

# Whole-School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing: Research bulletin

## Top line findings from a survey of school leaders and practitioners

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### 1. Background

- 1.1 This bulletin presents top line findings from a survey of school leaders and practitioners about the implementation of the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing in their learning settings.
- 1.2 The Welsh Government published the 'Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional well-being'<sup>1</sup> in 2021 as statutory guidance to governing bodies of maintained nursery, primary, secondary, middle (all-through), pupil referral units (PRUs), special schools and local authorities in Wales. The Framework aims to provide direction and a template for settings to address the emotional and mental well-being needs of all children and young people, as well as staff as part of the whole community. It intends to support education settings to review their own wellbeing landscape and, through a continuous improvement approach, develop plans to address their weaknesses and build on their strengths.
- 1.3 The Framework outlines several stages a school's senior leadership team will follow in implementing their whole-school approach. The stages comprise a self-evaluation of strengths and needs (*scoping stage*), followed by *action planning* to address gaps and capitalise on strengths, *implementation* of the action plan, *evaluation* of effectiveness, leading to *continuous improvement* as insights from the evaluation process are used to improve the school's approach.
- 1.4 On behalf of the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales has developed a self-evaluation tool to support schools during the scoping stage to assess their well-being strengths and needs, which can then feed into the school's action plan. Welsh Government has also provided additional funding to appoint local whole-school approach implementation leads, who together with local Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme (WNHSS) team, will

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<sup>1</sup> [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being](#) | [GOV.WALES](#)

support schools with not only completing the self-evaluation process but also with their wider needs in relation to developing and delivering their whole-school approach.

- 1.5 The mental health and well-being of children and young people in Wales is a priority. Prior to the pandemic, there was evidence indicating worsening mental health and wellbeing among UK children and young people<sup>2</sup>. The pandemic and its associated mitigation measures have likely further exacerbated poor mental health and wellbeing problems in children and young people.
- 1.6 Considering the prevalence of mental health problems in children and young people, [UK-wide NHS data](#)<sup>3</sup> indicates that one in six (17 per cent) 6–16-year-olds in England have a probable mental health disorder, which has increased from one in nine (12 per cent) in 2017. In addition, around two in five (39 per cent) children and young people reported worsening mental health over this period. [A similar decline in young people’s mental health and wellbeing has been observed in Wales \(School Health Research Network\)](#)<sup>4</sup>.

## Research aims

- 1.7 To understand the progress of schools and education settings to develop and deliver their whole-school approach, officials from Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS) in the Welsh Government conducted a survey in June and July 2023 open to all maintained schools. This bulletin reports on top line findings from this survey.
- 1.8 The survey invited responses from school leaders (a member of the school’s senior management team including headteachers, assistant headteachers, or deputy headteachers) and well-being leads on behalf of their learning settings.
- 1.9 It is intended that the survey findings inform policy decisions and support the effective delivery of the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing.
- 1.10 The research aims of the survey were to:
  - Map the progress of schools in developing and implementing their whole-school approach,
  - Explore the extent of support that schools have received to develop and implement their approach,
  - Examine the use of relevant resources by schools,
  - Understand how schools’ progress, as well as the support they have received and their use of resources, varies based on the characteristics of the schools.

## 2. Methodology

- 2.1 The survey invited responses from members of senior management and leadership teams, and/or health and well-being lead staff in maintained schools.
- 2.2 The survey was developed by KAS through discussions with policy officials, as well through collaboration with stakeholders including from Welsh Local Government Association, in

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<sup>2</sup> [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017 | NHS Digital](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 - wave 2 follow up to the 2017 survey | NHS Digital](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Youth mental health and wellbeing in Wales: Comparing findings from the 2019 and 2021 School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing survey](#)

particular the Association of Directors of Education in Wales, Public Health Wales, and academic partners.

- 2.3 KAS also conducted cognitive interviewing with a small group of current or former senior team leaders in education settings to test and improve the survey questions. The survey questions were administered during these interviews and participants were asked to describe what they thought they were being asked and how they were answering the questions. The survey questions were updated based on the feedback from these interviews.
- 2.4 The survey was disseminated online via a link through relevant networks and outlets (e.g., Hwb, Dysg, Welsh Local Government Association), and also shared on Welsh Government communication channels. The survey was run via SmartSurvey in both Welsh and English.
- 2.5 The dissemination method was chosen as it allowed the survey to be shared widely through a variety of channels to ensure that most schools were likely to have been provided with the opportunity to respond to the survey, although it meant that the sample was self-selecting and therefore not necessarily fully representative.
- 2.6 Where more than one response was provided for a school, only the response from the most senior member of staff was included in the analysis to aim for equal representation from responding schools and on the assumption that they were likely to have greater strategic awareness of the school's overall whole-school approach.

