



[www.well-school.org](http://www.well-school.org)  
[@well\\_schools](https://twitter.com/well_schools)

# Well Schools FINAL REPORT – Executive Summary



An evaluation of the Well Schools whole school approach for supporting teacher and student wellbeing: a mixed-method ecological case study approach.

March 2023



The University of Manchester



POWERED BY YST AND BUPA FOUNDATION

# Background

There is growing emphasis within education to promote wellbeing and whole school approaches are a recognised avenue for achieving this. Pupils supported by teachers who exhibit protective factors (such as confidence and resilience) are shown to achieve better educational outcomes. However, staff wellbeing is often overlooked in research, despite recognition that and for sustainable whole-school approaches such knowledge may be vital; suggesting connections between teacher and pupil wellbeing requires investigation.

Well Schools is a whole school approach that places as much emphasis on wellbeing as it does on academic performance. Well Schools understands that children and young people are more effective learners when they are happy and well, and that they must take care of their staff and their pupils' wellbeing to create a culture that allows everyone to reach their potential. Well Schools therefore focuses on supporting the wellbeing of school staff, senior leaders and pupils to improve education outcomes.

The main objective of this research was to explore and understand the factors that affect successful implementation of Well Schools and the perceived impact on schools, teachers, and pupils who are part of the Well Schools community. In addition, this research showcases examples of good practice for supporting wellbeing through a whole school approach.

## Method

10 case study schools were recruited having been identified for their good practice and that they represented diversity in setting type, location and school demographics. A mixed-method approach was used. Data was collected via interviews (n = 16) with Well School leads and teachers to capture the process of implementation from prior practice to current progress and future sustainability. Well School leads completed bespoke surveys (n = 17) to determine aspects of practice fueling the implementation of Well Schools. Specific strategies used in each school as part of their Well Schools approach illustrate, both quantitatively and qualitatively, implementation progress, quality, fidelity, and adaptations to Well School guidance. A series of quantitative surveys measured both teacher (n = 83) and pupil (n = 418) wellbeing supporting comparisons with national data and established benchmarks.



# Key findings

## Implementation:

**Case Study schools reported positive experiences of becoming a Well School** and managing being a Well School. This included:

- Positive experiences when reflecting on school level support systems and Well Schools engagement.
- Emphasis given to making time for Well Schools as well as provision of training that relates to Well Schools. Schools report mostly positive accounts of the support and engagement across their school regarding Well Schools.
- Engagement with online resources revealed the most mixed responses from schools, with some schools engaging with online resources and others reporting reduced engagement with such resources.
- The impact of Well Schools was being monitored in most schools, this includes the use of wellbeing surveys across staff and pupils.

When exploring the implementation of Well Schools it was clear **whole school engagement** was key to developing a 'Well Culture' and that the **senior leadership team must be the driving** force behind Well Schools. The Well Schools approach sympathised with the physical and emotional health provision already being implemented in many schools. The benefits of the Well Schools approach offered an "umbrella" framework that allows the principles of Well Schools to be organised, monitored, and evaluated and other provision to be structured and monitored within the framework. The integration of Well Schools into an existing school ethos is facilitated by the feasibility and suitability of the framework.

**Advocating staff wellbeing, staff recognition and allowing staff to have autonomy over staff enrichment in their schools can lead to positive outcomes.** For example, this included, better staff attendance, job satisfaction, and staff retention were singled out as areas with recognisable improvements. Staff wellbeing was supported through a combination of approaches and was led top down by senior leadership:

- Provision of a Staff Wellbeing Charter that allows schools to monitor and show their commitment to Staff Wellbeing.
- Many schools set up designated staff wellbeing leads.
- A wellbeing culture is driven by the senior leadership team to ensure workload is acceptable and manageable, offer staff mental health support and recognition of staff achievement.

