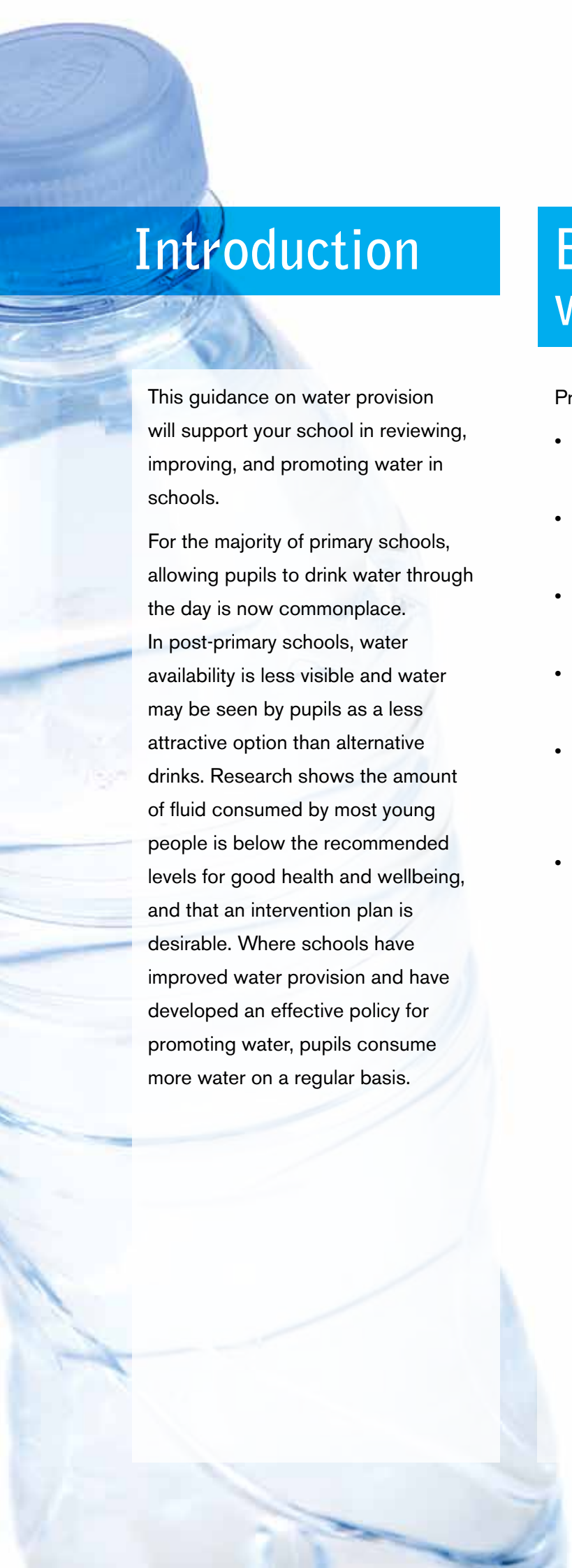
Water provision

school food top marks

Contents



Introduction

This guidance on water provision will support your school in reviewing, improving, and promoting water in schools.

For the majority of primary schools, allowing pupils to drink water through the day is now commonplace. In post-primary schools, water availability is less visible and water may be seen by pupils as a less attractive option than alternative drinks. Research shows the amount of fluid consumed by most young people is below the recommended levels for good health and wellbeing, and that an intervention plan is desirable. Where schools have improved water provision and have developed an effective policy for promoting water, pupils consume more water on a regular basis.

Benefits of water provision

Providing and promoting water:

- creates a plentiful source of low cost refreshment throughout the day;
- encourages good health and wellbeing among pupils, staff and other adults;
- reduces tiredness, irritability and distraction from thirst;
- can have a positive effect on pupils' concentration throughout the day;
- demonstrates to parents and to the local community that the school values pupils' health and wellbeing;
- raises awareness of the importance of adequate fluid intake and healthy eating as part of a healthy, active lifestyle.

What is water provision?

