

*How a school planned a totally integrated health curriculum*

John Howieson

# Developing positive attitudes: a school's 'Health Year'



**O**f all the pressures on young people today, those concerned with health issues are the hardest to deal with. External factors, such as advertising and image, add to the difficulties children and especially adolescents traditionally experience in coming to terms with what is right for them in life. What could be more important in our pupils' education than ensuring that they are educated about health issues, and encouraged to develop positive attitudes towards health topics?

For these and other reasons, health education was identified in Whitburn Academy's Development Plan as a high priority for implementation in the 1992-93 session. As a first step, a health education co-ordinator was appointed and given a favourable allocation of non-teaching time. The co-ordinator's remit was to have in place by the 1992-93 session a totally integrated policy in health. The definition of health education was to be a wide one, encompassing all factors contributing to the health of pupils, such

as nutrition, exercise, hygiene, drug abuse and environmental safety as well as the curricular provision required in school.

As the next step towards fulfilling this remit, two committees were established:

*The In-school Group*, made up of interested teachers within Whitburn Academy, covering the PE, Home Economics, Guidance and Science Departments, as well as the school's senior management group, called the Board of Studies.

*The Liaison Group*, which included several teachers from the In-school Group, as well as the school doctor, the school's medical auxiliary, a local GP, community nursing staff, a dentist, a representative of the Drugs and Alcohol Project in Livingston, representatives of Lothian Client Catering and of Lothian Catering Services, and several parents. For a while, there was also senior pupil representation.

The In-school Group met on a number of occasions between June 1991 and September

### Four phases to the Health Initiative

1992, when it was agreed that its functions would be taken over by the Liaison Group, in which it was then subsumed, with the further agreement that former members on the Academy staff would continue as departmental contacts for the single remaining committee, now called the Health Group.

After these groups had been established, the Health Initiative broadly followed this four-phase pattern:

1. Information-gathering.
2. Policy-making and preparation.
3. Implementation.
4. Evaluation and continuation.

#### Phase 1: Information-gathering

In this phase, there were:

1. A review of published materials relating to health education, such as *Promoting Good Health* (SHEG/SCCC, 1990) and *Developing Health Education* (Forbes, 1984).

2. Visits to other schools, where health initiatives of one sort or another were under way.

3. Discussion with relevant professionals on the perceived needs of people in the Whitburn Academy area. This discussion was facilitated by the existence of the Liaison Group.

4. Some in-service work, notably a visit to the National Schools Health Education Conference, at Jordanhill College in October 1992.

5. A curricular audit (covering both content and methodology) and review of resources. This exercise involved all departments in the school, and its results were first of all fed back to both the In-school and Liaison Groups, and then disseminated as appropriate more widely amongst the whole staff.

6. An analysis of the health-related behaviour of the pupils at Whitburn Academy, so as to identify the level of knowledge and skills our pupils had in health and related topics, and so as to establish their attitudes to the issues involved. This was done by the administration of the Exeter University Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, with 100 12-13 year olds and 100 14-15-year-olds.

7. An exploration of the possibilities for obtaining financial support for the health initiative from outside the school.

#### Phase 2: Policy-making and preparation

This phase included the formulation and promulgation of the Whitburn Academy Health

Education Aim:

*The aim of Health Education in Whitburn Academy is to promote the physical, social and mental well-being of the individual. In this way, Health Education makes a significant contribution to the caring aspect of the school.*

Health education was further defined as including:

- Knowledge about what is beneficial and what is harmful.
- The development of skills which will enable each individual to use his or her knowledge effectively.
- The opportunity for each individual to develop attitudes and values which will enable him or her to make choices which will be of value at present and in the future.

As a direct result of the curricular audit, it was possible for the Health Groups to state with certainty that most of the areas within health education that ought to be covered were indeed covered within Whitburn Academy, and that this occurred within the appropriate departments and via appropriate and varied methodologies.