### **3. Sample**

- 3.1 A total of 152 responses were received. Once duplicates were removed, 136 responses were included in the analysis. All subsequent paragraphs refer to this sample of 136 responses.
- 3.2 Providing these responses, 68 per cent of respondents were headteachers / acting headteachers, assistant headteachers, or deputy headteachers.
- 3.3 The remaining respondents comprised subject / classroom teachers (10 per cent), head of phase, year, or department (8 per cent), ALNCOs (6 per cent), health & well-being lead (4 per cent), higher level teaching assistant (3 per cent), and other (1 per cent).

#### **School sample**

- 3.4 Respondents were asked to provide their school reference ID number to identify their school. Of the 136 responses, 63 per cent were from primary schools, 1 per cent middle (all-through) schools, 13 per cent secondary schools, 6 per cent special schools, and 16 per cent not known (where correct school reference ID information was not provided).
- 3.5 A higher proportion of responses to the survey were from South-West and Mid-Wales (26 per cent) and Central South Wales (26 per cent) than South-East Wales (16 per cent) and North Wales (15 per cent). As a proportion of the number of schools in each geographical area, the response rates were: South-West and Mid-Wales, 8 per cent; Central South, 9 per cent; South-East, 9 per cent, and North Wales, 5 per cent.
- 3.6 Schools with both high and low rates of learners eligible for eFSM and learners with ALN were appropriately represented in the sample. Twenty-three percent of the school sample were amongst those with the highest proportion of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and 24 percent were amongst those with the highest proportion of learners with additional learning needs (ALN).

3.7 Also, 60 per cent of schools who responded were English-medium mainstream and 18 per cent were Welsh-medium / bilingual mainstream. The remaining schools were categorised as special schools (6 per cent) or not known (16 per cent). As a proportion of all English-medium schools, responses represented 8 per cent. The proportion for Welsh-medium / bilingual schools was 6 per cent.

## **4. Limitations**

4.1 Findings should be interpreted considering the following limitations.

4.2 The findings were based on 136 survey responses and may not fully represent the picture across all schools in Wales:

- In total, 16 per cent of responses to the survey did not include a correct school reference number and therefore it was not possible to identify their school's information.
- The response rate for all primary schools was 7 per cent (86 responses) and 10 per cent (18 responses) for all secondary schools<sup>5</sup>.
- The response rate for North Wales was lower than other regions.
- The response rate for Welsh-medium / bilingual schools was lower than for English-medium schools.

4.3 The survey was disseminated online via a link. We cannot be certain of the role of the respondent or their knowledge level of their school's approach.

4.4 Where response numbers are small, the percentages are subject to larger fluctuations and should be interpreted with caution (e.g., data from secondary schools).

## **5. Findings**

5.1 The findings below related to the responses that were included in the analysis (one for each school responding).

### **Schools' progress**

5.2 Respondents reported that their schools were at various stages of developing their whole-school approach, with both primary and secondary schools most frequently reporting that they were in the action planning stage (slightly under one in three primary schools and over one in three secondary schools), followed by continuous improvement and implementation (around one in five primary and secondary schools for both stages).

5.3 No secondary schools were reported to be in the scoping (self-evaluation) stage (compared to one in seven primary schools) or evaluating stage (compared to one in ten primary schools).