Access to water is a fundamental human right and necessary for good health. Schools can encourage consumption of water by:

- supplying good quality water;
- providing water free of charge;
- permitting access to drinking water when required;
- ensuring it is accessible to all;
- promoting good habits throughout the day and in particular following exercise and in warm conditions;
- ensuring that hygienic, modern water sources are available and maintained;
- listening to complaints and suggestions regarding the provision of water.

"*I am drinking a lot more water now, probably about two bottles a day at school… I'm drinking water at home and I'm getting my parents to do it.*" Year 4 pupil

Step by step plan

1. Getting started

Assessing current water provision should be undertaken by your school council or school nutrition action group (SNAG), as part of a whole school approach (see booklet two: *Establishing a whole school food policy*). Ensure that pupils, teachers, parents and caterers are involved in this process.

There are two basic steps to improving your school's provision:

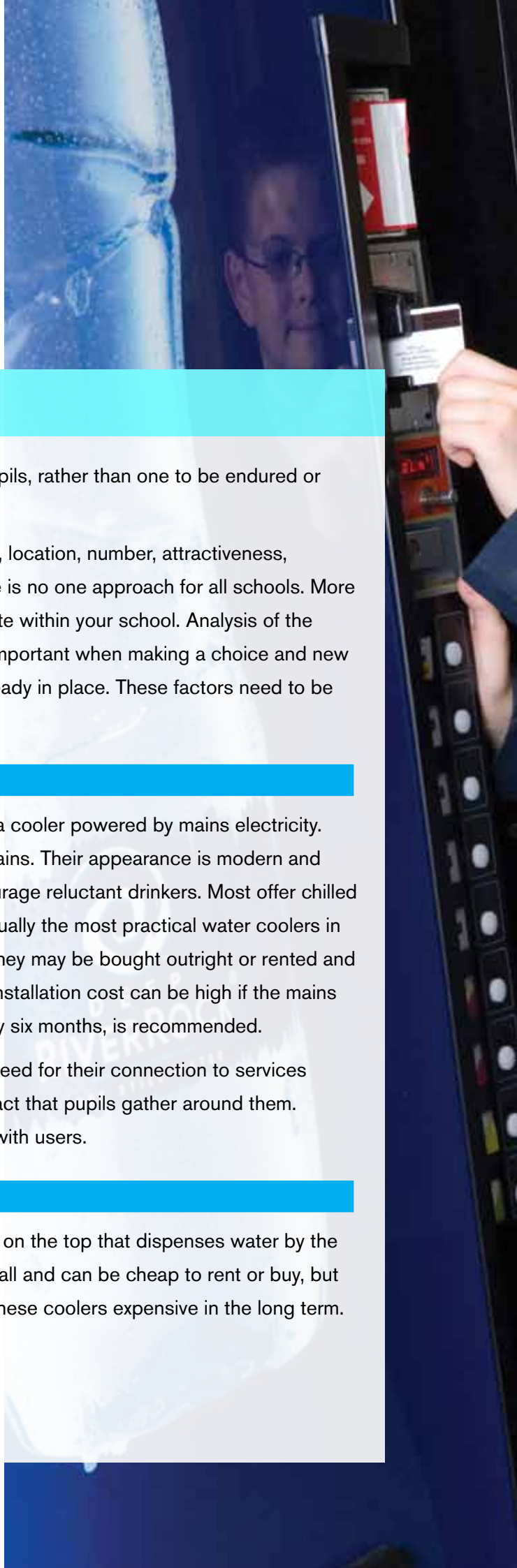
- recognising the importance of good water provision;
- implementing practical measures to ensure access to fresh, clean water at school.

The policy should ensure that water is freely available and accessible throughout the school day. Water consumption by adults should also be part of a whole school approach, eg ensuring that provision is made in the staff room.

When addressing water provision in your school, you may need to consider:

- current provision and consumption of water;
- pupil and staff understanding of water for health (as this might have curriculum links);
- budget and funding available;
- physical school set-up and facilities, eg drainage, mains supply and electricity points;
- management of water provision;
- curriculum links with water, especially through science and technology and home economics;
- links to Northern Ireland Water through its education department.

