rural and underserved areas where access to specialist services may be limited.

Suggested signs of progress: named referral pathways; response times; continuity after referral; regular multi-agency coordination; prevention activities delivered jointly.

5. Evidence, support and accountability

Schools need proportionate ways to understand progress and clear pathways to support. Evidence should drive improvement without creating new stigma or unnecessary bureaucracy.

4 Assessment

Assess well-being and SEL for understanding and improvement, not for high-stakes grading or labelling individuals.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Use age-appropriate self-reflection, climate surveys and qualitative feedback alongside observable school-level indicators.
- Discuss findings with pupils, staff and families and turn them into improvement actions.
- Apply strong privacy safeguards and avoid unnecessary collection of sensitive personal data.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Provide a small common set of validated indicators and tools that can be adapted locally.
- Support disaggregated analysis to identify inequalities without stigmatising groups.
- Ensure that well-being assessment is formative and linked to support, not punitive comparison.

Suggested signs of progress: baseline and follow-up information; participation from multiple school groups; clear actions linked to findings; privacy safeguards.

10 Monitoring and Evaluation

Measure whether well-being initiatives make a meaningful difference, not simply whether activities were delivered.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Define the intended change before starting an initiative and establish a simple baseline.
- Review reach, implementation quality, outcomes and equity at least annually.
- Combine quantitative information with pupil, staff and family feedback.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Provide a common monitoring framework that is proportionate and useful to schools.
- Publish anonymised trends and use them to target support rather than rank schools punitively.
- Include access to support and referral timeliness alongside climate and participation measures.

Suggested signs of progress: baseline and annual review; reach and quality data; outcome trends; equity analysis; actions revised in response to findings.

11 Research and Data Collection

Strengthen the evidence base through longitudinal research, implementation studies and meaningful partnerships between schools, researchers and public authorities.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Engage in ethical research partnerships where findings can improve practice.
- Use existing evidence before introducing new initiatives.
- Include pupils, staff and families in interpreting findings where appropriate.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Support stable longitudinal data collection on learner and staff well-being.
- Fund research on implementation and effectiveness, not only prevalence.
- Ensure that vulnerable, rural and under-represented groups are visible in the evidence base while preserving privacy.

Suggested signs of progress: regular comparable data; research-practice partnerships; published anonymised findings; documented policy or practice changes based on evidence.

12 Mental Health Services

Guarantee a clear, tiered pathway from universal prevention to early support and timely specialist care, while recognising that schools cannot replace health services.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Ensure staff know who the first contact is when a pupil or colleague needs support.
- Use universal prevention and early identification alongside clear referral procedures.
- Follow up referrals so that responsibility does not end when a case leaves the school.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Set needs-based expectations for access to psychologists, counsellors, nurses, social workers and specialist services.
- Strengthen multidisciplinary cooperation and continuity between school and community care.
- Provide dedicated support for staff mental health as well as pupil mental health.

Suggested signs of progress: access and response times; named contacts; continuity after referral; preventive coverage; staff access to support.

6. Governance and sustainability

Long-term change requires coherent policy, funding, accountability and mechanisms that keep useful practices alive beyond individual initiatives.

13 Policy Promotion

Create a coherent, funded and accountable policy framework for school well-being that connects education, health and social policy and includes both pupils and staff.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Embed well-being objectives in the school development plan and make responsibilities visible.
- Communicate progress transparently to the school community.
- Use local evidence to advocate for the support that cannot be delivered by the school alone.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Set a small number of shared cross-sector objectives with clear responsibilities and funding.
- Include prevention, care, staff well-being and equity in the same strategic framework.
- Report publicly on coverage, workforce, resources, outcomes and remaining gaps and involve stakeholders in review.

> **Suggested signs of progress:** clear governance; protected funding; annual public reporting; stakeholder participation; evidence of coordination across sectors.

14 International Collaboration

Use European cooperation to test, adapt and sustain effective well-being practices beyond the lifetime of individual projects.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

- Participate in communities of practice and document what conditions are needed to adapt a method successfully.
- Share both positive results and implementation difficulties.
- Keep useful partnerships active after project funding ends where possible.

WHAT SCHOOL AUTHORITIES SHOULD ENABLE

- Fund post-project networks and recognised relay structures such as hubs or ambassador networks.
- Create formal routes for validated European project results to enter national training and resource platforms.
- Encourage comparable evidence, safeguarding and adaptation planning across international initiatives.

> **Suggested signs of progress:** continued network activity after funding; adaptation of validated resources; uptake in training or national platforms; sustained cross-border professional exchange.

7. From recommendation to implementation

WINS recommends a staged approach. Schools and authorities do not need to launch every action at once; they do need a clear baseline, shared priorities and a mechanism for review.

FIRST 6 MONTHS | Build the foundation

- Name a school or system-level well-being lead.
- Consult staff, pupils and families and establish a simple baseline.
- Map existing curriculum, resources, training and local support services.
- Select two or three priorities rather than launching disconnected initiatives.

6–18 MONTHS | Implement and connect

- Deliver team-based professional development.
- Introduce or strengthen progressive SEL and whole-school practices.
- Formalise community and referral pathways.
- Join or establish a peer network or hub and begin annual monitoring.

18–36 MONTHS | Review, scale and sustain

- Use outcome and equity data to refine practice.
- Scale approaches that show value and stop those that do not.
- Embed successful actions in budgets, school plans, training systems and quality frameworks.
- Share learning nationally and through European networks.

A practical minimum standard for every school

- A named person or team responsible for coordinating well-being.
- An annual whole-school well-being plan informed by staff, pupil and family voice.
- Regular professional development that includes educator well-being and relational practice.
- A universal, progressive approach to SEL and emotional competence.
- Clear prevention, referral and follow-up pathways for mental-health or safeguarding concerns.
- A simple annual review of outcomes, access and equity.

8. Evidence base and final message

The partner contribution matrix drew on national curriculum and policy frameworks, school quality-assurance systems, teacher professional-development structures, mental-health and school-health services, school-climate and well-being data, OECD and European Commission resources, WHO and UNICEF guidance, and Erasmus+ cooperation experience. The full source list remains available in the WINS partner contribution matrix.

Selected cross-European and international reference points

- European Commission – European Education Area: https://education.ec.europa.eu/
- Erasmus+ – School education and cooperation opportunities: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/
- OECD – Education Policy Outlook / TALIS: https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/education.html
- World Health Organization – Mental health: https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health
- UNICEF – Mental health and psychosocial support: https://www.unicef.org/mental-health

WINS final message

> **Well-being should not depend on a single enthusiastic teacher, a temporary project or a crisis. European schools need systems that help educators thrive, give learners regular opportunities to develop social and emotional competences, connect schools with support services, and use evidence to improve over time. The goal is not to add another initiative to schools, but to make well-being part of how schools work.**

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