Reviewer's report

Title: The school environment and student health: a systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative research

Version: 2 Date: 6 May 2013

Reviewer: Lucy McLellan

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written review of how school environments influence young people’s health. The methods are described very well and it is clear that the systematic review has been conducted with sufficient rigour. The use of meta-ethnography is interesting from a methodological point of view and has also added important detail to this exploration of a relevant and important topic.

No major compulsory revisions.

Minor essential revisions are as follows:

Background, paragraph 4: What is a ‘value-added’ school? – define please.

There is incorrect use of the noun ‘constraints’ in two places (should be the verb ‘constrains’):

Abstract: “However, existing research offers little guidance on how the school context enables or constrains students’ sense of identity, friendships, health behaviours, or how students’ backgrounds relate to these processes.”

Background, last paragraph: “They also offer little guidance on how the school context enables or constrains students’ sense of identity, friendships and health behaviours, or how students’ family backgrounds relate to these processes.”

Research question: ‘through what processes might school social and physical environment influences on student health outcomes occur?’ lacks some clarity, as it is phrased in a way that is difficult to understand. Could it be rephrased using a more straightforward sentence structure such as ‘how do school environments (social and physical) influence student health outcomes?’

Discussion: good discussion which addresses relevant literature and summarises the important issues. This section could be improved by adding a little more detail about the way forward. How should interventions be designed, implemented and evaluated? Does this need to be a collaborative effort? Who should lead the way?

Discretionary revisions:

Background, paragraph 1: “This was undertaken as part of a project mapping and synthesising theories and evidence from outcome and process evaluations and multi-level model (MLM) studies in order to build a comprehensive picture on
how the school environment influences health.” – Complex sentence, difficult to understand. Consider rephrasing for clarity.

No suggestions for revision of the methods or results sections:

Methods: appropriate methodology and methods have been used and are described well in the manuscript. Limitations are suitably addressed in the discussion.

Results: well presented results section with good use of examples to illustrate each meta-theme.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.