Step by step plan



2. Providing water at school

Drinking water should be a pleasant experience for pupils, rather than one to be endured or avoided.

How much pupils drink at school depends on the type, location, number, attractiveness, palatability and accessibility of drinking facilities. There is no one approach for all schools. More than one approach or type of facility may be appropriate within your school. Analysis of the site, usage and possible management strategies are important when making a choice and new facilities will need to complement or replace those already in place. These factors need to be considered in light of your water provision policy.

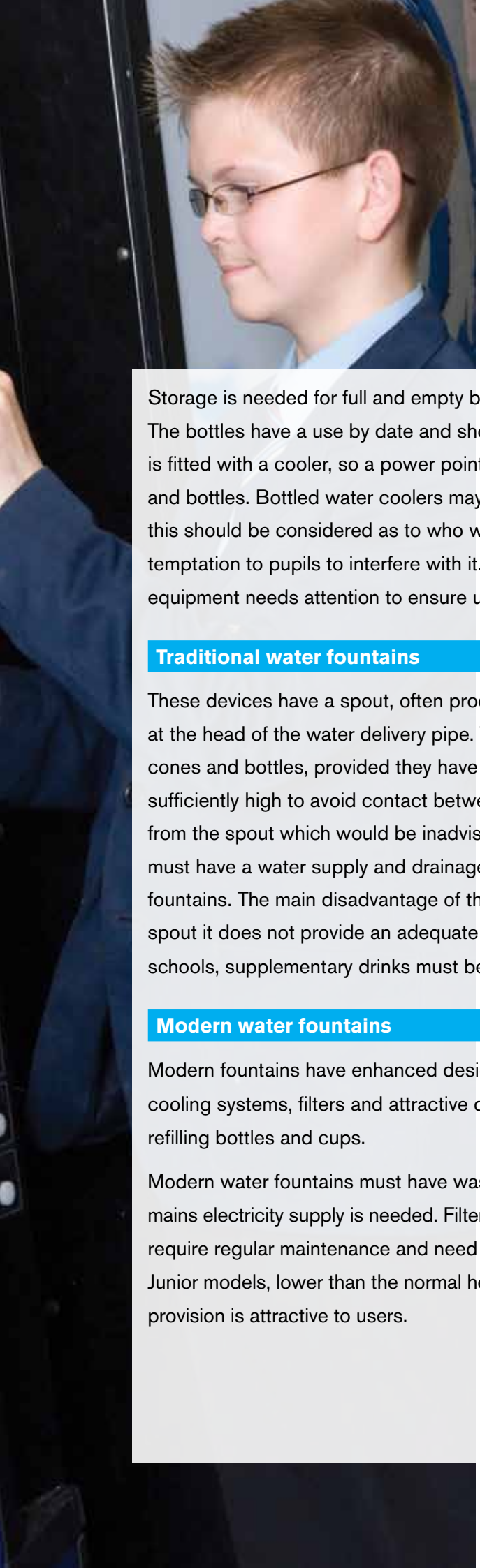
Point of use water coolers

Point of use (POU) devices use mains water that has a cooler powered by mains electricity. They have the advantage of being plumbed into the mains. Their appearance is modern and appealing to users and they have been found to encourage reluctant drinkers. Most offer chilled and ambient temperature water. These facilities are usually the most practical water coolers in schools as they have lower long-term running costs. They may be bought outright or rented and can be used with disposable cups, cones or bottles. Installation cost can be high if the mains water pipe needs re-siting. Regular maintenance, every six months, is recommended.

POU coolers require careful siting on account of the need for their connection to services (electricity, water mains and drainage) as well as the fact that pupils gather around them. Research shows that this type of provision is popular with users.

Bottled water coolers

These appliances have a large inverted bottle of water on the top that dispenses water by the user pressing a button or lever. They are simple to install and can be cheap to rent or buy, but require ongoing purchase of bottles which can make these coolers expensive in the long term.



