

# Teacher perceptions of **changes in** and **challenges to** wellbeing in schools

In 2023, we interviewed 36 school staff as part of our evaluation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing and asked them **how pupil wellbeing needs had changed since Covid**. While most pupils were functioning well, there were some clear challenges. Below is a summary of what **Primary School** staff said:

## **Developmental changes:**

Staff said that they had seen an **increase in developmental issues** in some of their younger learners. This included things like speech and language difficulties, as well as an increase in challenges with teeth brushing and toilet training.



## **Social changes:**

Staff discussed an increase in learners who were finding it **more difficult to work and communicate in groups**. Others said that more learners seemed to have lost confidence in speaking up in class in front of others.



## **Mental and emotional wellbeing:**

Staff said that **more learners were describing themselves as experiencing anxiety at school** in general or in certain – often crowded – situations. More were experiencing **challenges in emotional regulation and sensory overload**, needing support, time and space to manage this.



# Teacher perceptions of **changes in** and **challenges to** wellbeing in schools (cont.)

Staff were asked about **challenges in responding to these changes**. These are some of the key issues they highlighted:

## Space:

Some schools were creating 'safe' or quiet spaces for children who needed time away from the class situation but this was often a challenge due to **lack of funds and/or space in the school building** to do this. We were given several examples of staff paying for resources for these spaces themselves.



## Training and support:

Some staff were concerned over **not having training to deal with more complex issues** i.e. mental health – this led to worries over giving the 'wrong' response. While all had connections to specialist services outside school, these often had limited capacity and long waiting times, meaning **schools have to hold more issues internally for longer**.



## Time:

All staff said that **lack of time** was a challenge. In schools with smaller pastoral teams, their time was significantly impacted by increased demand. In some schools, **teaching assistants were having to deal with more complex issues** as a result. Several schools felt that they were **forced to be reactive** to deal with what was in front of them, rather than having time to plan provision.

Staff also discussed **managing competing agendas** alongside learner needs, including changes to the curriculum and delivery of other policy initiatives.