However, at the same time certain deficiencies were identified, and steps were taken to rectify them. A notable example of this would be in the area of parenting — it was agreed that the best way to rectify this particular deficiency was to generate a short course for insertion in the PSE course for pupils aged 15–16. A Senior Teacher was given responsibility for producing this short course, and subsequently responsibility for provision and co-ordination of the course and its resources rested with myself, while a PT Guidance saw to the supervision of the day-to-day issues of teaching and learning. This course, like the Health Project in PSE (14–15 age group), is now fully integrated, and will require no further Board of Studies input.

Similarly, our Senior Teacher with responsibility for in-service provision worked with me to organise the publication amongst subject departments of information extracted from the results received from the Schools Health Education Unit after the administration of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire. This material enabled the departments concerned to ensure that health-related components of their courses took account of the actual needs of the pupils.

In terms of the extra-curricular health-related

Healthy eating formed an important part of Whitburn Academy's Health Year. This 'healthy eating' display was one of the exhibits on Health Day.



### The support of experts from the broader community was a very encouraging feature of Health Week

provision of the school, it was agreed that Health Year — session 1992–93 — would begin with a high-profile launch, would continue with various events at approximately monthly intervals, and would culminate in June in Health Week, the centrepiece of which would be Health Day. A competition was held amongst the pupils to design a logo for the Health Initiative, and it was agreed that the slogans to be used would be *Go For Good Health* and *Go For It*. Some of the monthly events were to be sited within departments, and some would coincide with national or international events, thus ensuring that the whole initiative would achieve maximum publicity, coherence and integration.

Our associated primary schools indicated that their priorities lay elsewhere, and therefore declined to become directly involved with the Health Initiative. However, they were kept informed of major events, and were indeed invited to Health Day.

#### Phase 3: Implementation

The high-profile launch of the Health Year was held on Thursday 10 September 1992. The internationally famous Scottish athlete Yvonne Murray gave her time to publicise the event, and

a number of dignitaries joined pupils, parents, teachers and others in looking at displays and exhibitions brought in by representatives of various health- and fitness-related organisations. Many chose to undergo health screening by the CHSA and local medical staff, or fitness testing by Moray House College, or simply to sample the healthy cafeteria organised by our dining hall staff.

The main monthly events throughout the year are shown in the box overleaf.

Health Week, 7–11 June, as well as including the sponsored Step Aerobics event, saw a number of pupils, teachers and parents taking part in other aerobics activities; football coaching by professional footballers from Hearts FC; skipping; hair, nails & skin care; table tennis, and Tae Kwon-do. The support of experts from the broader community in leading these activities was a very encouraging feature of the week.

On 9 June, Health Day formed the centrepiece of the week, and as on the Launch Day the school was open to all comers. In addition to stalls staffed by individuals and groups too numerous to list here, there was also one featuring health education in Whitburn Academy, including a display of pupils' work produced

during the various monthly curricular and extra-curricular events referred to already, as well as the features of the strictly curricular input into our pupils' health education.

Health Day likewise included athletics coaching, as well as displays by Army PT instructors and a number of local health and fitness groups performing step aerobics, table tennis, badminton, Tae Kwon-do, judo, weight-lifting and boxing — in which our celebrity, Ken Buchanan, was particularly interested.

During the day, the opportunity was taken to publicise the healthy events which had been arranged for the last week of term so as not to disrupt classes at times when greater inconvenience would be caused: orienteering, mountain biking, kayaking and canoeing.

Thanks to various contacts within the community, local businesses heightened awareness amongst the general public by organising coincident healthy displays and events in the context of Health Week, as did the District Council, whose Leisure Services Department ran coaching sessions and offered free or concessionary use of the swimming pool and Community Centre fitness facilities.

#### Phase 4: Evaluation and continuation

At its meeting of 23 June, the Health Group evaluated the success of Health Day and of the whole initiative, and discussed the way forward for health education in Whitburn Academy.

The Health Group heard a number of very positive observations from a variety of sources. Our own head teacher, for example, had been very pleased that awareness of health issues had been raised, and that many of the benefits of the Health Initiative — especially those of a curricular nature — would endure.

