

Wellbeing initiatives: what they look like in practice and how the board is involved

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Wellbeing can feel quite abstract, and knowing how to embed a culture of wellbeing can be tricky. Get an idea of what wellbeing initiatives look like in practice, and how you can monitor them to make sure they're having a real impact.

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Our thanks to our associate education experts Julia Skinner and Pete Crockett, and to Dr Asha Patel, CEO and clinical psychologist of [Innovating Minds](#), Cait Cooper of the [Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](#), and Rebecca Kaloo, co-chair of [Charles Dickens Primary School](#), who helped us with this article.

Help your school develop a wellbeing culture

It's unlikely that wellbeing initiatives will work in your school unless you have this underlying culture.

How can our board start to develop this wellbeing culture?

- 1. Work with your school leaders on what to 'keep, improve, start and stop' (KISS).** This'll help you think strategically about how to build back better and embed wellbeing in your school. Find out more about how to do this [here](#).
- 2. Have wellbeing as an agenda item.** The start of developing your culture is having it on your radar, and being willing to discuss staff and pupil wellbeing regularly within your meetings.
- 3. Include wellbeing as part of your vision and values, and your school improvement plan (SIP).** This will allow wellbeing to dovetail with all aspects of your school's provision - if everything links to your vision and SIP, your culture will naturally embed across all areas of your school.
- 4. Apply a wellbeing lens to everything you do.** This includes:
 - Making sure your school's policies have wellbeing in mind. For example, when you're approving your marking policy and behaviour policy, ask 'how is wellbeing reflected in this policy?' or 'how does this policy impact staff/pupil wellbeing?'
 - Asking wellbeing questions at every touchpoint - for example, if you're on a maths learning walk, you can still ask pupils and staff 'how are you?'

Find out how to take your first steps in developing a wellbeing culture [strategically](#), and how to protect [governors' wellbeing](#) too.

What to bear in mind before you suggest a wellbeing initiative

Understand that:

- Everyone needs to be willing to support a wellbeing culture
 - Staff and governors need to be equally excited about providing the resources your school needs to make a lasting cultural shift towards wellbeing - this is both in terms of time and money
- Your school leaders will be in the driving seat

You can suggest initiatives, but your school leaders will decide whether to implement them, and how to do it



- You can **suggest** and draw your headteacher's attention to an initiative in this article, but it'll be for them to decide whether your school should implement it - as always, your role will be strategic rather than operational (see more below)
- Not all wellbeing initiatives will be right for your school
 - For example, a 'no marking' policy might actually make things more difficult for your staff. It's important to recognise that your school leaders need to be clear on what problems your school has before solving them. Your school leaders can carry out staff/pupil surveys or a wellbeing audit to help them do this - find out more in the section 'Find out how staff are doing right now' [here](#)

You'll monitor wellbeing initiatives

Your role is still strategic, so you'll **monitor** initiatives to make sure they're having an impact and show how wellbeing is being embedded in your school culture.

You'll do this by:

1. Asking questions during board meetings (before, during and after your school leaders implement an initiative)

For example:

- What is the evidence that this initiative is needed?
- Will this initiative require additional resources? (Time and money)
- What is the expected impact?
- Does the resource you require justify the expected impact?
- What data/evidence will we expect to see?
- What progress has/is being made towards this initiative and our wider objectives/vision?

2. Going on learning walks to see the initiative in practice

This is so you can see what impact initiatives are having in school.

3. Looking at data

In order to monitor that initiatives are having an impact, you need a way to quantify it.

The sources of data you can expect to see are:

- Surveys - staff, parent, pupil
 - Positive or negative comments can give you and your school leaders insight into how individuals feel about an initiative and if they think it's working/has worked
- The number and severity of behaviour incidents
 - If wellbeing initiatives are giving the opportunity for pupils to understand and express their feelings more, and staff are able to recognise potential mental health problems, it's likely your school will see fewer behaviour incidents as a result of frustration or lack of understanding (since behaviour can be a form of communication)
- The number of exclusions
 - This follows on from a reduction in behaviour incidents - with fewer incidents, you should have fewer exclusions
- Staff and pupil absence rates
 - If staff and pupils feel happy and healthy, they're less likely to be off sick (for example due to anxiety, stress or burnout)
- Your school's HR spend
 - If fewer staff are off sick, this can reduce the amount of HR spend your school is using on supply staff
- Conversations senior leaders have had with staff and pupils
 - For example, you want to know if a new staff workload initiative has been effective. Your headteacher reports that they spoke to 5 members of staff who all said they've seen a huge reduction in workload since your school introduced the initiative. One staff member said they haven't needed to take work home with them since the initiative started

Example: Charles Dickens Primary School

Wellbeing initiatives:

- **Marking:** Charles Dickens Primary School gives pupils feedback live during a lesson, rather than giving long next steps in their books. This has reduced staff workload as they no longer spend hours marking at the end of the day. If your school is a member of The Key for School Leaders, let your headteacher know about our case studies on reducing marking workload [here](#) and [here](#)
- **School reports to parents:** the school re-designed its school reports to be much simpler. The new design sets out how a child is doing, what their key next steps are and a positive comment. These reports are shorter and take less time for staff to complete
- **Staff time off in term time:** the school gives its staff 2 half days off a year during term time to spend however they like - for example, if they want to see their child in a school play. This could work for your school if it has flexibility within its staffing to cover this time internally (e.g. if your school is more than a 1 form intake or is able to share staff within a multi-academy trust/federation)

"In the short term, prioritise the 'big hits' - workload is a good place to start"
- Rebecca Kaloo, co-chair of Charles Dickens Primary School

- **Pupil wellbeing:** the school uses the [RULER initiative](#). This approach teaches pupils about mental health and wellbeing, which helps them to become more emotionally literate

What did the governing board do and what was the impact?