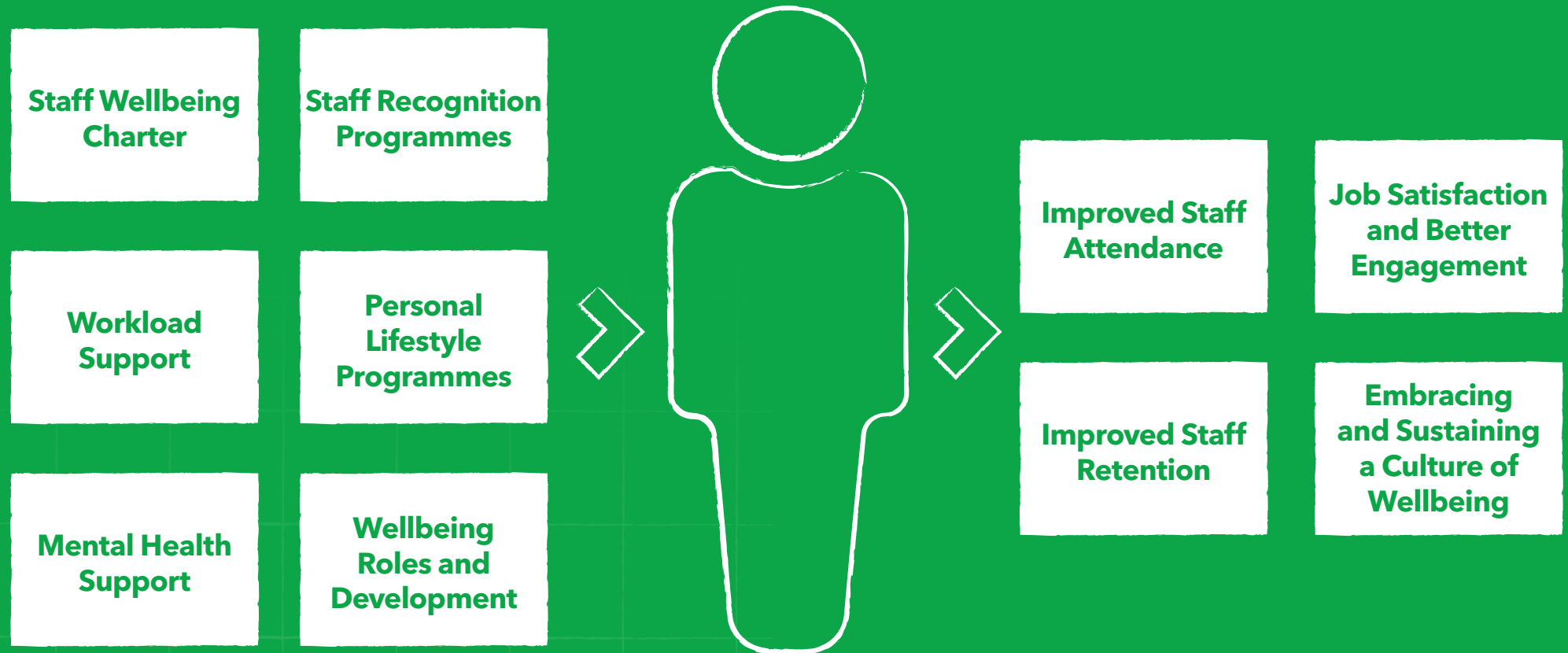
**Case study schools reported their pupils are happier and healthier** and this has had a positive impact on pupils' engagement with learning and academic performance. Physical health and literacy were the leading focus across all school types with regards to pupil enrichment. Schools adopted many pupil-centred approaches to physical health and literacy, including:

- Educating pupils on the importance of physical activity, good sleep, hygiene and maintaining a balanced diet.
- Using sports and mobility to support mental and physical health.
- Offering a diverse range of sports and extra curricula activities and recognising the importance of making physical activity accessible for pupils' individual needs.
- Recognising the benefits of outdoor learning.
- Offering pupils psycho-social development through a variety of whole school, universal and targeted provision, and programmes to support the development of skills and strategies to manage emotional wellbeing and mental health.

A series of infographics are offered that summarise findings identified through the analysis of interviews with Well School teachers. They showcase examples of practice, areas of impact and direct quotations from Well School teachers.

# Well Led Schools

The staff wellbeing strategies reported across the researched schools and the reported impact on teacher wellbeing.



# Well Prepared and Well Equipped Pupils

The strategies which support physical, mental and socio-emotional health and how they are used across researched schools to support student wellbeing and development.

## Physical Health and Literacy



“ a progressive curriculum that is, very much focused on, children developing the skills and understanding in those areas that they need to be physically and mentally well”.

## High Quality PE and Sports Enrichments



“ When I’m teaching in PE, yes I’m also looking at the physical side but I’m also looking at the emotional side as well as looking at the social skills, team work and communication”.

## Outdoor Learning and Education



“ Everything is outdoor, we have outdoor learning maths, we have outdoor learning English. It’s just making it much more, creative for those children getting them out there getting them seeing things”.

## Psycho-social Development Provisions and Programmes



“ Well Schools have strong systems and resources in place to support students in school who may be struggling with poor mental health”.

## Pupil Led Initiatives



“ Involving students in decisions that impact on them can benefit their mental health and wellbeing by helping them to feel part of the school, college and wider community and to have some control over their lives”.

