



WELLBEING GOVERNORS



Governors for Schools Wellbeing Report:
One Year On September 2022



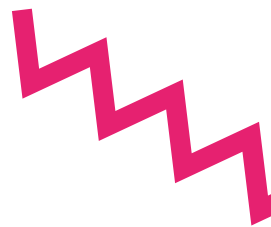
Our findings



What the experts are saying

What other boards are doing

What you can do



Our mission



Additional reading and research

Summary

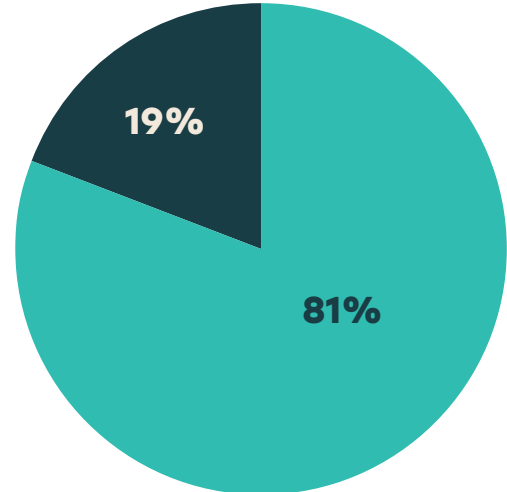
This report is designed to help the governance community reflect on issues surrounding wellbeing in schools. As we explored in our Wellbeing Governor campaign, mental health and wellbeing support must remain a cornerstone of school life.



The school leadership recruitment and retention crisis shows no signs of easing as staff continue to struggle with factors harming their wellbeing. While the UK government has lifted the vast majority of COVID-19 restrictions, schools continue to grapple with the long-term impacts of the pandemic, such as learning gaps and continued staff sickness. Beyond COVID-19, many staff struggle with pressures surrounding pupil outcomes, workload, attendance, school inspections, the cost of living crisis, spiralling fuel costs, and parental demands. Dissatisfaction surrounding pay scales and academisation is also common, while struggling support services are unable to offer leaders the help they require.

Wellbeing is not a COVID-specific issue, and boards must ensure any effective wellbeing measures initially introduced in response to the challenges of the pandemic don't wane over time.

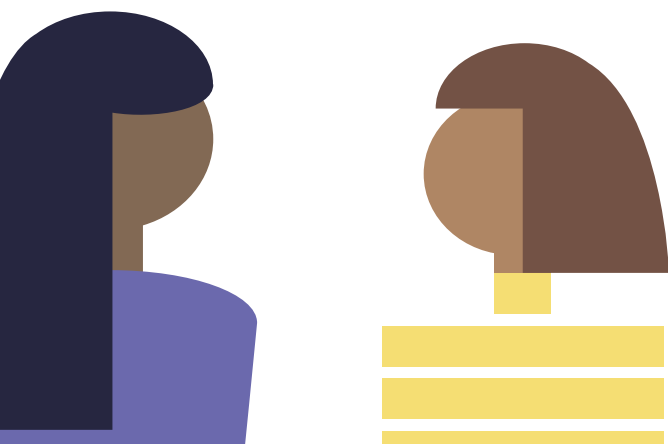
Wellbeing in numbers

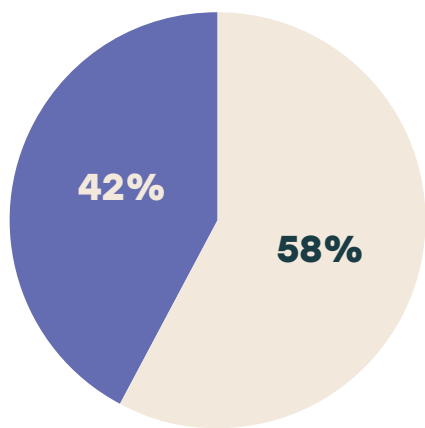
Boards have become much more conscious of the importance of school leaders' wellbeing over the past couple of years. A recent GovernorHub survey of over 4,000 governors shows:



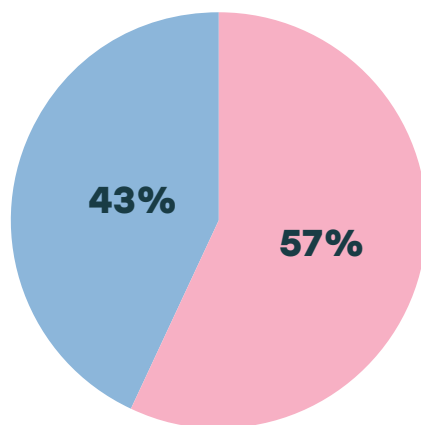
-  A lot or some tracking
-  No tracking or don't know

81% say their boards track school and trust leaders' wellbeing and workload.





increased tracking of wellbeing and workload
decreased or stayed the same



concerned
unconcerned / neither concerned nor unconcerned

58% of governors say the pandemic prompted their boards to track leaders' workload and wellbeing more closely.

57% have concerns about the wellbeing and workload of school and trust leaders.

The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) December 2021 report, *Fixing the Leadership Crisis*, says school leaders are burnt out and leaving the profession, with fewer staff members prepared to take on senior roles.

A 2021 NAHT survey identified that 53% of respondents who were not currently headteachers do not aspire to headship, up from 40% in 2016. When asked to summarise their experiences as school leaders over the previous year in a single word, the top three responses were "exhausting", "challenging", and "stressful", mirroring the 2020 survey findings.

What the experts are saying



Sinéad Mc Brearty is the CEO for Education Support, a charity that supports teacher and education staff wellbeing. She states:

"We can no longer afford to ignore the level of stress, exhaustion and burnout experienced by staff in our schools. Starting from an already low base of mental wellbeing, the pandemic has put additional strain on our emotionally depleted school workforce. No one can do their best work when they feel like this, and ultimately the pupils' learning suffers.

We welcome this report by Governors' for Schools. Governors have an important role to play in creating a culture that supports staff wellbeing. You can start by having open conversations about the state of staff wellbeing, and how it can be improved. We urge you to ensure that school staff have access to an EAP or are aware of our 24/7 helpline, and that your school leaders prioritise their own wellbeing by accessing our fully funded tailored support programme."



HEAD REST

Kenny Frederick works for Headrest, a free wellbeing telephone support service for headteachers and multi-academy trust CEOs. She explains:

Read more of Kenny's insights into the wellbeing of school leaders, and how governors can help [here](#).

"We started Headrest after noticing many headteachers using social media to talk about their struggles during the pandemic. Headrest is a helpline run by four experienced headteachers keen to provide confidential support to educators in difficult situations. School leaders can leave us a message and we'll always get back to them on the same day. It's been a very difficult time for many. We've listened to people experiencing a range of issues, including family breakups, breakdowns, and even suicidal ideation.

I'm worried about the lack of support for these headteachers, as many feel they need to put on a front at school, only to go home and cry. So many have said they're leaving and many have handed in their notices already."

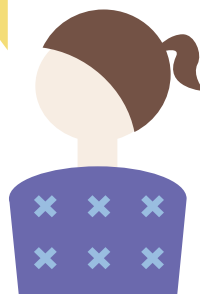


Improving children's mental health

Annie Evans, Clinical Lead of Mental Health & Wellbeing Programmes at children's charity Place2Be, told us:

Read more about wellbeing concerns for children and young people, and how governors can help [here](#).

"Poor mental health and wellbeing have represented a growing problem in schools since well before the pandemic. As we start the new academic year, the cost of living crisis is also a real cause for concern, as we know poverty and mental health are strongly linked. Stress, uncertainty, trauma, illness, and vulnerability are taking a cumulative toll on wellbeing across the whole school community. The need to improve mental health provisions within our schools is greater than ever."



What other boards are doing

Julie

Julie Palmer, Chair of Governors at Howden Junior School in East Yorkshire, told us about the benefits of her board's decision to hire an independent coach for the headteacher:

"While coaches come at a cost, there are very reasonable options available and our coach has returned fantastic results. Encouraging the headteacher to find a coach who suited him represented a great way to support his wellbeing and allow him to adjust to his new role. The local authority mentor, on the other hand, was understandably focused on the school improvement aspect of the role."

Julie and the board:

- Used the apprenticeship levy to enable the headteacher to do a master's degree.
- Introduced a wellbeing day, whereby staff can book off a day during the school year at a time that suits them.
- Increased flexible working options for staff.

