The Quick Guide to Staff Wellbeing in Schools
And why it’s so important!
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INTRODUCTION

Why would you want to focus on wellbeing?

Here are a few reasons you might want to consider it.

• There is considerable and compelling research and evidence that clearly demonstrates improvements in staff wellbeing lead to improved productivity, performance and results. There is a strong business case for this to be your main focus, alongside ensuring the right leadership, people, and processes are in place.

• It improves engagement and staff will willingly give you more.

• It reduces staff absence levels.

• It improves staff attraction and retention. You will recruit better teachers and support staff and they will stay longer.

• It reduces management time spent on unproductive tasks, such as staff friction, poor performance or grievances.

• It better meets your legal requirements as an employer.

• You are likely to have more fun as a leader, working with more people who want to be there and who are enjoying their job.

I am sure you can add more of your own reasons. Put simply, making wellbeing part of your everyday culture will improve your outcomes, for both students and staff.

If you buy-in to this then read on to find out more about what wellbeing really is and how you might improve it, for you and your school.

Not convinced? Then read on and see some of the research and evidence highlights, that just might change your mind.

This is not soft and fluffy! It is about taking the right action that will deliver a significant return on any investment (both time and money).
WHAT IS WELLBEING?

There is no easy answer to this, and there are multiple descriptions. There has even been a research project into whether it was possible to come up with a single definition. The answer being no!

Here are a few of the many definitions.

- How you feel (personally and socially).
- How you function – physically, emotionally, mentally (including positive psychology) and spiritually.
- How you evaluate your life as a whole – not just moment to moment happiness (though this can also improve wellbeing)
- How you develop and become fulfilled - which is also why continuing professional development and career aspirations can be so important.
- The degree to which positive effect is greater than negative effect. This last one has a clear link with resilience, where you look to build protective factors (positives) and mitigate risk factors (negatives).

Whatever your own view or definition, don’t spend too much time debating it. Instead, quickly move to action.

THE HOUSE OF ORGANISATIONAL WELLBEING

There is another way you might want to think about wellbeing!

On the next page you can see the house. If you are like most leaders (or individuals), when you start to think about wellbeing, you probably think of providing support in the way of giving something for free, providing training, counselling, or improving fitness.

For example you might arrange for some resilience or mindfulness training, give access to a gym, if you have one, or put free fruit in the staff room. There is nothing wrong with this, but it isn’t the place to start and is unlikely to make any substantial difference if you haven’t built firm foundations.

This is where people are putting on the roof, rearranging the loft, or kitting out the middle floor, but haven’t dug the foundations properly. As a result, as they add things, they do not sustain or provide benefits. In fact the level of wellbeing is at a position, where it is likely to fall.

Take a look at the house and think about what you do in your school.
TOP TIP!
Start with the foundations – it’s all about wellbeing being part of the culture. That means how leaders behave and treat others, the working hours, the one to one time people are given, the control they have over what they do and how they do it, and the systems of support, such as performance management.
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

One area that is worthy of greater explanation is that of psychological safety. Those organisations that truly build wellbeing into the culture have it. It is also the element that the Google people analytics team identified as being the number one characteristic of high performing teams.

Psychological safety, was penned by the Harvard Professor Amy Edmondson, and it is highly relevant for organisations.

Asked to review the mistakes in two US hospitals, she correlated the scale of these against the existing hospital rankings of team performance. The findings were surprising. The higher performing teams were making the most mistakes and the lowest performing teams the fewest.

However, on observing the teams in action, the reason for this became clear.

The leaders of highly ranked teams were focused on patient safety. They made it clear that there would be no repercussions and wanted to learn from mistakes. The result was that while they made the fewest mistakes, they were all reported, and improvements made. Lives were saved.

Conversely the leaders of the lower ranked teams were clear that their teams ‘didn't make mistakes’ and there would be repercussions! This meant that while they made the greatest number of mistakes, most of them were covered up and not reported. More patients died.

Professor Edmondson defined psychological safety as:

"A belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes."

She goes on to talk about the importance of balancing this with the need for accountability – that is people learning from mistakes and delivering high performance (the top right quadrant of her grid).

However, where people have to deliver results, and there is little psychological safety, this often leads to anxiety, blame and cover ups.

For schools, the fear of being found out by ETI or DENI, make this a real challenge. And how parents protect young children and keep them in their comfort zone, is one of the causes of anxiety as they move into later school years and their serious examinations.

As a leader, having a high awareness of how to develop both psychological safety and high levels of accountability is important. One way of doing this is to be securely vulnerable, which means being a role model and being open about the mistakes you make.

