

What matters most for pupil wellbeing?

In 2023/24, we revisited **7 secondary schools** across Wales as part of our evaluation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing. Based on what young people told us during our first visits, we asked the same young people to rank 14 items in terms of importance to pupil wellbeing. Below is a summary of what they told us.

The top five

'Friends' emerged as the most important factor for wellbeing, with half of the groups placing it at the top of their list. Participants explained that friends were the first port of call for emotional support and a listening ear, as well as providing a relationship in which they can be authentic and have fun.

1

The second most highly ranked influence on wellbeing was having an **'Adult you can speak to'**. Over three quarters of the young people placed this in the top half of their list, explaining the importance of having someone they can turn to when in need. This was both in terms of feeling safe and supported at school, and knowing that concerns would be acted upon.

2

The third most important item was **'Feeling like what you say makes a difference'**. It was important to young people that pupil voice groups were taken seriously by both staff and peers, and that feedback to school leaders was heard and responded to. Lack of response to feedback was experienced as frustrating and disempowering.

3

Having a **'Manageable amount of schoolwork, including homework'** emerged as the fourth most important item, though this varied across groups. For those that ranked it highly, experiences of stress were associated with the timing and spacing of homework from different classes, rather than the amount. Some also referenced how homework interfered with wellbeing-boosting extracurricular activities.

4

'Having your achievements recognised' was also valued very differently across the groups of young people we spoke to. Those who ranked it highly explained how encouragement from teachers and having messages sent home helped to build confidence, self-esteem and motivation to give their best. It was perceived to be an important part of a culture that noticed and valued its community members.

5

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The middle six

Young people were fairly divided in their opinions of the importance of six of the items ranking in the middle of the list, which included **'Feeling like staff listen to pupils'**, **'School counsellor'**, **'Access to a range of activities'**, **'A quiet space to calm down / relax'**, **'Connections between home and school'**, and **'Toilets you feel safe in'**. This variation tended to be based on factors such as personal experience (e.g. not having had need for a school counsellor) or personality (e.g. preferring to decompress with friends rather than in a quiet space). One group emphasised that these items were still important, but not as much as some of the others.



The bottom three

12



13



14



Pupils consistently ranked **'Headteacher'** and **'Head of Year'** low on their lists of what is important when considering pupil wellbeing. Most participants felt that members of the Senior Leadership Team were **too far removed from their day to day life**.

There were some schools where **Heads of Year** were valued more highly due to having a closer relationship with pupils. One pupil also acknowledged that **leadership teams ultimately shaped all other items on the list**, and in that sense have the greatest impact.