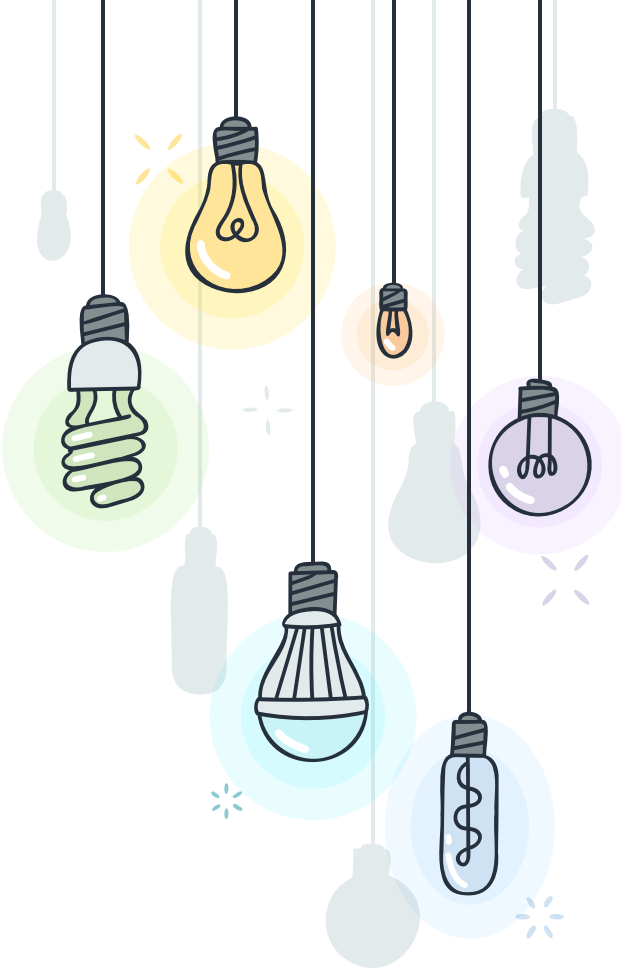
1712942

Ceri Littlewood

How can we support Staff Well-being and Mental Health in Primary Education?

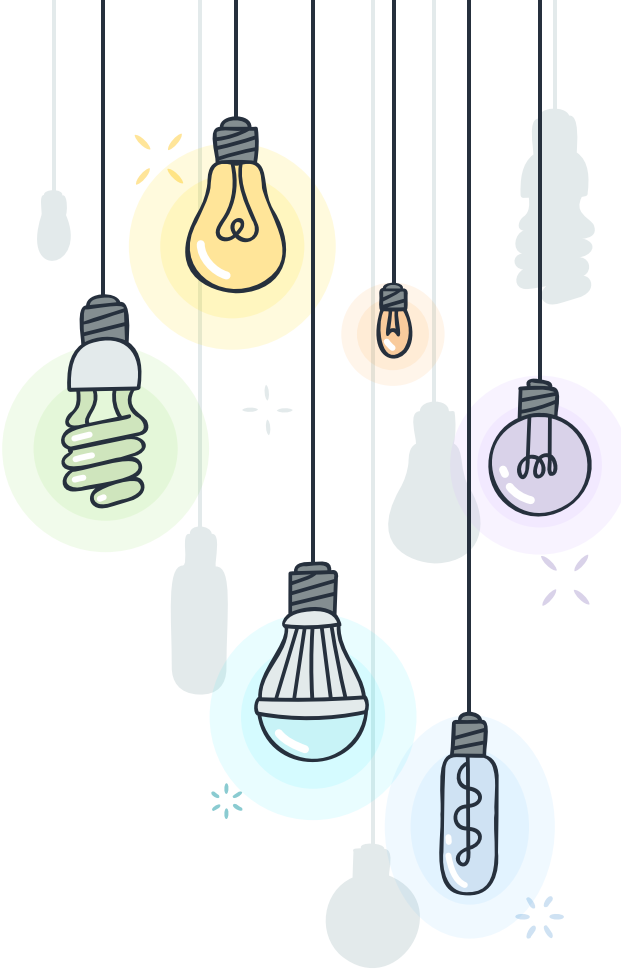
Consideration for Ethics:

- The purpose of the research was explained to all participants via an INSET day.
- An introductory email explained that purpose of the research, participation was voluntary and required consent.
- Participants were able to withdraw from the process at any time during the research.
- All information was stored on a secure google file.
- Due to the nature of the topic, participants were informed of the counselling service offered by the school and the Local Authority.