If you want to find out more about psychological safety then you can watch a short video at www.successfullives.co.uk/psychological-safety

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THE EVIDENCE FOR A FOCUS ON STAFF WELLBEING

The evidence for making wellbeing a part of everyday behaviours and activities is compelling. There has been limited research into school staff wellbeing and its impact on outcomes. The only major report was written in 2007 by Birkbeck College, University of London, in partnership with Worklife Support. This found that:

- There was a statistically significant impact on the SATs results of English primary schools.
- Teacher enjoyment was linked with a higher value added measure of pupil performance.
- There was an increased performance in 5+ GCSEs A to C.
- There was improved value added progress through key stages 2 to 4.

While the education research is limited there has been research in business (examples below) and significant research in the health sector (details on page 8).

In business, a 2014 report for the Department of Business Innovation and Skills, titled ‘Does Worker Wellbeing Affect Workplace Performance’, found that wellbeing shows a strong and positive link with improved workplace performance for both profitability (financial); and labour productivity and the quality of outputs and services.

It also showed a strong link between wellbeing and job satisfaction, including aspects such as training, skills development opportunities, how much autonomy employees have in their role, and how much scope they have to use their own initiative and influence decisions.

Dame Carol Black’s review of the health of Britain’s working age population, in her 2008 report, ‘Working for a healthier tomorrow’ found considerable evidence that health and wellbeing programmes produced economic benefits across all sectors and all sizes of business: in other words, that good health is good business. She also concluded that the benefits of wellbeing go beyond the quality of life of staff and extend to increasing an organisations productivity and profitability.

**REFLECTION TIME!**
What impact might greater wellbeing have on your business!

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THE EVIDENCE FOR A FOCUS ON STAFF WELLBEING

Much greater research has been carried out within the health sector, where staff wellbeing is consistently shown to be linked with patient care, welfare and mortality.

Among the highlights from findings are:

- Evidence of a causal link between staff wellbeing and performance outcomes.
- There is a relationship between staff wellbeing and staff reported patient care and patient reported patient care.
- Staff wellbeing is a driver of patient care performance and seeking to systematically enhance staff wellbeing is not only important in its own right but also for the quality of patient experiences.
- Local climate is important, even for high performing staff in demanding jobs.
- It is important to monitor employee wellbeing and target resources to areas known to be problematic.
- Management practices are significantly linked to NHS staff health and wellbeing.
- This is linked to multiple outcomes, including staff absenteeism, turnover, agency spend (e.g. supply staff), patient satisfaction, infection rates, and annual health check performance.
- The associated financial costs of these can be significant.

If you want to see the benefits highlighted above, in your business, then make wellbeing a keystone habit and a focus of what you do every single day.
WHY AND HOW TO MEASURE WELLBEING?

If, like us, you are swayed by the compelling evidence, the next stage is to measure wellbeing.

Why? Well if you are going to focus on improving it, then knowing the current state of play is a good place to start. There are other reasons too:

• Even though you may have a good sense of current challenges or issues, this step will help to uncover anything hidden, as well as identify priority areas.

• It allows you to put a stake in the ground and to use that to measure progress, including identifying trends.

• It provides great feedback, which you can use to create context and engagement with your staff, to involve them in action and ensure they take a share of responsibility for improving their own and whole school wellbeing.

HOW TO MEASURE WELLBEING

• A simple way to start is through a questionnaire. It is very important to use one that has been shown to be valid and reliable. That’s why we use the Health and Safety Executive’s Indicator Tool. Evidence shows it to be a good predictor of workplace stress.

• Don’t be tempted to create your own and if you are offered the use of a different one, then check out the evidence for using it.

• The reasons for using a questionnaire include; the relative ease to administer; ability to reach everyone, particularly if delivered on-line; the focus on measurable specifics; and you can repeat at intervals and measure progress.

There are other things you need to track when measuring wellbeing, including:

• Reviewing other data, such as sickness and absence, retention, including exit interview responses, grievances, and the extent to which any staff assistance or counselling schemes are used.

• One to One interviews.

• Group discussions and focus groups.
WHAT ARE YOU MEASURING?

In addition to the organisational data, mentioned on the previous page, such as absence information, when we use the HSE Indicator Tool, we are measuring the self-assessed scores of staff against those risk factors for workplace stress. These are:

**THE 6 MAJOR RISK FACTORS ARE:**

- **The demands you face** (workload, work patterns and working environment).
- **Control** (how much say you have in the way you do your work).
- **The support you receive** (the encouragement from leaders and colleagues and the resources to which you have access).
- **Your relationships at work** (the extent to which positive working practices and behaviours are encouraged and problems dealt with).
- **Your role** (whether you clearly understand what is expected of you).
- **Change** (how it’s managed and communicated to you)

Of course it isn’t just work (shown as HSE risks in the stress bucket diagram opposite) that might cause poorer wellbeing. I’m not talking about exercise or nutrition, as important as these are to long-term health. This is more about those things that might cause challenge in life outside work.