These initiatives are highly operational, so the board wasn't involved in actually implementing them.

Click below to see how the board was involved in the:

Staff-focused initiatives

The governing board made sure staff workload was included within the school's [school improvement plan](#) (SIP). For example, the SIP includes an objective to develop the English team and build capacity to give staff time to develop their subject knowledge more widely.

Impact

Staff survey data and conversations during governor visits were encouraging, and staff governors also fed back to the board on how positively these initiatives were received. The school also continues to have high staff retention and low staff turnover.

Pupil progress and outcome data also remained strong - this showed that staff wellbeing initiatives (such as changes to marking) didn't have a negative impact on pupils. There were also no additional staffing costs for the 2 half days given to staff as school leaders arranged internal cover in advance.

Pupil-focused initiatives

The board:

- **Monitored the initiative to see how it was being embedded in practice.** For example, while governors were on a learning walk focusing specifically on language and vocabulary, they could see that the language of emotion and wellbeing (as part of the RULER initiative) appeared during English lessons and as pupils were reading. It was clear that the initiative was not a separate topic, but referenced throughout the curriculum
- **Communicated the approach to parents.** The initiative was shared with parents through the school newsletter. This also dovetailed with another governing board priority of improving communication with parents
- **Ensured pupil wellbeing was part of the school values and school improvement plan.** For example, [social intelligence](#) for pupils is part of the values of Charles Dickens Primary School. Within a previous SIP the school had targets about improving pupil leadership as part of this. Governors would then ask questions during board meetings about what progress the school had made towards this objective, and they would ask pupils on school visits what the benefits had been for them

Impact

There was a decrease in both the number of serious behavioural issues and low-level disruptive behaviour.

The number of exclusions also reduced over time and are now consistently low.

The examples in this section came from Rebecca Kaloo, co-chair of [Charles Dickens Primary School](#).

Example: Young People's Academy

The [Young People's Academy](#), a secondary special school, implemented a whole-school approach to wellbeing through the support of [Innovating Minds](#).

Some of the initiatives Innovating Minds helped to put in place at the Young People's Academy included:

- Working with students in 1-to-1 sessions
- Supporting staff members to feel more confident in talking about mental health, and recognising early signs of mental health problems - this helped to create a cultural shift to become more aware and sensitive to students' needs
- Facilitating reflective practice sessions with staff members so they could reflect on their own practice. This helped to shift a perception that some children were 'attention seeking'
- Making sure each classroom had a space that provided a calm sensory environment (e.g. beanbags, sensory objects) to support children to feel calm and safe, so they didn't have to leave the classroom

What did the governing board do?

Governors weren't involved in the operational implementation of this approach (this is as it should be).

But, for the approach to be successful the governing board had to support the initiative from the start, and the board was frequently updated through reports on the school's progress.



What was the impact?

- The Young People's Academy saw a 68% reduction in high, medium and low risk behaviours from pupils - and a 90% decrease in high-risk behaviours (such as violence)
- Staff are more reflective and less dismissive - there's more of a focus on understanding students' needs and actions

You can find out more about the case study [here](#) (see about half-way down the page).

Dr Asha Patel, CEO and clinical psychologist of [Innovating Minds](#), gave us the example in this section.

"Don't see this as extra work. Your school will embed wellbeing within the systems it already has" - Dr Asha Patel, CEO and clinical psychologist of [Innovating Minds](#)

Other initiatives that might work for your school

- A staff wellbeing committee - school leaders would set this up to allow staff to focus on different problems, such as workload. You'd ask the committee to keep you updated on its progress, and you could ask questions about the committee's work during full board meetings
- Headteacher mentoring/supervision - the role of the headteacher can be very lonely, so make sure your headteacher has someone they can emotionally offload to - this is likely to be someone external. Find out more about supporting your headteacher's wellbeing [here](#)
- Staff mentoring/peer-to-peer support - school leaders would organise this to allow all staff members the chance to step back and discuss how they feel, in meetings which have a pastoral focus. This could be organised internally (using staff in the school or across a trust/federation) or your school might use an external provider. You'd ask to be kept updated on how the sessions are going

Julia Skinner, Cait Cooper and Pete Crockett gave us these examples.

If your school is a member of The Key for School Leaders, your headteacher can get advice on how to create a staff wellbeing action plan in [this article](#).

Sources

Our thanks to the following for their help with this article:

- Julia Skinner is a former headteacher and national leader of governance. She has chaired in a MAT, a federation of special schools and numerous maintained schools
- Pete Crockett is a retired special school headteacher who, prior to that, worked as a senior leader and SENCO in mainstream education. He has extensive governor experience, having served on governing boards as a staff, headteacher and co-opted governor. He has particular expertise in SEND, school leadership support and governance
- Dr Asha Patel, CEO and clinical psychologist of [Innovating Minds](#). Innovating Minds provides training for designated mental health leads to implement a whole-school approach to mental health. Via its online platform (EduPod), self-assessment audits, action plans and professional mental health resources are accessible for schools
- Cait Cooper of the [Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families](#). Its [Schools in Mind](#) network provides expert guidance and resources around mental health and wellbeing
- Rebecca Kaloo, co-chair of [Charles Dickens Primary School](#)

Last review

This article hasn't had a review yet.

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- > [Monitoring and supporting staff workload and wellbeing](#)
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