Vinny

Vinny Wagjiani, Chair of Governors at Leechpool Primary School in West Sussex, spoke to us about the importance of developing a culture of openness and support with the headteacher:

"I would encourage all governors to help develop open and honest relationships by leaning into vulnerability. If you are open with others, they're more likely to be open with you. Building reciprocal relationships in this way will encourage senior leaders to articulate their worries and give governors the information they need to offer relevant wellbeing support."

Vinny and the board:

- Introduced coaching for the headteacher, who can, in turn, provide a coaching style of leadership to the staff.
- Developed a proactive approach to succession planning, identifying opportunities to recognise and develop staff potential.
- Kept introduction of new non-statutory policies to a minimum to ensure staff feel trusted to carry out their roles and aren't burdened with unnecessary bureaucracy.

Claire

Claire Monk, Chair of Governors at St Anne's CE Primary School in Worcestershire, emphasised the importance of providing the headteacher and staff with training and support to cope with difficult situations. She noted that cuts to services and mental health support for young people require staff to provide innovative interventions while children remain on long waiting lists to receive specialised support:

"We know we need to meet children's needs, but governors must protect staff to ensure everyone's wellbeing is considered. We want staff to know we take their wellbeing seriously so everyone in the school feels supported."

Claire and the board:

- Introduced a link governor role for nurture and wellbeing who monitors support provisions for both pupils and staff.
- Increased opportunities for the headteacher to undertake flexible working hours.
- Used extensive data to support monitoring of wellbeing across the school.

We'll publish the [full interviews](#) with Julie, Vinny and Claire throughout the autumn term. Follow us to receive notifications when we release these insights.

What you can do

Review policies and procedures to ensure the wellbeing of all school stakeholders, including headteachers, is adequately represented

For example, policies that don't require contact between schools and headteachers on long-term sick leave may intensify stress if headteachers don't have access to support resources, such as a mentor. To rectify this, schools could adopt more flexible approaches that protect headteachers from work burdens while providing necessary support pathways.

Governor action point

If your board hasn't reviewed wellbeing policies recently, you may want to:

1. Form a working group to review school policies and prioritise those most likely to benefit staff wellbeing. While these policies will differ from school to school, they may include:
 - The complaints policy
 - Capability policies
 - Staff discipline procedures
 - The flexible working policy
2. Review the policies and consider whether support options are clear and stakeholders know who to contact for help. You must also consider whether this support addresses the wellbeing of all involved, including the headteacher.
3. Suggest amendments or create an appendix with further information such as links to support agencies. Present your suggestions to the whole governing board for final review and agreement.



Assess which policies support wellbeing and help manage workload (and which do not)

You must establish which policies help headteachers fulfil their responsibilities, as well as those which require amendments or could be eradicated entirely. While many boards acted quickly to refine policies in response to the pandemic, it's vital you continue meeting regularly to review and update leaders' duties.

Boards must be prepared to adjust their expectations surrounding long-term communication procedures between board members and the headteacher. For example, headteachers may wish to provide verbal updates at board meetings rather than formal written reports, as this could positively impact their workload and wellbeing.

Governor action point

1. Read more from the [DfE Collection: Reducing school workload](#)
2. Consider asking the headteacher questions such as:

Which policies are most beneficial to the wellbeing of the senior leadership team (SLT), including you? What measures are helping to keep your workload manageable?

- What are the measurable impacts of these policies?
- Can they continue in the long run?
- Are these short-term measures?
- Do you require financial provisions to allow these measures to continue?
- Can they be replicated in any other areas of the school?

What are the biggest demands on your time or stressors in your role?

- Are they ongoing or short-term demands?
- Is it necessary, manageable, or realistic for them to continue?
- Can you delegate or drop any responsibilities?
- What kind of support would mitigate the burden of these stressors?

How can the board support you further?

- Do we need to review the budget for wellbeing and professional development?
- Which board and governance-related activities take up most of your time? Can we modify, delegate, or drop them?
- Can we make wellbeing a standing item on meeting agendas to ensure we regularly address related concerns?



Familiarise yourself with the headteacher's professional journey and support their continuing professional development (CPD)

Some headteachers are promoted into their role very quickly and may not have the requisite support to adapt to their role – an experience they may find overwhelming.

