Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementing health promotion in schools: Protocol for a realist systematic review of research and experience in the United Kingdom

Version: 1 Date: 13 September 2012

Reviewer: Mary Dixon-Woods

Reviewer’s report:

This is generally a clearly written protocol that has a clear goal and described its methods reasonably well. It would be improved by some attention to the issues raised below.

Major compulsory revisions.

The authors list “initial mechanisms and contextual factors” that might influence implementation on p5-6. They need to distinguish between mechanisms and contextual factors (they are very different things) and they need to show where this provisional list came from.

The authors need to provide a clear and explicit definition of what they mean by “programme theory”. It would also be useful to have a clear and explicit definition of "mechanisms" and "context".

The authors need to explain what they mean by "testing" programme theories.

Minor Essential revisions.

Though the Background is clearly written, I'd like to see some references for the list of claims made regarding the appeal and rationale of school-based health promotion initiatives.

Please correct the grammar in this sentence: "That is, where the school and targeting schoolchildren, is not the primary starting point for the health promotion activities."

Discretionary revisions.

A Cochrane review might well be able to provide explanatory insights into variations in the effectiveness of programmes, but they are likely to be of a different type from those generated by a realist review. The authors may wish to rephrase their comment about this.

If the authors do decided to do a formal Qualitative Comparative Analysis using Ragin’s techniques, I'd recommend they produce a separate protocol for this.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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