Storage is needed for full and empty bottles, and replacing these will involve carrying and lifting. The bottles have a use by date and should be stored away from direct sunlight. The appliance is fitted with a cooler, so a power point is needed. It can be used to fill disposable cups, cones and bottles. Bottled water coolers may have drip trays that will need to be emptied daily and this should be considered as to who will be responsible for this and whether it would cause a temptation to pupils to interfere with it. This type of provision is popular with users, although the equipment needs attention to ensure uninterrupted provision and can be expensive.

Traditional water fountains

These devices have a spout, often producing a vertical 'fountain' of water from an opening at the head of the water delivery pipe. They can be used directly or to fill disposable cups, cones and bottles, provided they have the right shaped nozzle. The jet from the spout must be sufficiently high to avoid contact between the spout and lips. More often, pupils drink directly from the spout which would be inadvisable. They are often unhygienic and unappealing. They must have a water supply and drainage. It is possible to add renewable filter units to these fountains. The main disadvantage of this type of fountain is that if pupils drink solely from the spout it does not provide an adequate amount of water. If this type of provision is used in schools, supplementary drinks must be provided.

Modern water fountains

Modern fountains have enhanced design features such as swan neck dispensers, built-in cooling systems, filters and attractive design. The swan neck design is recommended for refilling bottles and cups.

Modern water fountains must have waste water disposal arrangements. If chilling is required, a mains electricity supply is needed. Filters will need replacing at regular intervals. These fountains require regular maintenance and need to be robust in design with a minimum of moving parts. Junior models, lower than the normal height, are available for primary schools. This type of provision is attractive to users.

Step by step plan

Taps

If taps are used, these should be supplied directly from the mains and clearly labelled as suitable for drinking. The area must be hygienic, with sinks that are clean and empty. It is possible to add chill units to improve palatability.

Disposable cups should always be available. Pupils could refill their own water bottles. Dedicated taps for drinking water do not often exist in schools.

Water quality

Mains tap water in Northern Ireland is of a high drinking quality and complies with all UK and EU standards.

Water bottles

Bottles are the most cost-effective means of allowing pupils access to water throughout the day. The main advantages of bottles are that they can be carried by pupils or left in a designated area. They are also popular with pupils, especially when placed on desks within arm's reach. Bottles may be purchased and some schools include water bottles in the uniform list to new parents. Where pupils are invited to bring in their own bottles, take-up may be low. Consider contacting Northern Ireland Water's education department which provides water bottles as part of its 'Water for Health' talk at schools or when schools visit the Silent Valley.

Effective management is required for filling, cleaning and replacing of bottles. Water quality, cost and temperature (ie chilling) are the main issues to consider and hygienic cleaning is essential. The quality of the bottle can impact on its lifespan. You will also need to decide whether they are filled at home or in school.

Top tips

- Water bottles should not be shared. Label the bottle with the name of the pupil.
- Use clear plastic containers.
- If bottles are kept at school, they should be filled in the morning or, if there is sufficient space, refrigerated overnight.
- If schools take responsibility for bottle cleanliness, it is advisable to seek advice from the local environmental health department.
- Dishwasher action or the use of a sterilising agent should be sufficient to clean drinking vessels and bottles.

Care of bottles

At home: bottles should be washed daily in warm soapy water, rinsed and left to air-dry upside down. The nozzle of a sports cap should be opened and flushed through. The bottles could also be washed in a dishwasher taking care to separate the cap from the bottle. Children can be shown at school how to wash and care for their water bottle and teachers may inspect bottles for cleanliness.

At school: if the school is providing the bottles, you may prefer to keep them on-site. You can be sure the bottles are washed daily, but it does create another job. In some schools, there are concerns over other fluids being put into the bottles, so it is thought preferable that pupils fill their bottles at school or consider introducing a rule around this issue.