The board should reassure the headteacher that they will receive any additional training, support, and learning opportunities they require to succeed in their role. You must factor this support into the budget and ensure it is differentiated from staff-run CPD.

Conversations about training and support are often sensitive. Many headteachers feel pressured to appear resilient in the face of adversity. As such, they may worry that asking for development opportunities will make their work appear suboptimal. To combat this, try fostering an environment of support, respect, and openness wherever possible.

Similarly, review provisions for other SLT members' CPD, ensuring their career development is adequately supported.

Governor action point

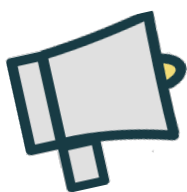
1. Put staff CPD on your next meeting agenda if it hasn't been discussed recently. When discussing this point, ascertain how current CPD provisions meet the needs of the headteacher, SLT, and the wider workforce. Conduct these conversations in a supportive tone that avoids focusing on the headteacher's potential weaknesses, as this may cause anxiety surrounding their abilities and could be demotivating.

A good example: "The board supports career development for all staff, including the headteacher, to encourage continuous learning and innovation. We welcome interest from staff in specialised programmes for senior leaders and will ensure there is a dedicated budget for this."

A bad example: "We think you might benefit from doing some more training on being a headteacher."

2. Approach the headteacher's appraisal process with wellbeing in mind. Those who make up the committee should have had relevant training and support to conduct the process effectively. For example, they must know how to set SMART targets.

Conduct appraisals with the contemporary educational landscape in mind. While COVID-19 lockdowns may be over, many staff and pupils will continue to struggle with the effects of the pandemic for months or years, affecting standard appraisal metrics.



Consider hiring an external consultant to support Continuing Professional Development and the Designated Safeguarding Lead

Some headteachers may feel overwhelmed by internal and external pressures and need an independent perspective to alleviate ongoing problems. An independent consultant will address mentorship gaps in current school provisions and help improve workload and effectiveness.

If your board and headteacher agree to hire an external consultant, the headteacher must have the freedom to choose the consultant themselves to avoid impartiality concerns. You must make reasonable allowances for this service when making budgeting decisions, even if resources seem strained. After all, increased staff sick leave or high staff turnover will detrimentally impact both the budget and the vision the board and the school ultimately want to deliver.

Headteachers and other members of the SLT may also benefit from support or external supervision in their role as designated safeguarding leads (DSL). This role carries significant responsibilities and requires specific knowledge of traumatic events pupils have experienced. Many staff are understandably affected by such accounts, which can take a serious toll on their wellbeing. While you must be mindful of confidentiality requirements, staff may need support to cope with this role.

Understand the impact of budget cuts on staffing, roles, and responsibilities

As staff numbers decrease due to career changes or budget cuts, staffing structures may feature more regularly on board agendas. It's important to have conversations about how staffing changes will impact provision requirements and whether some school activities need to stop altogether. Asking the remaining staff to absorb new tasks on top of their existing workload could cause unnecessary stress. Your board may also wish to discuss whether to invest in additional training and support such as higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs).

As mentioned previously, you must carefully incorporate appropriate support and time for training and development into the wider budget.

Governor action point

You might want to consider asking questions like:

- Are there any current concerns about the staffing structure or changes you are anticipating?
- How will these changes impact pupils, staff, and the budget?
- What does this mean for your wellbeing and workload?
- What can be changed, delegated, or dropped to allow the best quality provision to be delivered?
- Do you need to review the budget to support these changes?




Understand what flexible working can mean in your school

The board may wish to implement a flexible working policy to embed wellbeing within the school culture. While Department of Education (DfE) guidance notes that flexible working arrangements should not be introduced to address excessive workloads, it can have a positive impact on wellbeing and staff retention .

Research also indicates that staff members' perceptions of flexible working are largely influenced by those of senior leaders . For example, staff are more likely to feel confident making reasonable adjustment requests if senior leaders make use of flexible working provisions.

