

School leadership and governors: improving staff wellbeing together.

Headteachers and other members of school leadership teams (SLT), [alongside effective governors](#), are crucial to creating and maintaining a positive culture concerning staff mental health and wellbeing in a school. They are also most at risk of suffering from a lack of support in this area. Governors are best able to provide support around mental health and wellbeing and work with them to ensure policies and culture are delivering for all staff, including leadership. It is therefore critical that governors approach the subject bearing several things in mind:

Staff wellbeing cannot be another burden

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated what was an already stress-filled role. However well-intentioned, if governors set about addressing staff wellbeing by making more demands of their SLT without easing burdens and requirements elsewhere, they may find themselves simply exacerbating the issue. This also minimises the likelihood of SLT and other staff embracing the challenge. Consider the KISS method – “Keep, Improve, Start, Stop” – to analyse what changes need to occur and make sure that if more is asked on the wellbeing front, less is demanded elsewhere.

The needs of SLT must be incorporated at all times

SLT are not only under unique stress by virtue of their position but are also most likely to sacrifice their own needs to better serve their staff. Whilst admirable in the longer term, this is not sustainable or constructive. Governors should be checking on the wellbeing of SLT and ensuring that they benefit from any and all staff wellbeing policies, procedures and provisions too.

Any action requested should be agreed upon and reasonable

The board may ask some action of the SLT, depending on the circumstances of the school. This could be developing policies, measuring and reporting on staff wellbeing, or enacting specific programmes or training. How and when these occur should not be mandated, but discussed and agreed with SLT to allow sufficient time to address the issue without being overwhelming. The need is urgent and governors are understandably motivated to get to grips with the issue of staff wellbeing, but an overly-ambitious or aggressive approach can do more harm than good.



WELLBEING
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The impact of COVID-19 on schools will be long-lasting

The pandemic will leave lingering issues for schools to face, regardless of when the immediate effect and the response eases. These issues could range from funding shortfalls due to COVID-related expenditure, confusion and uncertainty regarding assessments, or when and how OFSTED inspections will resume. Responsibility for managing or preparing for these falls largely on SLT and means many of their more regular responsibilities become even more burdensome. Governors should constantly seek ways to support SLT in this aspect of their role, as well as ways in which administrative obligations can be eased or removed.

Retention of SLT is critical to the long-term success of the school

Between the inherent stresses of the role and the pressures of the pandemic, there are worrying signs that significant numbers of headteachers and senior staff are considering leaving the profession. This is particularly apparent among those closer to retirement age (see Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index) and would be catastrophic for any school. Any board failing to address the wellbeing of their school leadership and staff runs the risk of facing the difficulties and costs of replacing them.

By keeping these points in mind, governors can help ensure discussions with school leadership are positive. Governors can also ensure impactful, sustainable changes to staff wellbeing will be implemented and supported by all involved.

Thanks to the [National Association of Head Teachers](#) for their contributions to this article.

