The impact of teacher wellbeing and mental health on pupil progress in primary schools

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Table of Contents

Executive
Summary

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an exploratory research study into the effect of teacher wellbeing and mental health on pupil progress.

The research, which took place in the autumn of 2018, was conducted by the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University (LBU).

The study was based around the following three research questions:

1. What factors affect teacher wellbeing and mental health?

2. How does teacher wellbeing and mental health impact on the progress and learning of students?

3. What resilience strategies are used by highly effective teachers with poor wellbeing or mental health to ensure that their students thrive?

Research design

The research study was qualitative in nature and involved ten primary schools in Yorkshire and across the East Midlands. Schools were selected that had wellbeing and mental health as part of their overall strategic development plans and were working with staff and pupils to raise awareness in this area. The ten participating schools were all at various stages of their wellbeing and mental health journeys. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, it was important to go into schools that had some level of general awareness around wellbeing and mental health.

Key to this piece of research was the inclusion of the pupils' voice. Pupils were given the opportunity to express how they perceive a teacher's wellbeing and mental health impacts on their learning.

School visits and interviews took place between mid-October and mid-December 2018. At each school, interviews were carried out, as a minimum, with:

▶ the Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team;

▶ a teacher who was considered at the time of the interview to be in good mental health; and

▶ a teacher who was considered at the time of the interview to have poor mental health.

Each school visit also included a pupil discussion group with children from Years 3-6.

The teachers and pupils interviewed were selected by the Headteacher, or in their absence, a member of the Senior Leadership Team responsible for leading wellbeing and mental health at the school.

In total, the research team spoke to 35 education professionals and 64 pupils.

Of the 21 classroom teachers interviewed, eleven considered themselves to be in good mental health at the time of the interview, whilst ten considered their mental health to be poor or variable

Research design limitations

The research design used in this study has several limitations. Firstly, due to the small sample size of the study - i.e. it relies on just ten schools in two geographical areas – it is not possible to generalise the findings and apply them to teachers, pupils and schools more widely. However, the findings do raise some important issues and provide a basis for conducting further research into this area.

Secondly, it is extremely difficult to prove direct causality between pupil progress and the status of a teacher's mental health and welling as many other factors, for example a child's home circumstances, may impact on pupil progress.

Key findings
Teachers' wellbeing and their resilience strategies

▶ Most teachers agreed that a teacher's wellbeing affects their performance as an education professional, especially their ability to teach in the classroom.

▶ Teachers' wellbeing is finely balanced; the difficulty is not necessarily increased workloads as commonly assumed, but it can often be a crisis in their personal life - especially relationship difficulties, family bereavement or illness and childcare issues - which tips them over the edge.

▶ Teachers reported a number of work-related stress triggers including busy times of the year, such as assessment periods; the pressure of extra curricula activities; the unexpected; keeping up with the pace of change; and changes in school leadership.

▶ Many teachers who experienced poor wellbeing professed to wanting to stay in control and were striving to do everything to perfection all of the time; realising this is not always possible appeared to be a large part of their recovery.

▶ Being organised and able to prioritise are two essential skills teachers need to learn to maintain good wellbeing.

▶ Key coping strategies included talking to family and friends and putting a time limit on the amount of schoolwork they do at home.

▶ Most case study schools had a number of strategies in place to help staff with their wellbeing and mental health; some were formal, some were more informal in nature. Several revolved around reducing workloads and sharing responsibility.

▶ At least one school now includes wellbeing and mental health in each teacher's annual performance targets.

▶ All schools in the study were striving to be more open about wellbeing and mental health.

The impact of teacher mental health on pupils and their progress

▶ Most children in the study were familiar with, and understood, terms such as mental health, stress and anxiety.

▶ Children were attuned to their teacher's mood and could usually pick up when they were feeling stressed, even if teachers tried to hide it.

▶ Teachers were seen as 'stressed' by children when they were: unusually short tempered; they shouted at the class more than normal; they got upset when pupils did not understand the work they were given; classroom behaviour deteriorated; and less work than usual was completed in lessons.

▶ Children learned more when their teacher is happy and performing well.

▶ Children try to help their teacher when they are stressed and feel an obligation not to make things worse. Some of the ways they do this included working hard in lessons, behaving, doing something nice for the teacher to cheer them up and giving the teacher time to get their jobs done.

▶ Cover teachers can lead to confusion and inconsistency in learning, largely due to changing styles of teaching and teaching not being pitched at the right level.

▶ Children's behaviour in the classroom was cited as one of the signs that all was not well in the classroom and that the teacher was not coping.

