

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 **Secondary School** staff said:

Emotional and mental wellbeing:

More learners were **describing themselves as experiencing anxiety at school** in general or in certain situations, such as particular lessons or crowded spaces like lunch halls. This meant **more requests for time-outs** in wellbeing hubs or other separate spaces and for **hybrid timetables**, with some learning done at home.



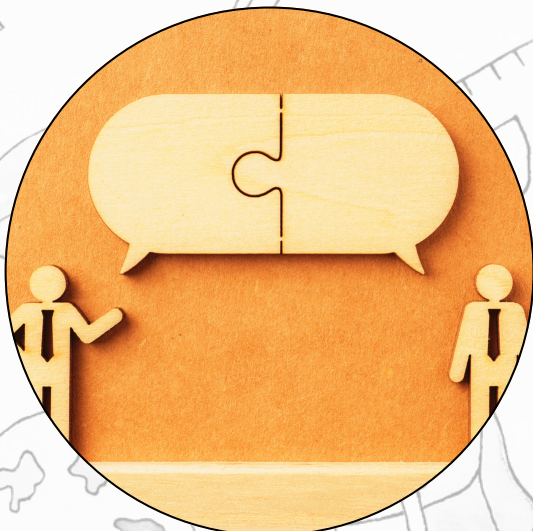
Attendance:

Learner attendance was generally lower than pre-pandemic. Staff discussed this as related to mental wellbeing but also said that, for some learners and their families, they felt that attendance was just seen as less necessary or important than before.



Family engagement:

Some reported better engagement with families, sometimes as a result of the regular check-ins and wellbeing calls they had maintained during periods of lockdown, which were felt to have improved relationships. However others said that **some families had become more disengaged from school** as a result of the absence of in-person contact.



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 and time:

Finding space for learners who needed time out of the class situation was often a challenge due to **lack of funds and/or space** in the school building to do this. **All staff said that lack of time was a challenge**, particularly pastoral staff who are dealing with higher caseloads.

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



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**.



Managing expectations:

While increased awareness of mental wellbeing support was recognised as positive, both in encouraging learners to seek support and in reducing stigma, there were also concerns over **increases in expectations of both learners and families over what schools were able to ‘fix’**. Concerns were expressed over an increase in **self-diagnosis and unrealistic expectations** of what kind of support could be offered, putting additional strain on school staff and resources.