# Motivation

## Why become a Well School...

### An Organised Framework

Well Schools provides an organised framework where all health and wellbeing provision can be organised, monitored and evaluated.



**“**We see Well Schools as an umbrella under which we can run our organisation in the best possible way for all of the human beings within it”



Integration of Well Schools into the existing school ethos is facilitated by the suitability of the framework and how it embeds “quite naturally into the school life”



**“**We haven’t made a thing of it because if you make a thing of something it becomes something people have to do, so we’ve just really put it there by stealth”



### Promotes a Positive School Ethos and Environment

### A Wellbeing Network

The opportunity for schools to build on relationships, collaborate and learn from other like-minded schools.



What I understand of Well Schools is it’s a movement of schools which are all coming together to share ideas, share knowledge of what’s successful, what’s hopeful and spread that across more schools putting that into practice’.



Well Schools find that collaborating ideas and practices which are successful in contextually similar schools is more effective than developing practices through theory and academic research.



**“**It opens up, a network for collaboration and sharing of ideas and things like that, people have just tried things on the ground and things that have worked and things that haven’t worked and it’s time saving. We haven’t got a lot of time in schools and that helps massively.”

# Capability



## Schools Concern: Time

The competing priorities that many schools balance with are then usually compounded by difficulties brought about by contextual factors (e.g. social deprivation), time to implement and learn new approaches is not always available.



## Strategy: Employment of Wellbeing Leads That Focus on Developing Wellbeing Across The School



## Schools Concern: Adapting Resources and Practice

Difficulty adapt resources and practice so that it is inclusive and accessible for all pupils.



## Reality: What Well Schools Experienced

Schools reported the framework was easy to implement and embed across whole school practice and that some of the underlining approaches, especially in the Well Led pillar, actively promoted time saving practice.



"Our staff are supported, we take away so much of the unnecessary bureaucracy so that our staff can just focus on what they love which is working with kids."



"In fact my role, I'm head of health, head of year 7, but I'm also the wellbeing lead but next year in September I'm giving up the head of year so I can do more with Well Schools and more with staff wellbeing. It's just so massive isn't it?"



"I can't do both jobs so it's been noted this year that the wellbeing lead needs to focus on that for staff and students"



## Reality: Collaboration

Shared resources, practices and building connections in the Well Schools network makes adaptation easier, meaning approaches and activities are suitable for pupils with varying needs and abilities.



"It opens up, a network for collaboration and sharing of ideas, people who have unofficial research, that have just tried things on the ground and things that have worked and things that haven't worked. It's time-saving we haven't got a lot of time in schools and that helps massively"

# Awareness & Engagement

## Well Culture

Wellbeing is put at the heart of school life and enables everyone to thrive and achieve their potential.



## Future Direction

### Collaboration with Local Schools

Building stronger links with local secondary schools and with schools within MAT's, to ensure that the benefits of the Well Schools approach is not lost when pupils leave.

## Senior Leadership

Senior leaders oversee the various Well School components of physical health and wellbeing. Enabling all components to be advocated, managed and monitored, accommodating different ideas on development and implementation.

“ Each member of SLT oversees their team and makes those decisions based on what they're seeing day in day out, which means our teams are heard.”

Some schools report having

“ a children's voice on whether or not they feel the health curriculum's having a positive impact on their learning.”

## Staff

School leaders draw on wider staff experiences of implementing Well Schools in order to make decisions on the future directions of the provision.

“ Staff coming together and creating that vision, meant that everybody played a part, and everybody felt that they had invested in this journey and this process.”

## Pupils

Most schools recognise the value of the pupil voice and encourage children to act as ambassadors and lead on certain activities within the school.

## Future Direction

### Parents and Wider Community

Parents and the wider community do not appear to have much involvement with Well Schools culture. This is a reported future direction for many schools.

“ We have these fantastically well rounded children in school but then we don't have them for six weeks in the holidays and we want it to carry on outside of the school building.”



# Sustainability

## Implementation research considers sustainability to indicate success of an intervention

All Well Schools report that they will be continuing with the Well School approach. Some schools report how they will adopt parts of the framework that they have not fully received or embraced yet and some schools report adaptations to better fit their school context and needs.

Adaptability is encouraged by Well Schools who note that Well Schools is

“not a prescriptive, linear set of rules for schools to follow. Instead they are the things a school can do well to make consistent and sustainable changes”.



## The Future

## Monitoring Impact

Researched Well Schools look to monitor the impact of the approach on a range of outcomes whilst considering the longitudinal gains across the school community.