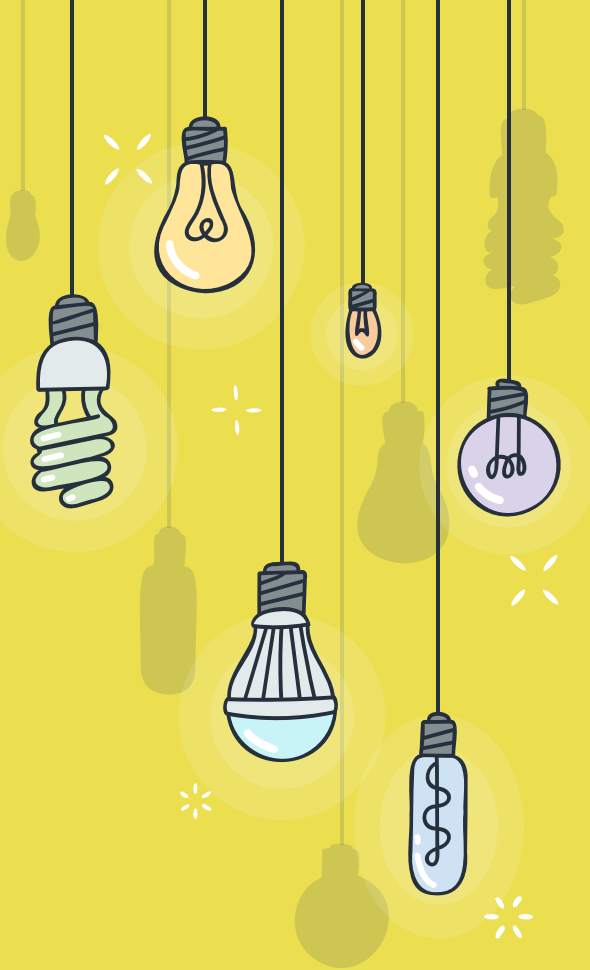
Consideration for Ethics:

- Questionnaires were anonymous.
- Due to the researcher being an insider and the headteacher, the focus group was conducted by the Well-being Lead. The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed to allow for confidentiality.
- Feedback on the outcomes of the research was made available to staff upon request.



Consideration for Insider Research

“Insider–led, work-based projects are approached from the perspective of bringing about contributions to practice that are informed by underpinning knowledge. The purpose of the project is to bring about actual change, either during or at the end of the research project’ Costley, Elliott & Gibbs (2010)



Consideration for Insider Research

STRENGTHS

A deep understanding of the culture, and dynamics within the school community.

S

W

WEAKNESSES

Possibility of unconscious bias and skewed findings

Can be impactful and insightful and bring about positive changes.

OPPORTUNITIES

O

T

Participants concerns around confidently and conflict of interest

THREATS

Background

In March 2020, COVID-19 changed the face of education; pupils, staff and families found themselves in an unprecedented situation. Schools closed, communities shut down, pupils and staff lost all contact with their friends and colleagues, routines were changed.

The introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales has had a notable impact on staff well-being in education. While the aspirations of the New Curriculum will reform education in Wales, the curriculum has brought a shift in teaching methodologies and approaches.

In 2021, The Welsh Government provided a guidance document to develop a Framework for Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental well-being, which is now statutory for all schools.

Background - Aims

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the current state of well-being within the school.

To present evidence-based research and strategies that the school and the cluster of schools can implement to provide a supportive well-being and healthy environment for all primary staff.

To find supportive initiatives, which may include peer support networks, professional development, and work-life balance practices.

Literature review - Well-being and Mental Health

- The Office of National Statistics describes the importance of a work-life balance and a healthy working environment as some of the essential factors related to job satisfaction. (ONS, 2021) .

- The Department of Health (2014) defines well-being as "**feeling good and functioning well and comprises an individual's experience of their life; and a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values.**"

- In 2018 (Guardian, 2018), it was reported that 3,750 teachers in England were on sick leave due to their mental health; this was linked to too many changes in policy, budget cuts affecting staffing and resources, staff retention and unmanageable class sizes.

- This research is also supported by the 'Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2020). They highlight the need for more support for teachers due to budget freezes, which limits the amount of support for teachers when faced with new challenges and demands.

Literature review - Well-being and Mental Health

- Bryson *et al.* (2019) inferred that school staff are more satisfied and content with their jobs than employees in other workplaces.
- Key findings of The Teacher Wellbeing Index' (2021) showed that anxiety and depression related to teaching is 5% lower in 2021 than in 2017 and 2018. Therefore, evidence may suggest that the pandemic has not had as much impact initially.
- A survey conducted by the NASUWT (2020) teaching union (which included responses from over 4,300 teachers in the UK), reported 88% of teachers were satisfied with their jobs.
- In November 2021, 'The Educational Solidarity Network' produced a report on Personnel's Health and Well-being' findings. Over 8,000 teachers were interviewed from 5 countries The report highlighted that: "more training and professional development opportunities and better information on health and occupational health" was desperately needed (The Educational Solidarity Network, 2021). The overall results were inspiring, as all 5 countries had a high percentage of staff who would choose to teach again.