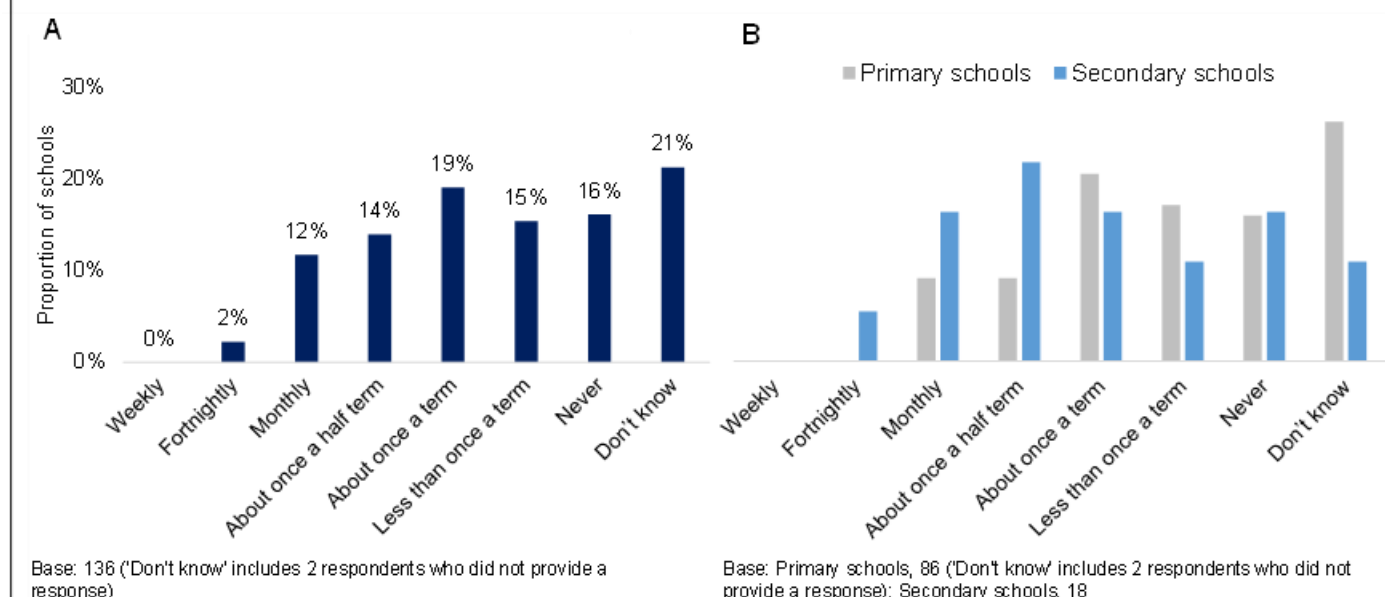
5.4 A small group of schools (5 per cent) indicated that they had not started to develop their whole-school approach.

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<sup>5</sup> Data for primary and secondary schools taken from Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC)

## Communication with implementation coordinator or local WNHSS

**Figure 5.1: A) Reported frequency of communication between schools and implementation coordinators or local WNHSS to support the development of their whole-school approach by schools overall, and B) for secondary and primary schools.**