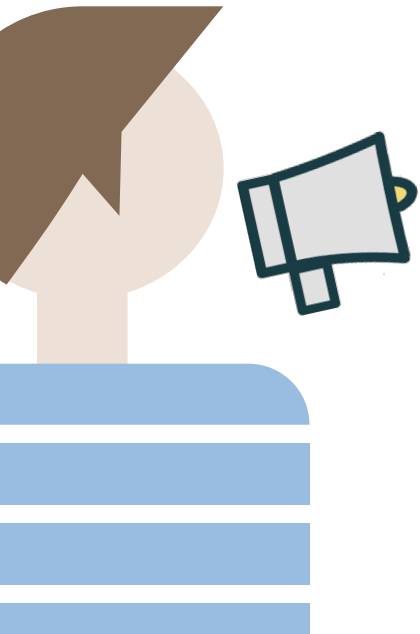
Governor action point

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1. You can access further resources from the DfE Guidance on Flexible working in schools to understand the main considerations that impact flexible working requests.
 2. Review the flexible working policy to ensure it is fit for purpose for the school and staff in the current situation.
 3. Where requests have been granted, ask questions to gather insights into what worked well and could be replicated, and what adjustments may be necessary to grant further requests. Remember to remain strategic with your line of questioning, rather than operational.

For example, “Does the budget support purchase and maintenance of the equipment required to support staff working remotely?”, rather than “Will they take any books home to mark?”

Review the vision to consider whether it incorporates the needs of the staff and headteacher, as well as pupils and families

Governor action point

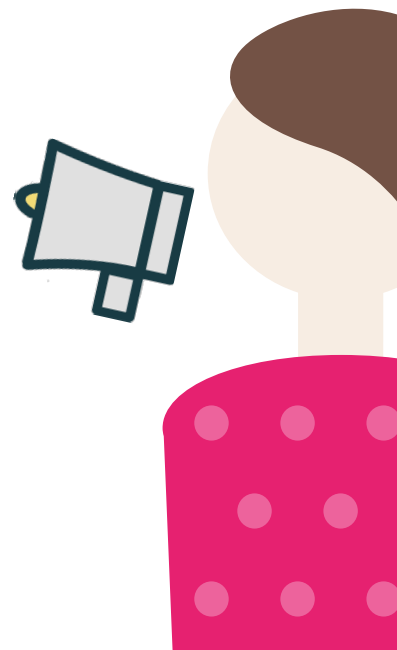
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1. Find out when the board last reviewed the school's vision
 2. Make time during a board meeting (or plan a working group) to consider whether the vision is still right for the school community and whether it caters for all stakeholders. For example, does the vision encourage all members of the school community to embrace learning and be healthy or is it only specific to pupils?

Try and understand the demands of internal and external stakeholders headteachers must contend with, recognising that governors are only one part of this

Governors do an important job, and maintaining a positive and effective relationship with the headteacher is vital. However, other stakeholders also hold the headteacher and school to account in specific ways, including parents, School Improvement Partners (SIPs), Ofsted, and the local authority or the academy trust. Remember that governors won't be the only ones asking important questions of senior leaders.

Governor action point

1. When carrying out your governance role, carefully consider the purpose of any questions or visits you carry out. If these questions or visits don't relate to the strategic functions of governance, reflect on whether they're appropriate. If your question is irrelevant or unhelpful, it will simply add to the headteacher's stressful workload.
2. Consider timelines and scheduling by giving headteachers as much notice as possible about requests for visits or questions you wish to raise at meetings. A board meeting may not be the only important appointment the headteacher has in a given week.
3. Consider whether any meetings or parts of meetings can happen without the headteacher present.



Signpost to Independent support

There are several organisations available to help headteachers and other school staff who feel overwhelmed, including:

- [Headrest](#) (specifically for headteachers and CEOs)
- [Education Support](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)

This list is not exhaustive and the board should encourage the headteacher and other staff members to access support services as needed.

Governors for Schools' mission

Governors for Schools continues to recruit skilled volunteers, helping them become effective governors through a range of training and development materials. Visit the Governors for Schools website to find out more.

Additional reading and research

The following materials may also benefit your understanding of wellbeing in education and how you can make a difference:

- [Pressures on Middle Leaders in School](#) – Education Support in collaboration with Public First, June 2022
- [Annual Headteacher Wellbeing Report 2022](#)- Headrest, January 2022
- [The School Leadership Supply Crisis](#) – NAHT, March 2021
- [Fixing The Leadership Crisis: Time For Change](#) – NAHT, December 2021
- [Social, emotional and mental wellbeing in primary and secondary education](#) - NICE guideline [NG223] 06 July 2022



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