▶ A deterioration in pupils' behaviour, especially in the classroom, was reported when cover teachers were used for any length of time; sometimes it took a long time for this to be corrected.

▶ Relationships are one of the most important aspects of school for primary school children. The relationship that they build up with their classroom teacher is key to their ability to learn. When this is disrupted, so are their chances to progress and attain their full potential.

This study highlights examples where pupil learning has been affected by their teachers' mood, to a lesser or greater degree and that pupils are often aware of their teachers' mood - no matter how hard the teacher tries to hide it.

In total, the research team spoke to

35 education professionals

and

64 pupils

Recommendations

This research study has a number of implications for a range of stakeholders, including those delivering initial teacher-training programmes, senior school leaders and those involved with continuing professional development:

School senior leaders:

▶ All school leaders should be proactive in reducing unnecessary workload for teachers.

▶ All school leaders should develop a positive school climate to enable staff and pupils to thrive.

▶ The wellbeing of staff should be a focus of the school improvement plan and should be a standing item for discussion at Governors' meetings.

▶ Senior leaders need to know their staff and be aware of the pressures they are feeling; not just from a work perspective, but also in their personal life

▶ School leaders should take relevant steps to ensure that supply teachers are fully informed about pupils' current stage of development.

▶ Professional Development for senior leaders should include approaches to enhancing staff wellbeing.

▶ Continuing professional development: Teachers should be provided with professional development to support them in managing their own mental health.

▶ School leaders should improve signposting of external support services. For example, the charity Education Support Partnership run a free and confidential 24/7 helpline staffed by accredited counsellors, which is available to the entire education workforce.
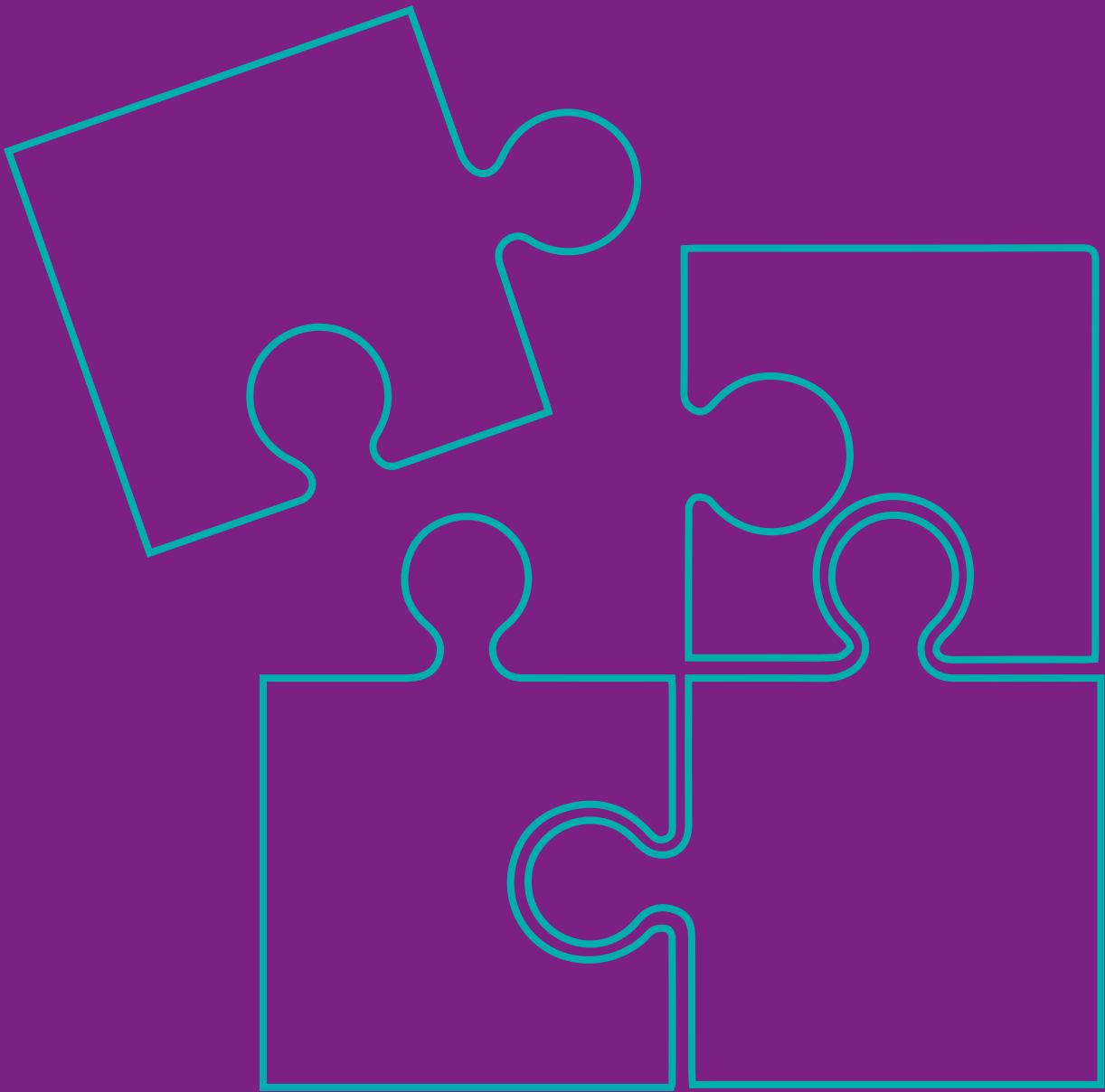
Initial teacher training programmes:

▶ All teacher training courses should include a module on teacher wellbeing to provide trainee teachers with strategies to manage their mental health and increase their resilience.

Future Research

This study points to the need for further research into the issue of teacher wellbeing and mental health and its impact on pupil progression. Future areas of investigation should include:

▶ A widening out of the study to primary schools in other geographical areas in the United Kingdom.

▶ A longitudinal study, over the period of one school year, to track the impact of measures schools are putting into place to help with teacher wellbeing and mental health.

▶ A study to track the progress of primary school pupils who experience significant classroom teacher disruption in Years 3 or 4 and the impact this has on their year 6 SAT results.

Introduction

Introduction

In September 2018, The Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University (LBU) conducted a short piece of exploratory research into the effect of teacher wellbeing and mental health on pupil progress.

The study was based around the following three research questions:

1. What factors affect teacher wellbeing and mental health?

2. How does teacher wellbeing and mental health impact on the progress of students?

3. What resilience strategies are used by highly effective teachers with poor mental health to ensure that their students thrive?

Report layout

The main body of this report is divided into four sections. The first section frames the context in which this research was commissioned. Section two, outlines the methodological approach taken and summarises the characteristics of participating schools. Section three, presents the findings of the research and specifically looks at factors that trigger poor mental health and wellbeing in teachers, the impact of teachers' mental health on their teaching and the progress of their pupils. The final section summarises the key findings from the research along with recommendations and suggested next steps.

Section 1:
Definitions and Scoping Literature Review

The World Health Organisation (2014) defines mental health as:

...a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

We adopt a multi-dimensional perspective on wellbeing which acknowledges the different dimensions of health – physical, social, emotional and psychological. These dimensions overlap and interrelate (Danby and Hamilton, 2016). Wellbeing is an aspect of mental health which affects people's participation in daily life.

Definitions of stress tend to focus on the adverse reactions that people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them (HSE, 2017). Not all stressors are detrimental to health; some act as motivators. However, when stress starts to affect people's participation in daily life it can then result in poor mental health. Anxiety is used as a general term for several disorders that cause nervousness, turmoil, fear, apprehension, panic, and worrying (Bouras and Holt, 2007). When anxiety is a selective response to specific circumstances it can be a positive sign of psychological well-being. However, anxiety disorder is a pathological disorder which disrupts the routine course of daily life.

Scoping Literature Review

The problem of teacher stress is pervasive. It is evident across all sectors of education and across countries (Gray et al, 2017) and results in burnout and lower job satisfaction. Teachers are consistently reported to experience an increased risk of developing mental ill health (Stansfeld et al, 2011; Kidger et al, 2016).

Teacher wellbeing is influenced by factors such as life satisfaction and personal happiness (hedonic perspective) and positive psychological functioning. Teachers are able to demonstrate positive psychological functioning when they are able to form good interpersonal relationships with others, have a sense of autonomy and competence and when they have opportunities for personal growth (Harding et al, 2019). School climate influences teachers' daily experiences in school. It is shaped by the school ethos which is established by the senior leadership team. Limiting teacher agency can result in diminished teacher wellbeing, which detrimentally impacts on teacher performance (Beck et al, 2011).