Literature review - Well-being and Mental Health

England

Following the launch of The Department of Education (2019), the 'Teachers Recruitment' and 'Retention Strategy' the English government created a well-being charter for all schools.

The charter allowed schools to to prioritise staff health and well-being to increase job satisfaction in schools.

The aim of the charter was a commitment from the Department of Education and Ofsted to protect and promote the well-being of all staff (The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, 2021).

Wales

The Welsh Government's Well-being Future Generations Act' (2015) states, **"The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales."**

In 2021, the Welsh Government created a framework for 'Embedding a Whole School Approach to Mental Health and Well-being' (2021).

The framework is a statutory document requiring all educational settings in Wales to review and address the emotional and well-being needs of all pupils, staff and their community.

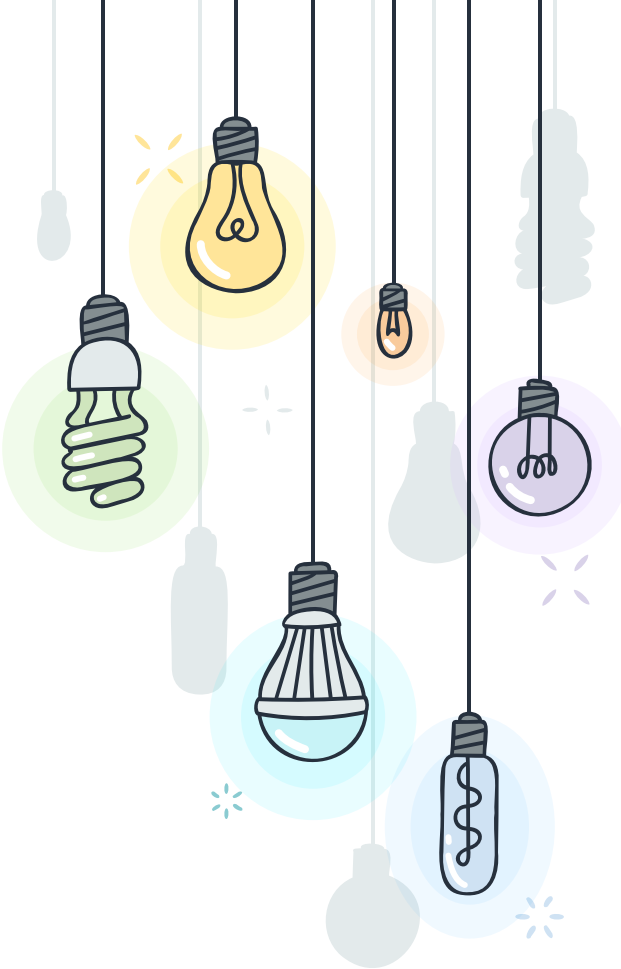
Well Being Tool Kits for Schools

1. **The Warwick- Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale'**

   This toolkit measures positive mental well-being as well as any interventions implemented.

2. **Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families'.**

   This survey focuses on staff well-being, the school's attitudes to well-being and its culture, and the staff's understanding of young people's mental health.



Main Themes - Linked to PERMA Model

- Commitment from the Senior Leadership Team
- A positive working Environment
- Effective collaboration and Mentoring.
- Whole school approach with a shared mission.
- All staff have a voice in decision making
- Promoting Healthy Lifestyle

- Positive Emotions
- Engagement
- Relationships.
- Meaning
- Accomplishments

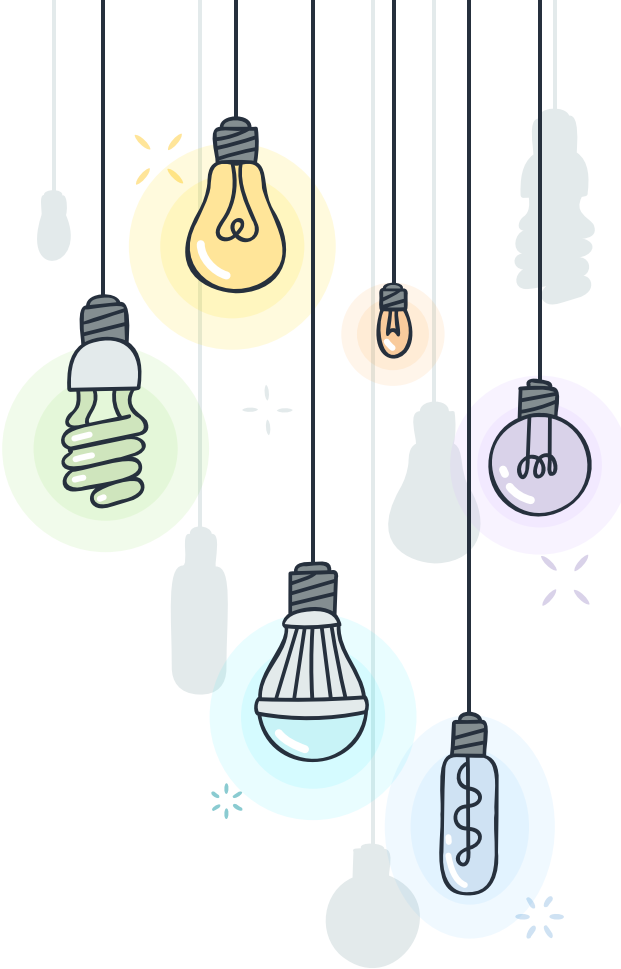
(PERMA; Seligman, 2011)