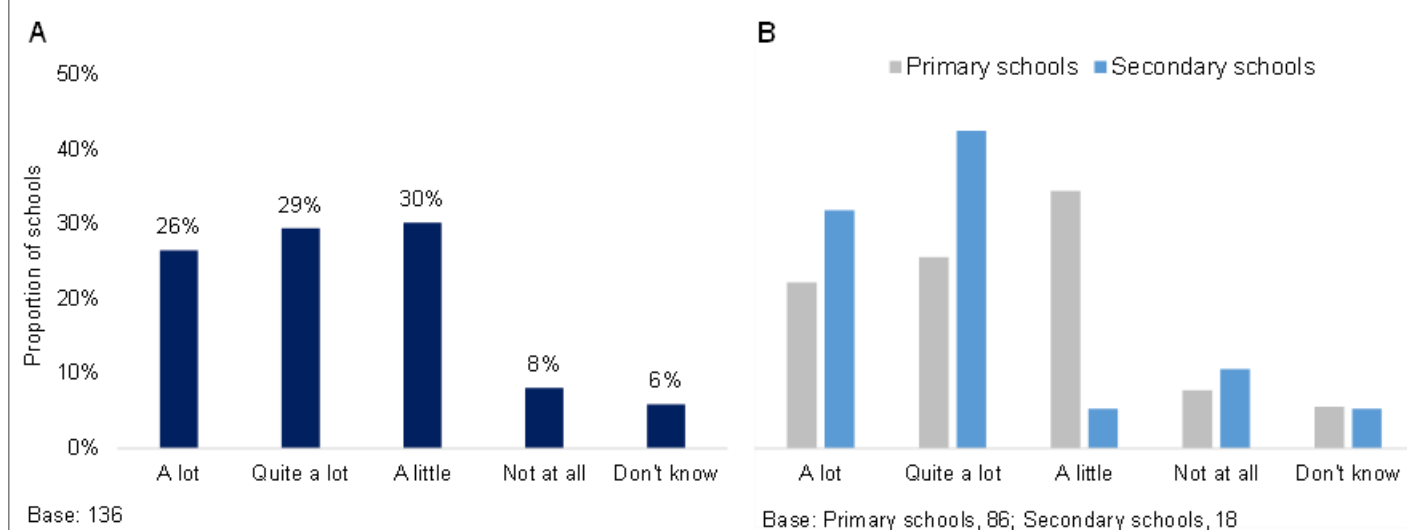


- 5.5 As Figure 5.1 shows, under half of schools (47 per cent) reported that they had contact from their dedicated Implementation Coordinator or local WNHSS to support the development of their approach once a term or more frequently, although a higher proportion of secondary schools reported that they received frequent engagement than primary schools (around two in three secondary schools compared to two in five primary schools).
- 5.6 Around one third of respondents (32 per cent) reported that their school received this communication less frequently than once a term or never, with the pattern largely similar across primary schools and secondary schools (see Figure 5.1).
- 5.7 Of respondents who have had this communication, three quarters (75 per cent) reported being 'Quite' or 'Very satisfied' with the quality of their support, 13 per cent indicated that they were 'A little' satisfied and 4 per cent reported that they were 'Not at all satisfied'. This pattern was largely similar across primary and secondary schools, although a greater proportion of respondents from secondary schools reported being 'Quite' or 'Very satisfied' compared to primary schools (over three-quarters of secondary schools compared to slightly under three-quarters of primary schools).

### Framework on embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being

- 5.8 As Figure 5.2 shows, most respondents (86 per cent) reported that their school had used the Framework to some extent, although 10 per cent of respondents indicated that they were not aware of the Framework.
- 5.9 A larger proportion of respondents from secondary reported using the Framework 'A lot' or 'Quite a lot' compared to primary schools (around three-quarters of secondary schools compared to one half of primary schools) (see Figure 5.2).
- 5.10 Amongst schools who had used the Framework, respondents from secondary schools were slightly more likely to indicate that the Framework was 'Very' or 'Quite useful' (around nine in ten secondary schools compared to eight in ten primary schools).

**Figure 5.2: A) Reported use of the 'Framework on embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being' by schools overall, and B) for secondary and primary schools.**



## PHW self-evaluation tool

- 5.11 Almost three-quarters of respondents (71 per cent) reported that their school had used the self-evaluation tool to some extent.
- 5.12 Overall, 18 per cent of respondents were not aware of the self-evaluation tool.
- 5.13 Respondents from secondary schools were more likely to report using the self-evaluation tool 'A lot' or 'Quite a lot' compared to primary school respondents (around two in three secondary schools compared to two in five primary schools).
- 5.14 For schools who had used the self-evaluation tool, a larger proportion of respondents from secondary schools reported that the self-evaluation tool was 'Very' or 'Quite useful' (a little under nine in ten secondary schools compared to around three-quarters of primary schools).

## 6. Conclusions

- 6.1 These findings should be interpreted with caution owing to the limitations set out in the methodology section.
- 6.2 Nearly all respondents indicated that their school was developing or implementing their whole-school approach, although the stage reached by each school varied considerably.
- 6.3 Frequent communication between schools and their dedicated implementation coordinator/local WNHSS to support schools' whole-school approach was not consistently reported:
  - While respondents from secondary schools were more likely to report frequent communication, around one-third of respondents from both primary and secondary schools indicated that they had received communication less frequently than once a term or have never had contact.
  - However, when respondents have had communication, there was a good level of satisfaction with the quality of the support provided.

- 6.4 Use of the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being was high, and was more frequent in secondary schools:
- Most schools were using or aware of the Framework and reported this document to be useful.
  - Respondents from secondary schools were using this document on a more frequent basis and found it more useful compared to primary schools.
- 6.5 Use of the self-evaluation tool from PHW was also high and was again more frequent in secondary schools, although to a lesser extent than the Framework:
- While respondents reported slightly lower levels of awareness, use, and usefulness for the self-evaluation tool from PHW compared to the Framework, most schools were using or aware of the tool and found it useful.
  - Again, respondents from secondary schools were using the tool on a more frequent basis and found it more useful compared to primary schools.
  - However, around one in five schools were not aware of the self-evaluation tool and this pattern was similar across primary and secondary schools.
- 6.6 More detailed analysis of the survey findings will be undertaken to gain a greater understanding of how schools are developing and delivering their whole-school approach.

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Views expressed in this bulletin are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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