Absorbent matting

Absorbent matting is recommended for use with all types of cooler or fountain. It comes in different sizes and shapes and is made of nylon, which is thermally bonded to rubber backing. If a swan neck fountain is being used, u-shaped mats can be placed on the floor. Mats can absorb more than a gallon of water per square metre. Mats need to be washed regularly; therefore, maintenance and cost to schools would need to be considered.

Case study

At a small post-primary school where pupils were allowed to drink water at any time of the day, including lessons, few did as they were not aware of the entitlement. Drinking habits were regarded as poor. After the installation of three new water coolers and the provision of water bottles for all pupils, water consumption increased significantly. Pupils now keep their bottles with them on their desks and take them out onto the sports fields during break times, PE lessons and after-school games.

"*I never drank water before now, but I do now. Everyone's drinking more. It tastes better because it comes out of the cooler.*" Year 10 pupil

Step by step plan

3. Siting water in school

Research shows that schools have traditionally relied on drinking water being available to pupils in or close to toilets. Drinking water in toilets is no longer permitted as it is unhygienic and does not promote water consumption. Depending on the size of a school and level of water usage, it is likely that a number of distribution points will be needed. For younger pupils, the use of shallow crates to store bottles in a central place, away from sources of heat, allowing pupils frequent access and regular water breaks will be important.

Schools should also consider the following:

- access and routes to water for adults and pupils, including those with disabilities;
- proximity to a storage area for supplies and cleaning apparatus;
- the need for surveillance or supervision, eg distribution points in open areas so that pupils are safe from bullying and misbehaviour;
- the proximity to adequate drainage;
- the proximity to a mains water and electricity supply, if required;
- the cleaning and monitoring of the drinking facilities;
- access for pupils engaged in PE and similar activities;
- the proximity of items that are not compatible with water.

Safety

- Water and electricity do not mix. Most classrooms have electrical apparatus. Procedures must be enforced to minimise risk.
- Because of the potential health and safety risk, no cups or bottles of water should be kept near computers (or other electrical equipment) or used in science labs.

School efforts to improve water provision and encourage the increased consumption of water will be hampered if:

- access to toilets is restricted;
- the toilets are off-putting: dirty, smelly or poorly maintained;
- a pupil does not feel safe using them due to anti-social behaviour or fear of intimidation;
- pupils avoid or restrict drinking in order to avoid using the school toilets.