Methods

- A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

- Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires featuring a 7-point Likert Scale.

- 12 Questions were devised based on the Perma Model to allow inclusive space for participants to reflect on their well-being and mental health within the educational setting

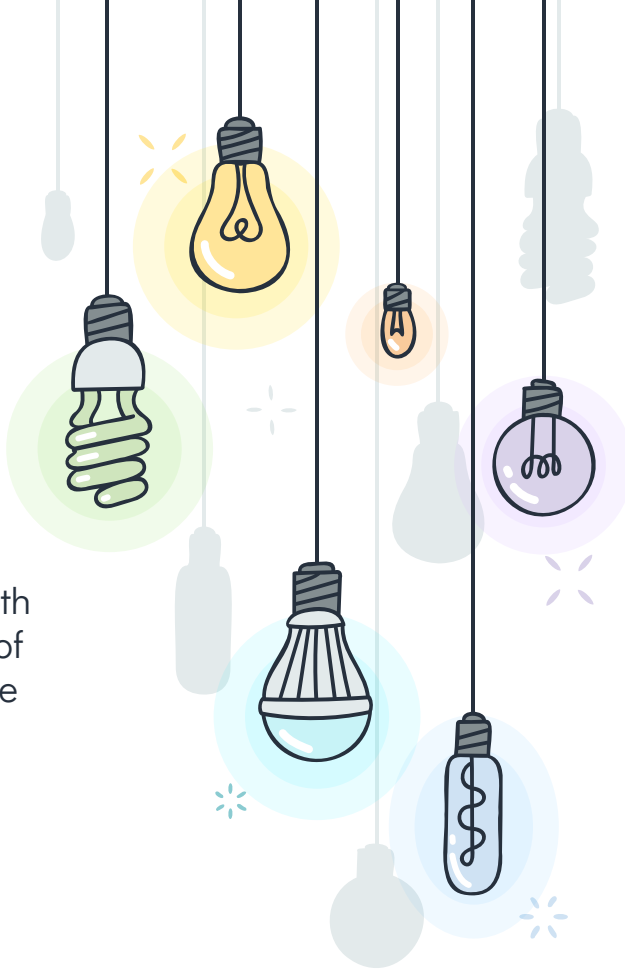


Methods

- Qualitative data was collected using a focus group.

- In determining the participants for the study, consideration was given to the timescales of staff working at the school. One staff member within the focus group had worked at the school for thirty years, while one had only been there four months. By including both long-term and recently joined staff members, a broader spectrum of experiences, perspectives, and historical contexts can lead to more robust findings.

- The focus group lead by the Well-being Lead focused on 15 questions that covered a range of dimensions related to staff well-being, including work-life balance, job satisfaction, support systems, workload and professional development opportunities.

