Looking after teacher wellbeing

Supporting you to be your best

Education Support Partnership

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In the current educational environment, where schools are trying to increase student attainment with a diminishing budget, teacher wellbeing may be overlooked as a 'nice to have' rather than as essential.

But, from an organisational perspective, employee wellbeing is an important factor in quality, performance and productivity. Wellbeing is strongly related to work stress, a key player in employee absence. Demotivated staff are often disengaged, do not enjoy their jobs and eventually leave.

The education sector are currently facing a recruitment and retention crisis. Many teachers feel overworked, under-appreciated and stressed. A recent survey by *The Guardian* newspaper found that teachers regularly work 60 hour weeks. Many teachers' work-life balance is non-existent, their relationships outside of work are suffering, and their passion for the profession is waning.

It's therefore never been more important to focus on and ensure the wellbeing of teaching staff. As well as greater staff retention levels, less sick leave, and lower supply teacher costs, research has shown that a teacher's happiness levels has a knock on effect for students.

For example, a 2009 study compared students from 'poor' and 'non-poor' socio-economic groups and their attainment at school. Researchers found that if a poor student had effective teachers and a non-poor student had ineffective teachers for their GCSEs, then the gap in GCSE outcomes would reduce.

It would therefore seem likely that higher levels of teacher health and wellbeing would result in improved student educational outcomes. A teacher with high job satisfaction, positive morale and who is healthy should be more likely to teach lessons which are creative, challenging and effective, leading to students doing better in exams.

Why does teacher wellbeing matter?

A teacher with low health and wellbeing, experiencing high levels of stress or who is ill at work, will not perform to the best of their ability.

This could be as a result of different factors. For example, a teacher with low health and wellbeing may lack the energy required to deliver a lesson which effectively pushes children to succeed.

A teacher who is ill but at work may find it more difficult to manage poor pupil behaviour, leading to higher levels of disruption for the rest of the class. Additionally, a teacher who is struggling to cope with stress is more likely to be absent from work.

Teachers are one of the many factors that may be associated with a student's educational attainment. Other factors are the student's home and family life, the school as a whole, their peers and the classes they are placed in.

Research has shown that having a good teacher has a big difference on student exam results. A 2009 study found that this finding is especially pertinent in terms of redressing the inequalities in attainment between students from 'poor' and 'non-poor' socioeconomic groups, finding that if a poor student had effective teachers and a non-poor student had ineffective teachers for their GCSEs, then their gap in GCSE outcomes would reduce.

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What has an impact on wellbeing?

Past research has identified six aspects of work which, if managed poorly, could create stress in the workplace:

▶ Demands – such as workload and work environment

▶ Control – a person's own influence over how their job is carried out

▶ Support – from colleagues, line-manager and organisation

▶ Relationships – to reduce conflict and deal with unacceptable behaviour

▶ Role – understanding of the job content and expectations

▶ Change – how change is managed in the organisation

An employer's attitude to workplace health is likely to depend on the culture of the organisation and their motivation. Evidence has shown that being in good quality work is good for your physical and mental health, resulting in better self-esteem and quality of life.

The main factors influencing good quality of work are:

▶ Leaders who support employees and see where they fit into the bigger organisational picture

▶ Effective line managers who respect, develop and reward their staff

▶ Consultation that values the voice of employees and listens to their views

▶ Concerns and relationships based on trust and shared values

Measuring staff wellbeing

It is a good idea to measure staff wellbeing on an annual basis. Education Support Partnership offer an online Positive Workplace Survey service, which includes diagnostic report and detailed analysis of your staff's responses.

However, it is possible to put together your own survey, providing there is a way for staff to answer questions anonymously and without fear of reprisals. You may also want to instil a suggestion box in the staff room so that teachers can provide feedback throughout the year.

Explain to staff the purpose of the survey and seek their support for the process. Be clear that you are happy to make necessary changes, depending on what the results show.

Think about including questions such as the below, and ask staff to scale how happy they are on a scale of 1-5 (where appropriate). Using a scale helps make the results quantifiable:

▶ Do you feel stressed at work?

▶ Do you feel adequately supported at work?

▶ Do you feel equipped to manage your workload?

▶ Where/who do you turn to if there is something wrong?

▶ Would you like the opportunity to have counselling?

▶ What do you enjoy about your job?

▶ What do you not like?

Presenting findings & making changes

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The results of the survey should be shared with staff and the governors. Anonymity must be maintained, but staff should be consulted on the findings and given the chance to suggest improvements to the school culture and environment.

Workload

If workload has been highlighted as an issue, consider:

▶ Rescheduling activities such as report writing to times that are not already busy

▶ Limiting after-school meetings

▶ Hiring additional teachers or teaching assistants at peak times of the year

▶ Allow staff to take a real break at lunch time

▶ No expectation of an immediate response to emails and a ban on sending emails at the weekends

▶ Commitment to consideration and consultation around workload impact before a new initiative is introduced

Support

If staff have expressed that they do not feel supported, it may help to ask:

▶ Is there a better way that good work and effort can be acknowledged by the management team?

▶ How can the practice of lesson observation be improved so it is a positive process?

▶ Is there more administrative or technical support that can be offered?

▶ Is there an effective induction schedule in place for new and supply staff?

▶ Are there any flexible working arrangements that can be put in place, eg do staff know how to ask for time off when it is needed?

▶ Are staff aware of the health and welfare support that is available?

Structure

▶ Do staff understand their role within the organisation and what is expected of them?

▶ Are staff provided with a revised job description when promoted or moved within the school?

▶ Is there a school handbook that clearly explains the roles of all staff?

Control

All staff should be satisfied that they have some say in the way that they work. Consider:

▶ Do staff feel that they have autonomy, or do they feel micromanaged?

▶ Do they have control over their own lesson plans?

▶ Are staff encouraged and have opportunities to go on training courses to develop subject knowledge and professional development?

▶ Can they access mentoring and coaching?

Relationships

Creating a positive workplace means that professional relationships and conflict management need to be addressed:

▶ The school behaviour policy should be robust and enforced. Are there any concerns?

▶ Are staff satisfied that where bullying or harassment is taking place, management takes steps to stop the behaviour?

▶ Do staff feel encouraged to report violent incidents, including verbal abuse, and are victims offered support?

▶ Are complaints taken seriously and investigated?

Change

If there are changes happening at the school, management need to engage staff during this period. Is/are there:

▶ An opportunity to consult with staff before any organisational change occurs?

▶ Training and equipment provided to deal with new systems?

▶ Suitable resources to support the change?

▶ Reflection on how this will affect work-life balance?

Next steps

Following the meeting to present the results and consider changes that need to be made, an action plan will need to be put in place to address issues in the school.

It is essential that the effort of the staff to complete the survey and give feedback is not wasted. Concrete action to reduce stress, support employees and provide ongoing opportunities for reflection and further suggestions is essential.

> "I would wholeheartedly recommend the programme. It has served as a timely reminder of the importance of investing in the engagement and resilience of the staff who represent our most valuable resource"
>
> **HEAD TEACHER**

Education Support Partnership's Positive Workplace programme can provide ongoing support over an initial two years, aimed at maximising the overall potential and performance of the school.

It concludes with an assessment for the Positive Workplace Award, which recognises the positive culture, which has been achieved through the active engagement of the school's staff.

> "I think the programme gives people a personal responsibility… helps people to think about how they can improve their situation within the constraints of the working environment, and gets them to take more responsibility"
>
> **MIDDLE MANAGER**

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