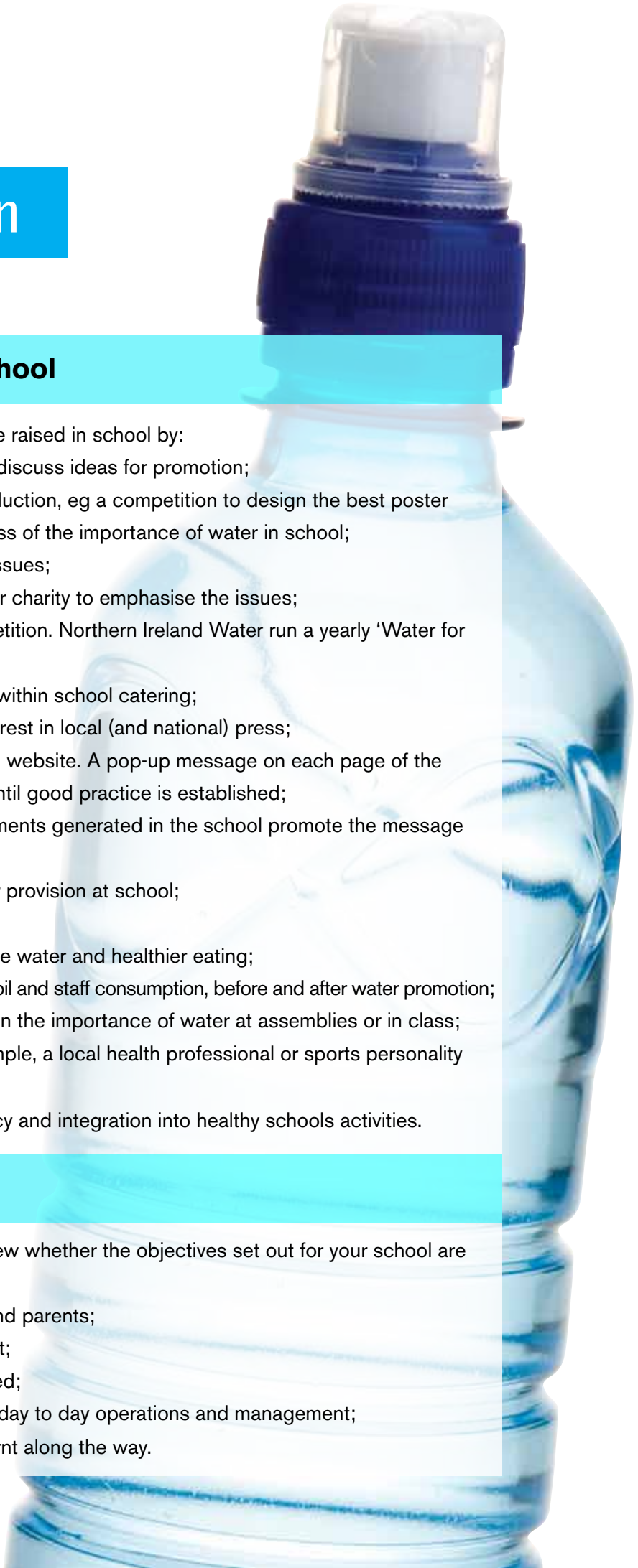
It is important that pupils are allowed to go to the toilet when they need to, especially if they are being encouraged to drink water. Restricted use of toilet facilities can lead to psychological problems, constipation, wetting and urinary problems. Encourage the use of the toilet at break and lunch time to minimise disruption to teaching. Pupils who do not need to go to the toilet at least once at school need to drink more.

There is evidence that increased availability of water and encouragement to drink regularly does increase the need for toilet visits initially but, as good habits are developed, this need reverts to normal. It is important that toilets have clean and well-stocked washing facilities. This includes warm water, soap and hygienic hand dryers for use by pupils.

Case study

A small rural school had a water drinking policy in place. To improve consumption, a water cooler was installed in every classroom. Previously, pupils had filled their bottles from a tap and kept the bottles with them in the classroom. Pupils and staff agree that by having coolers in every classroom access to fresh, chilled water has improved uptake enormously. Pupils found the chilled water tastier and more refreshing. The combination of easy access and appeal has greatly influenced their consumption.

Step by step plan



4. Promoting water in school

Water awareness and consumption can be raised in school by:

- asking the school council or SNAG to discuss ideas for promotion;
- developing campaigns and poster production, eg a competition to design the best poster would be a great way to raise awareness of the importance of water in school;
- having water-only days to explore the issues;
- arranging a sponsored swim for a water charity to emphasise the issues;
- entering the school in a regional competition. Northern Ireland Water run a yearly 'Water for Health' competition;
- promoting the availability of free water within school catering;
- writing a press release to generate interest in local (and national) press;
- promoting water drinking on the school website. A pop-up message on each page of the website will emphasise the message until good practice is established;
- ensuring that all newsletters and documents generated in the school promote the message that drinking water is good for you;
- informing parents regularly about water provision at school;
- using adults as positive role models;
- holding a health day or week to promote water and healthier eating;
- starting a curriculum project to survey pupil and staff consumption, before and after water promotion;
- getting pupils to make a presentation on the importance of water at assemblies or in class;
- arranging visits from speakers, for example, a local health professional or sports personality or Northern Ireland Water;
- inclusion in the whole school food policy and integration into healthy schools activities.

5. Evaluating success

Part of your water policy should be to review whether the objectives set out for your school are being met. For example, you could:

- consider the attitudes of pupils, staff and parents;
- review the robustness of the equipment;
- calculate the amount of water consumed;
- collect comments and suggestions on day to day operations and management;
- record mistakes made and lessons learnt along the way.