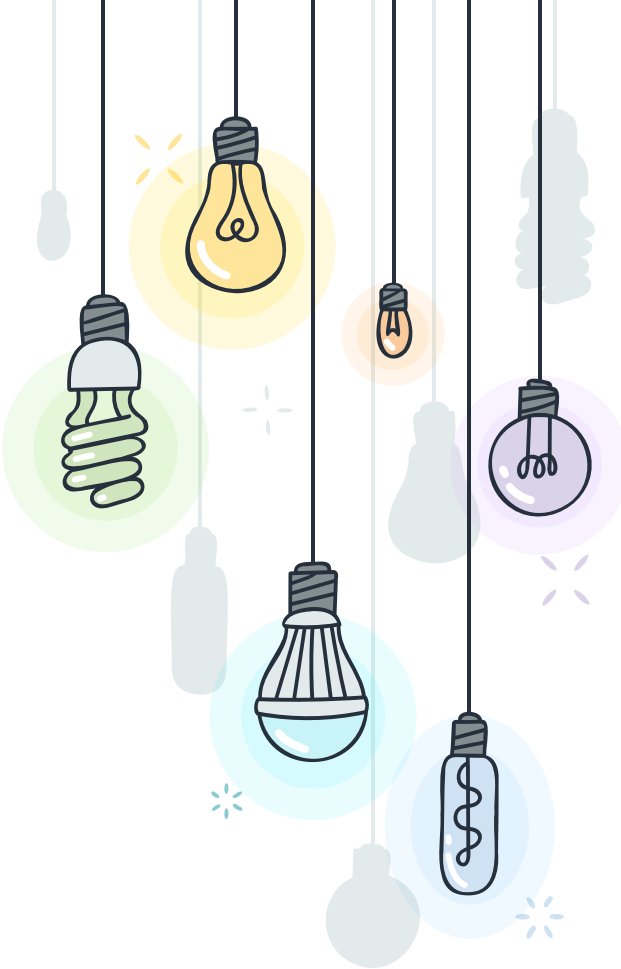


Methods

- Qualitative data was also collected using Semi-structured interviews with a select cohort of participants consisting of four senior leaders and the Chair of Governors representing two schools within the cluster of schools.

- These schools were intentionally selected due to their engagement with the Perform and Grow training program and their active involvement in developing the Well-Being Framework as mandated by the Welsh Government.

- The questions were derived from the outcomes emerging from the previously conducted focus group discussion, ensuring a coalition between what was discovered through the focus group and questionnaires.



Findings - Questionnaires

- 17 participants volunteered to complete the questionnaire - 12 teachers, and 5 support staff.

Questions 1 & 2

91.1% of the staff expressed a sense of value and security in their respective roles. 5.9% disagreed with the concept that they possess the same confidence level in contributing to the school environment or experiencing effective communication.

Questions 3 & 4

94.1% of the participants felt strongly or above that their workload was appropriate, with 100% feeling they had adequate time to complete tasks.

Questions 5, 6, & 7

100 % of the staff felt confident they had the right skills and experience needed to undertake their role in the school environment.

Questions 8 - 12

91.1% experienced a heightened sense of safety and support within their working environment.

Findings - Questionnaires

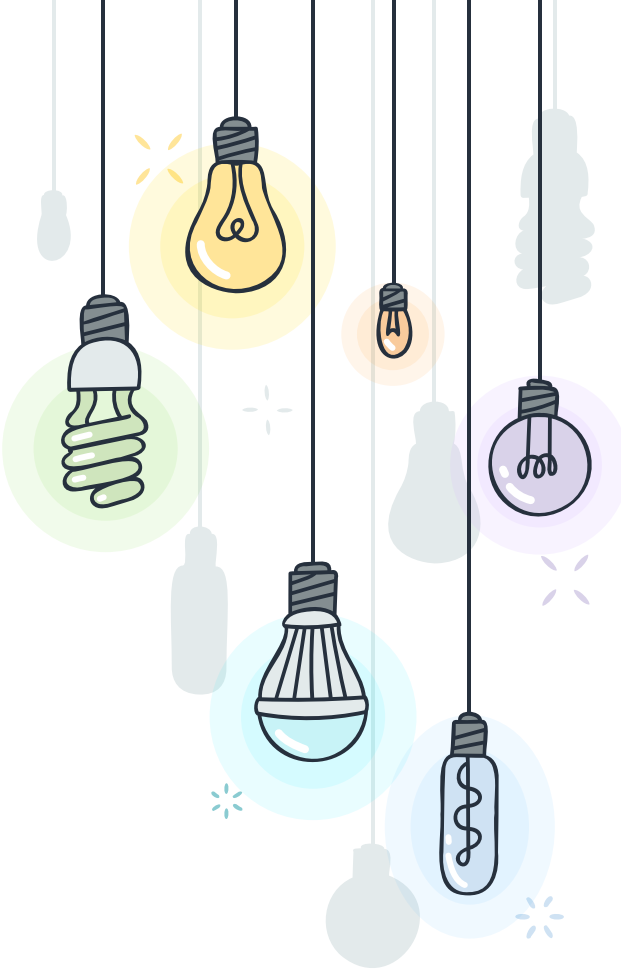
While it remains acknowledged that questionnaires are subjective interpretations of individuals' experiences and perceptions, the responses from the seventeen staff members who completed the questionnaire are notably positive.

These results align with the researchers' reference drawing from The Department of Health (2014), which states well-being as “feeling good and functioning well and comprises an individual’s experience of their life; and a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values.”

A more extensive dataset would have further enriched the analysis by providing the opportunity to explore contrasting viewpoints and potentially uncover any divergent perspectives.