An important aspect of the evaluation of the success of our Health Year was in the re-testing in May 1993 of 100 pupils from each of the 13–14 and 15–16 age groups — broadly the same pupils as in January 1992, but 16 months on. As with the results of the original testing, these new results will provide an interesting insight for various departments of the school, as well as for parents and others. Some of the statistics show that despite our efforts, certain negative trends can be seen: perhaps it is not surprising that as they go through adolescence more of our pupils are smoking and drinking alcohol. However, it is clear that much work still

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*. . . but our pupils are now better informed, more in control, and have more positive attitudes*

## The principal monthly events during Health Year

*Bug Busters' Day* (31 October), which was reflected in PSE with materials issued to and discussed with all pupils by Guidance staff.

*World AIDS Day* (1 December), on which the judging and prizegiving for an AIDS poster competition were held. Many pupils had taken part in this.

*Healthy Eating* film, shown by Home Economics staff at lunchtimes on three days in January, for interested pupils.

*More than just the disease*, a short story by Bernard McLaverty, studied by 14–15-year-old pupils in English, also during January.

*Teeth and oral hygiene* were studied by the 13–14 age group in Science, during February.

*National No-Smoking Day* (10 March), on which earlier work with all year groups in PSE was followed up by an exhibition organised in collaboration with the school nurse, with carbon monoxide monitoring and lung capacity measurement.

*The Cost of Living*, a production on AIDS at the Edinburgh International Children's Festival, to which the whole of the 14–15 age group were taken on 25 May.

*The School Library Health Quiz*, an inter-house event, had its heats during March, April and May, and its final on 4 June. Prizes for all participants were donated by local businesses, and for winners by the District Council.

*Special Unit pupils*, supervised by Special Unit staff, organised a talk by an expert on epilepsy, which was given in rotation on 1 June to all the 12–13 age group.

Each month, dining hall staff arranged a *Healthy Eating Day*, when chips were not offered, and opportunities were maximised for eating wholemeal bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, and other healthy options.

*Step Aerobics*, led by a professional coach, provided the PE Department's main fund-raising sponsored event of the year, carried out by the 12–13-year-old pupils on 8 and 9 June.



needs to be done in such areas.

More encouragingly, larger numbers of our pupils want to stop smoking, more of them feel that they are in control of their own health, more of them are eating wholemeal bread and fresh fruit and vegetables every day, figures for hygiene and oral hygiene are encouraging, and more of our pupils report that they have learned useful facts about AIDS from school lessons and that they will take precautions accordingly.

The Health Group decided that the way forward in 1993–94 should depend to a large extent on the needs of our pupils now, as identified by means of the questionnaire results. A needs analysis will be carried out; feedback gained from all departments in response to comparative questionnaire data will be used in the targeting of specific areas to receive attention, either through the curriculum or by other means. The Health Group will be reconvened as necessary, so as to enlist the support which the external members of the Group have guaranteed will continue to be available. Healthy Eating Days will continue,

Scenes from Health day. *Upper left*: Hurdling. *Upper right*: Demonstration of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation for cardiac arrest, using a dummy. *Lower left*: Demonstration of massage technique by an expert in aromatherapy and reflexology. *Lower right*: Celebrity guest Ken Buchanan (right) with two of the academy's parents, Andrew Hamilton and Grace Campbell, who represented the Red Cross.

and will be held on the first Thursday of each month.

We feel confident that our Health Year has made a significant positive contribution to the lives of our pupils. As we know, thanks to the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, they are now better informed, they feel more in control, and they have more positive attitudes on health topics. For our part, we know also what work remains to be done, and we continue with our push towards better health in the community we serve.

John Howieson is Assistant Rector of Whitburn Academy, and took over as Co-ordinator for Health Education shortly after the launch of the Health Year.

Further information about the activities described in this article may be obtained by contacting Whitburn Academy, Shanks Road, Whitburn, West Lothian EH47 0HL (0501 740675).