Research demonstrates that multiple factors impact on teacher wellbeing, including school climate (Gray et al, 2017). A negative school climate can lead to high rates of teacher absenteeism and staff turnover (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008). Evidence also suggests that there is an association between school climate and teacher and student wellbeing (Gray et al, 2017). Additionally, research also indicates that a positive school climate increases student academic achievement (MacNeil, Prater and Busch, 2009). It is possible that this is because a positive school climate results in better teacher engagement, higher

levels of commitment and increased staff and student self-esteem and wellbeing (Gray et al, 2017). Research even suggests that a positive school climate can mitigate the negative effects of socio-economic context on students' academic success (Thapa et al, 2013). It would therefore appear that a negative school climate detrimentally impacts on the wellbeing of both teachers and students and has a negative impact on student attainment.

Positive teacher-student relationships support children and young people to be mentally healthy (Kidger et al, 2012; Plenty et al, 2014). These relationships help students to feel more connected to their school (Harding et al, 2019) and improve student wellbeing (Aldridge and McChesney, 2018) through fostering a sense of belonging. Research demonstrates that teachers with poor mental health may find it more difficult to develop and model positive relationships with their students (Kidger et al, 2010; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). In addition, higher rates of teacher absence can impact on the quality of teacher-student relationships (Jamal et al, 2013). This is because relationships are fostered through human connection.

> "Research demonstrates that teachers with poor mental health may find it more difficult to develop and model positive relationships with their students."
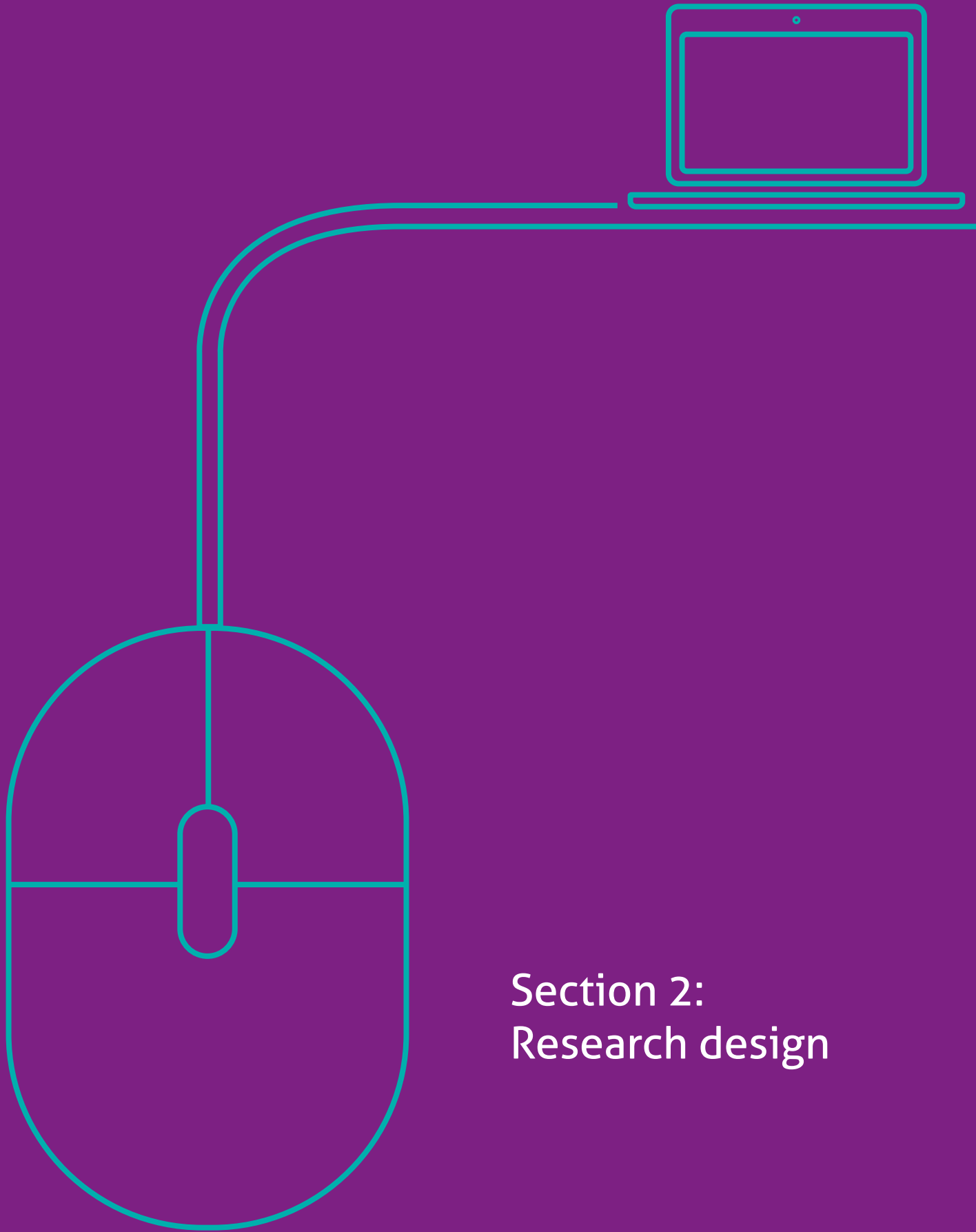
Research demonstrates that teachers with poor mental health may have less belief that they can support the wellbeing and mental health of their students (Sisask et al, 2014), particularly if they are struggling with their own wellbeing and mental health. Poor teacher wellbeing could therefore be problematic for student wellbeing (Harding et al, 2019). In addition, research demonstrates that teachers who demonstrate 'presenteeism' find it more difficult to manage their classrooms effectively (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009) and are less likely to develop positive classroom and behaviour management strategies (Harding et al, 2019). Presenteeism is evident when teachers with poor wellbeing and mental health continue to work. The quality of their work is reduced and this affects the quality of their relationships with their students (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009), student wellbeing (Harding et al, 2019) and overall teacher performance (Beck et al, 2011; Jain et al, 2013).