Findings from Focus Group.

- The focus group consisted of 8 members of staff- 5 class teachers, 2 Learning Support Officers and the Administration Manager.
- Initially, the researcher intended to undertake two focus groups of five participants, each taken from a cross-section of staff within the school.
- Unfortunately, only one focus group session transpired due to staff sickness and the constraints of staff cover.
- The collaborative efforts of the researcher and the Well-Being lead within the school created fifteen comprehensive questions intended for inquiry within the focus group.



Findings from the Focus Group.

Theme 1 - Dimension of Time

Change of hours due to a consultation for the LSOs meant there was no dedicated time in the morning or at the end of the school day for collaborative discussions on planning or pupil progress.

Fewer opportunities for preparation and marking time.

Theme 2 - New Initiatives.

Challenges while grappling with the weight of educational changes.

A unified belief among the participants that there needs to be a settlement period to allow all new policies, procedures and changes to be embedded.

Theme 3- Support for Staff

Providing robust support for colleagues who may be struggling with mental health challenges.

A more proactive stance, on early intervention and consistent support to mitigate potential challenges.

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Theme 4 - Pupil Behaviour

The overall agreement was that the behaviour climate in the school was positive. However, a recognition emerged that the presence of certain high-tariff pupils can be very challenging.

Findings - continued.

- One of the questionnaire items prompted the staff to consider the potential impact of staff well-being on pupil outcomes,
- There was a general consensus from the participants that children may be influenced by a teacher's mood when the teacher's well-being is not satisfactory.
- It become challenging to ascertain whether the participants truly grasped the potential linkage between staff well-being and pupil outcomes. (Jonathan Glazzard and Dr Anthea Rose, 2019).

Findings - continued.

Positive elements regarding staff well-being within the school's context.

- Participants expressed a tangible sense of support deriving from the modifications made by the new leadership team.

- Staff described an environment where they could speak up and raise concerns. Staff members reported a profound sense of belonging, perceiving themselves as part of a very close team. It was evident that robust interpersonal connections and a culture of mutual support permeated the school.

- Noteworthy initiatives such as whole school training days, which included provisions such as staff lunches, secret buddy schemes and changes to the lunch hour to ensure staff receive their allocated times, which are all symbolic of the school's commitment to nurturing staff well-being.

Findings from the Semi Structured Interviews.

School 1

- Heightened workload implementing the new curriculum.
- Pupil Behaviour and classroom management.
- Absence of adequate measures to address disruptive behaviour within the classroom.

School 2

- Coffee machines and comfortable seating arrangements in the staff room.
- The provision of dedicated time off school to write end-of-year reports and a focus team building skills during training days.

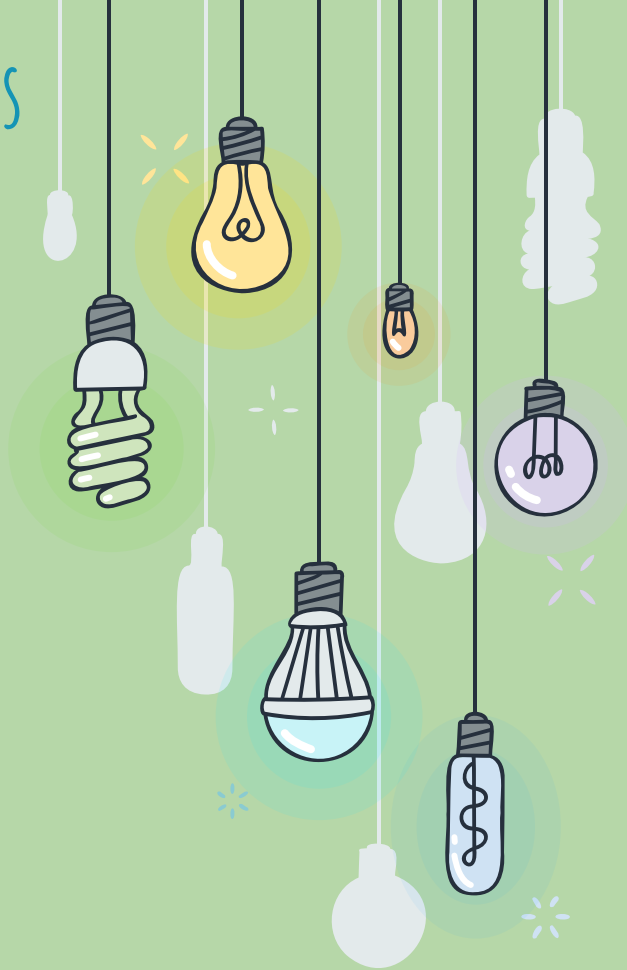
Findings from the Semi Structured Interviews

The consensus among participants consolidated that effectively managing the well-being of the entire staff within a primary school presents a formidable challenge.