These are such things as finances, relationships, and lack of sleep. So helping staff to develop coping strategies is important but not before addressing those elements that affect culture. This is also why leaders have to spend quality one to one time with their team members.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Factors</th>
<th>Vulnerability Factors</th>
<th>Coping Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Things that cause the stress level to rise</td>
<td>Size and strength of your bucket</td>
<td>Coping strategies = holes to let out the stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>- HSE Risks</td>
<td>- Financial</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Not enough sleep</td>
<td>- Bereavement</td>
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<td>- Family</td>
<td>- Arguments</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Relationships</td>
<td>- Etc.</td>
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**The Stress Bucket** – as things build up, it’s like a bucket. When things become too much, the bucket overflows and stress becomes less manageable. People also respond differently to situations. Bucket sizes vary!
WHAT NEXT?

You’ve run your questionnaire and received your report covering each of the six risk areas for workplace stress. Your scores are benchmarked against 136 organisations across sectors. The benchmark is useful, because not all questions are created equal. That is scoring 3 out of 5 in some areas might put you in the 80th percentile, while in another area you might need to score significantly more.

You’ve reviewed your other data and had conversations with a sample of staff.

It's likely that there will be some key issues highlighted. This will probably be about workload, and that they don’t feel in control of how they do their job.

You realise that the behaviours of some department heads, and a lack of empathy are having an impact on wellbeing, and as a result, performance and results.

There is little one to one time being spent and your performance management process is simply a tick box exercise once a year.

You take the graphs and PowerPoint of the questionnaire results and other findings and share them with your staff. As well as talking about the findings you ask for their ideas and engagement in deciding on priorities and action.

SETTING GOALS

You set clear goals and objectives. This might include a longer term aspiration and a small number of specific priority actions that become part of your school development plan.

Actions may cover a wide range of areas and include:

- Quick wins, for example, looking for leaders to give more praise and recognition and ensuring this is observed.
- Longer term development, for example, improving line manager coaching skills.
- Improving systems, for example, changing performance management to encompass regular check-ins and conversations and not one off interventions.

The most important aspect is to focus on those things that will build the foundations for the right culture and influence the behaviours of leaders and staff every single day.

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WHAT MIGHT BE YOUR KEYSTONE HABIT?

In 1987, Alcoa, a major US aluminium manufacturer appointed Paul O’Neil as its new CEO. He hadn’t operated in the market before and was joining at a time when the organisation had failed on product lines and profit was down.

At his first analysts meeting, he didn’t mention anything about profit or revenue projections, dividends or shareholder returns.

Instead he said, “I want to talk to you about worker safety. Every year, numerous Alcoa workers are injured so badly that they miss a day of work. I intend to make Alcoa the safest company in America. I intend to go for zero injuries.”

When he was asked about the financial performance, he continually returned to the subject of worker safety. As a result many analysts recommended the company as a sell.

While there were accidents at the company, it already had a better safety record in comparison to many other manufacturers. But Paul O’Neil wanted to build his strategy around one core area that everyone could get behind and support.

He also knew that developing habits in this area, would lead to improved financial performance and results.

He started out by insisting that accidents were reported to him, together with lessons learnt. And after that he did not let up. The unions came on board, as did staff.

Over time, he did improve the safety record considerably. Yet through this same focus, by the time he retired in 1999, the companies profits had increased five times and sales had risen on average by 15% every year. All without the need for an explicit focus on them.

Driving hard on safety, led to improvements in working practices, systems, and productivity. staff also realised their new leader really did want their feedback and ideas. As well as suggesting safety improvements, they came forward with sales and product ideas too – some which had been thought of years before, but not presented, thinking that management were not interested.

Under Paul, worker safety became their keystone habit.

What will you make your keystone habit?

Perhaps reducing working hours, or a specific behaviour linked to your school values or…?
HOW WE HELP

Have you received value from this quick guide to wellbeing?

Hopefully, you will already be addressing many of the areas covered and benefiting from more engaged and well staff. As a result, you will also be seeing strong performance and results.

If you aren’t confident in your foundations and would like some support then we can help in a number of ways, including:

• Providing simple advice, running your ‘wellbeing’ questionnaire and/or helping you decide on your strategy.
• Providing access to staff guides, chat cards and a school toolkit.
• Building out your strategy for you.
• Developing and/or implementing a more detailed plan.
• Implementing specific elements to build better foundations, for example articulating the behaviours that underpin your values, implementing a more effective performance management process or developing coaching skills and empathy within your leaders.
• Providing a range of standalone workshops and seminars for leaders and staff, for example on managing personal wellbeing, resilience or energy for results.
• Giving you access to our student lesson plans, for example on resilience, growth mindset and coaching skills.

A COMPLIMENTARY STRATEGY SESSION FOR YOU

For school leaders serious about taking action, we offer a complimentary strategy session.

Up to ninety minutes face to face or by web or phone, to discuss your specific situation and needs. All about giving you value, whether or not you decide to go ahead with any of our services.

We also offer a full guarantee. If we deliver anything you are not happy with then you simply don’t pay.

Get in touch to book. We’d love to hear from you.

Call 020 3303 0496
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