## Taking the Philosophy of Well Schools into the Wider School Community

Making parents more aware of Well Schools so that they can understand what the school is working towards. Extending Well Schools into secondary schools to ensure school leavers are able to continue their wellbeing journey when they move on.

## Future Direction for Well Schools Cultural Transferability

Align the Well Schools philosophy and approaches to sit better in Scottish schooling. Adapting terminology and how the organisation sits better with Scottish initiatives and wider school systems.

# Impact

Teacher wellbeing surveys found teachers at participating case study schools were reporting a trend for **lower levels of emotional exhaustion** and statistically significant **lower levels of depersonalisation/cynicism** and **higher levels of personal accomplishment** than other published norm data with large samples of teachers. Teachers reported **high levels of feelings of teacher efficacy** in engaging pupils, use of instructional strategies and in classroom management. Generally, teachers in Well Schools show a **high level of job satisfaction**. However, there are a small number of teachers that have low levels of job satisfaction. Findings suggest a **cohesive and positive climate** in Well Schools. Together these findings suggests that Well Schools is a promising approach to supporting the wellbeing of teachers.

Pupil surveys identified a trend for lower levels of wellbeing, and this is consistent with nationally reported dips in pupil wellbeing post pandemic. Initiatives like Well Schools therefore align with a national imperative to support the wellbeing of children and young people. **Pupils reported encouraging levels of physical health**; where 85% of the pupils indicated their physical health was good to excellent and pupils on average spent 4.5 days a week taking part in 60 minutes or more of physical activity. Physical health, followed by a sense of school belonging, were the largest unique predictors of wellbeing, and pupils who engaged in more physical activity reported increased wellbeing. These findings provide evidence of the **benefits of a whole school climate and culture to foster a sense of community** as well as the **benefits of a physical health curriculum for improved pupil wellbeing** operating within the Well School framework.

Such knowledge and insights supported the development of a series of illustrative school profiles that offer an account and insight into the nature of wellbeing situated within schools where the commitment for supporting wellbeing is linked to pupils, staff and extends to the school community.



# Conclusion

Well Schools offers the opportunity for schools to **build relationships**, **collaborate** and **learn** from other like-minded schools and is a reason why some schools were attracted to Well Schools. Therefore, promoting Well Schools can help other schools adopt better practices for health and wellbeing.

All Well Schools report that they will be continuing with the Well School approach with plans for how they will sustain and develop their current practice. Such continued engagement further exemplifies the feasibility, acceptability and positive impact the case study schools reported regarding Well Schools.



# About the Research Team

The project was conducted by a team from the Manchester Institute of Education at the University of Manchester. An open science model was adopted supporting a transparent reporting of the independent evaluation, meaning the plans and final report are accessible at this link: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SWM25> and the via the QR code.



## The research team comprised:

Dr. Alexandra Hennessey	Co-Principal Investigator	Carla Mason	Research Assistant
Dr. Sarah MacQuarrie	Co-Principal Investigator	Mumine Ozturk	Research Assistant
Dr. Kirsty Pert	Lead Research Assistant	Smriti Gupta	Research Assistant
Dr. Charlotte Bagnall	Co-Investigator	Kathryn Mills-Webb	Research Assistant
Prof. Garry Squires	Co-Investigator	Fionnuala Mottishaw	Research Assistant
Dr. Lily Verity	Research Assistant		

## Contact details:

Manchester Institute of Education, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.  
email: [alexandra.hennessey@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:alexandra.hennessey@manchester.ac.uk) / [sarah.macquarrie@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.macquarrie@manchester.ac.uk)

## Acknowledgements

This activity started as the COVID-19 pandemic was tailing off and schools began a gradual return to more regular provision. In light of this, we would like to thank each of the participating schools, teachers and pupils for offering their time in this evaluation project. The commitment to wellbeing and ensuring every pupil has the optimal environment for their learning and development is and will continue to be an inspiration.

## How to cite this report:

Hennessey, A., MacQuarrie, S., Pert, K., Bagnall, C., Squires, G., Verity, L., Mason, C., Ozturk, M. Gupta, S., Mills-Webb, K., & Mottishaw, F. (2023.) An evaluation of the Well Schools community whole school approach for supporting teacher and student wellbeing: a mixed-method ecological case study approach. Final report to Youth Sport Trust. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SWM25>

## Related publication:

Hennessey, A., MacQuarrie, S., Pert, K., Gupta, S., Mills-Webb, K., Mottishaw, F., Squires, G., & Bagnall, C. (2023). School Profiles: Ten accounts of supporting wellbeing in a school community. Well Schools profile book developed for the Youth Sport Trust. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SWM25>