There was a clear theme across the schools that staff members grappling with mental health were predominantly affected by the transformation in the educational landscape. These individuals found themselves significantly challenged in terms of shifting their perspectives and adapting new pedagogical approaches aligned with these changes.

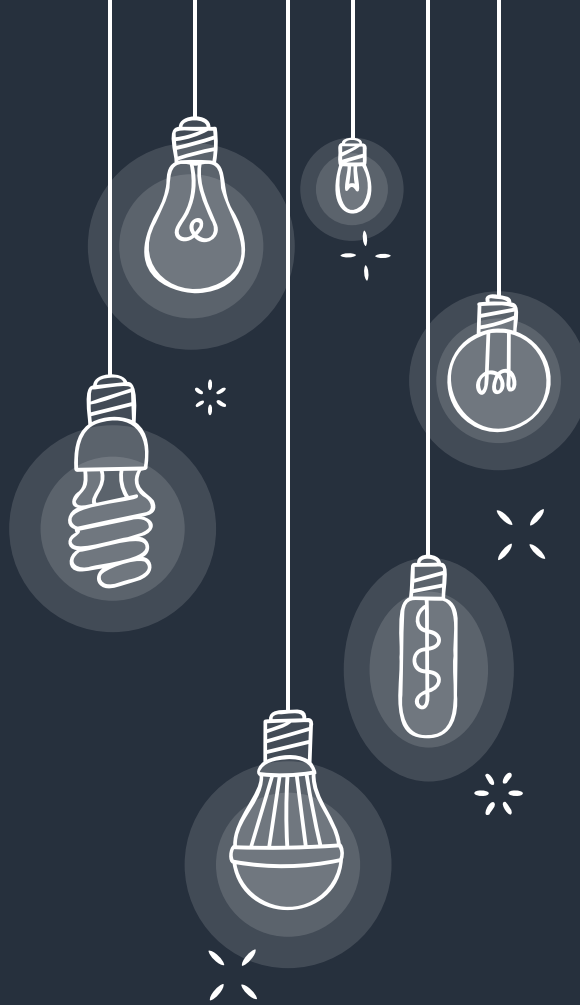
Professional development emerged as a vital issue, focusing on providing staff opportunities to undertake stress management training and mental health awareness.

A further recurrent thread was recognising the importance of Governors contributing to the school ethos that is supportive and positive, wherein staff members feel valued and respected. It was also emphasised that the Governing body should institute a mechanism to regularly review and evaluate the well-being initiatives implemented within the school.



Conclusion

- Leadership and Governance: The leadership team and the Governing Body must foster a positive school ethos and culture where all staff feel valued, respected and empowered to contribute to formulating policy and procedures.
- Effective Communication and Support Networks: Establishing open communication channels and a robust network for staff allows a transparent working environment that encourages staff members to seek assistance if needed.
- Professional Development: Providing appropriate professional development opportunities to equip staff with the suitable skill set and knowledge to implement new educational changes effectively.
- Protected time: Allocate time for collaborative discussions and planning. When teachers and LSOs work collaboratively, they can identify and address the specific needs of individual pupils.



Recommendations

1. To enhance the depth of understanding and improve well-being in education by increasing the sample size.

2. Establishing a dedicated staff well-being group equipped with change management skills that can facilitate developing and implementing a purposeful and impactful framework to promote well-being across the school.

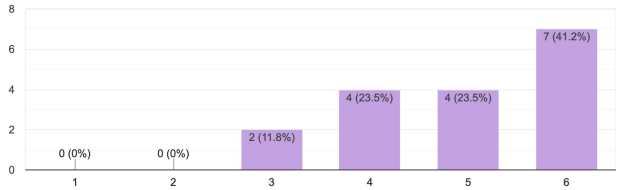
3. Provide training for several staff members as Mental First Aiders to help foster awareness and early intervention for those encountering mental health challenges.

4. Develop a holistic approach involving all cluster schools to explore the correlation between mental health and well-being and pupil progress.