Water provision checklist

- ✔ Are you clear about the benefits of improving water provision in your school?
- ✔ Are you clear about what you want to achieve?
- ✔ Have you involved the school council or SNAG?
- ✔ Have you consulted and involved pupils and parents in decision making from the outset?
- ✔ Have you decided where and how water will be provided?
- ✔ Do all pupils and staff have access to water at all times?
- ✔ Is water consumption actively encouraged both in class and during break and lunch time?
- ✔ Are pupils aware of the benefits of drinking more water?
- ✔ Do you have a 'code of conduct' in relation to water?
- ✔ Do you have a procedure for recording whether pupils drink enough water?
- ✔ Have you established a system to ensure good maintenance and hygienic standards of water facilities?
- ✔ Are the toilets well maintained, clean and open throughout the day?
- ✔ Have you planned a policy to promote water provision and consumption?
- ✔ Have you planned how you will monitor and evaluate the impact of your improved water provision?

Integrating with other school food projects

There are many natural links which can be made to other school food projects, depending on your school. Links to water provision could include:

- Ensuring that all pupils have free access to water in line with the nutritional standards for school lunch and other food and drinks in schools.
- Promoting and actively encouraging the provision and consumption of free water at the breakfast club, break time and lunch time.
- Promoting and actively encouraging the provision and consumption of water. Creating a water inspired theme for the dining room to promote consumption.
- Encouraging pupils and parents to include water in every lunchbox. Water should be freely available for those who do not have a drink in their lunchbox.

Curriculum links

Water provision provides a context for a wide variety of curriculum links, including:

Primary

Personal development and mutual understanding

The concept of a healthy lifestyle encompasses the importance of personal hygiene, and the provision of water to homes and businesses and a basic utility in the UK.

The world around us

There are opportunities for pupils to learn about the water cycle and compare how weather conditions in a variety of countries affect water supply. Specialist vocabulary might include 'drought', 'flooding' and 'torrential'.

Religious education

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural significance of water and its symbolism in different faiths may be explored.

The arts

Art and design – pupils might review portrayals of water using different media by others, and record their own first-hand experience and investigation to explore the theme of water.

Post-primary

Science and technology

Pupils can learn about the role of water fluoridation in dental health and the cleaning process for water.

The arts

Music – water may be an inspiration for musical composition or performance.

Art and design – using visual techniques to display the use of water in our everyday lives.

Physical education

The importance of hydration in physical activity and performance can be discussed.

Learning for life and work

Home economics – The role of water in diet and health can be discussed.

Sources of further information

The following list provides links to further resources and information that may support you in developing your water provision.

Northern Ireland Water

www.niwater.com

Northern Ireland Water is the sole provider of water in Northern Ireland. They have a range of initiatives and advice to help support schools which is delivered by their education department.

ERIC

www.eric.org.uk

ERIC (Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence) provides support and information to younger children, parents and health professionals on bedwetting (nocturnal enuresis), day-time wetting, constipation and soiling, and incontinence in children with special needs. Resources for schools are available.

Bog Standard Campaign

www.bog-standard.org

The Bog Standard Campaign is an ERIC initiative run in coalition with other organisations. It aims to raise the standard of school toilets for pupils and for pupils to go to the toilets when they need to. Resources for schools are available.

Water is Cool in School

www.wateriscoolinschool.org.uk

The Water is Cool in School campaign, aims to improve the quality of provision and access to fresh drinking water for children in UK primary and post-primary schools. Resources for schools are available on this website.

Water for Health Alliance

www.waterforhealth.org.uk

Water for Health is a water industry initiative to guide and inform health professionals and health authorities, to stimulate interest and research, and to help move water up the public health agenda.

Water UK

www.water.org.uk

Water UK is the industry association that represents all UK water and waste water service suppliers at national and European level. It seeks to develop understanding in areas that involve the industry, its customers and stakeholders.

This resource was originally developed and produced by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland as part of the School food: top marks programme. It was jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Heath, Social Services and Public Safety.