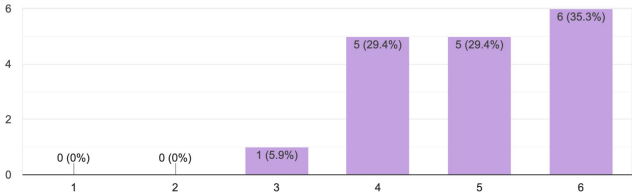
Appendix Questionnaires

Questions 1 & 2

I feel that I can contribute to whole school decisions that impacts on school life.
17 responses

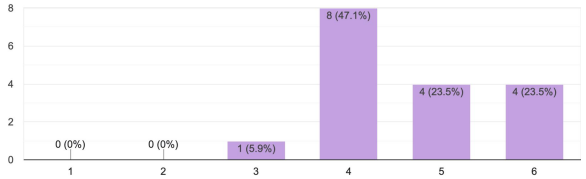


I feel that the school communicates effectively so that I am kept up to date with what is happening.
17 responses

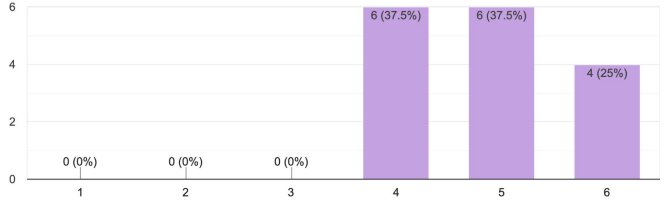


Questions 3 & 4

I feel my workload is appropriate.
17 responses



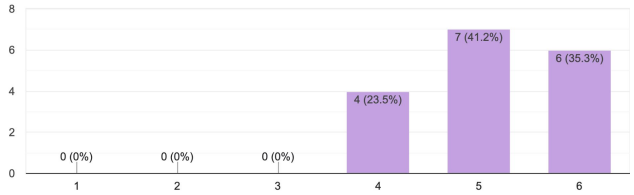
I feel that I have adequate time to complete tasks set by the school.
16 responses



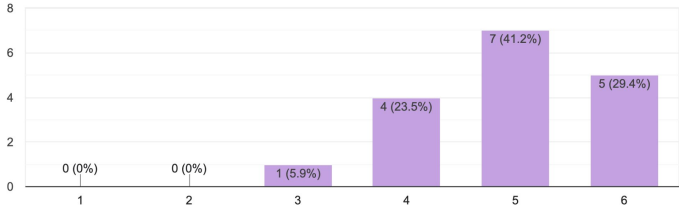
Appendix Questionnaires

Questions 5, 6, & 7

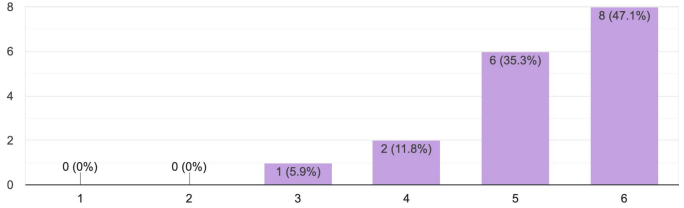
I feel that I have the correct skills to undertake my role.
17 responses



I feel that the correct professional development is provided by the school to allow me to do my job.
17 responses



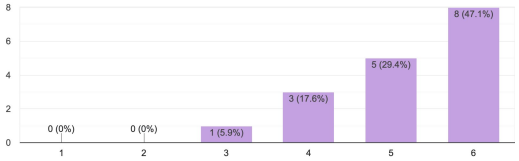
I feel that the school recognises my skills and uses them effectively.
17 responses



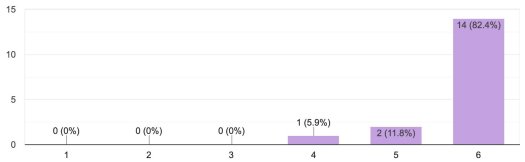
Appendix Questionnaires

Questions 8 - 12

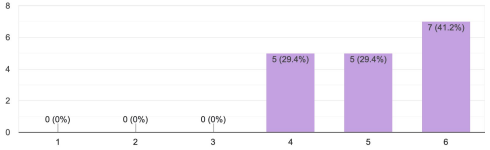
I believe I have the support from the school to ensure I have a work life balance.
17 responses



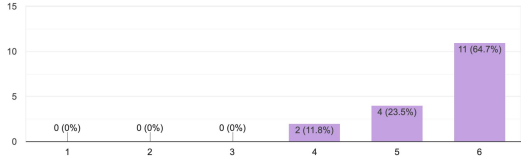
I feel safe at school and within my learning environment.
17 responses



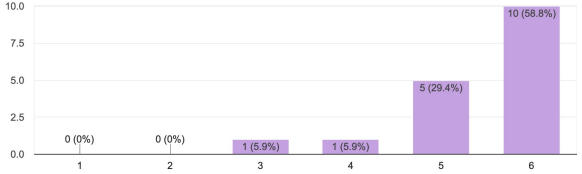
I feel that the school encourages positive relationships, and the social relationships in the school are good.
17 responses



If I approached a member of SLT with concerns, I am confident that I would be well supported.
17 responses



I know where I can gain support if my health impacts me doing my job.
17 responses



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