There is an association between better teacher wellbeing and lower student psychological difficulties (Harding et al, 2019). There is also an association between lower teacher depression and better student wellbeing (Harding et al, 2019). In addition, there is an association between teacher presenteeism and student wellbeing and psychological difficulties (Harding et al, 2019). Thus, there appears to be a causal relationship between teacher and student mental health (Harding et al, 2019).

There is a consensus in the literature that positive wellbeing in teachers is influenced by school climate and that school climate also impacts on student wellbeing and attainment. There is also a consensus that positive teacher wellbeing enhances the quality of teacher-student relationships, student wellbeing and teacher performance. However, there is limited direct evidence of a causal relationship between teacher wellbeing and student attainment and thus, this is an area for further research. There is also a paucity of literature which examines student perspectives on how the mental health of their teachers impacts on their learning and progress. This small-scale study therefore extends the existing research on teacher wellbeing by examining the perspectives of pupils on how they are affected by the mental health of their teachers.

"There is an association between better teacher wellbeing and lower student psychological difficulties."

Section 2:
Research design

This is small-scale exploratory investigative piece of qualitative research in an area known to be of a sensitive nature and one that has not previously included a pupil voice. Key to this piece of research was giving pupils the opportunity to express how they perceive teacher wellbeing and mental health impacts on them. The study also sought to ascertain whether or not pupils are able to sense a change in the mental health status of their teachers.

This was a qualitative study. This approach was suitable because it produced richer data than would have been possible had a quantitative approach been adopted. Data were collected from Headteachers and teachers using individual semi-structured interviews. This was deemed to be a suitable method given the sensitivity of the research and the need to maintain confidentiality. Focus groups were used to collect data from pupils. Focus groups have a number of distinct advantages over individual interviews. They are economical on time and allow a significant amount of data to be collected from a large number of participants in a relatively short period of time (Cohen et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 2004). Nutbrown (1999) argued that the process of obtaining a 'collective experience' enables the researcher to mine, rather than survey the terrain (McCracken, 1988; 17). According to Madriz (1998) 'the interaction in focus groups emphasises empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation' (p.116). Additionally, focus groups are able to create a 'synergistic effect' (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p.16) in which the interaction between individuals within the group produces greater data than that which could be generated by a single individual.

Ten primary schools volunteered to take part in the research. Schools were recruited through a range of links and selected because they had mental health and wellbeing as part of their overall strategic development plans and that are working, to a greater or lesser degree, with staff and pupils to raise awareness in this area. Some schools were at the beginning of their journey whilst others have been working in this area for some time. These criteria were used because it was felt there needed to be some kind of general awareness in the school around mental health and wellbeing, especially when talking to the pupils.

The school visits and interviews took place between mid-October and mid-December 2018 in the latter half of the autumn term. Each school visit ideally included three individual interviews one with:

▶ the Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership team;

▶ a teacher who was considered at the time of the interview to be in good mental health; and

▶ a teacher who was considered at the time of the interview to have poor mental health – but not necessarily medically diagnosed or that it had led to time off work.

However, in some cases, more teachers were interviewed and in others, it was less. In one school (CS5) teaching assistants were interviewed rather than teachers. At each visit the exact number and type of interviewees selected was decided by the school.

Each visit (except one – CS3) also included a discussion group with pupils from Years 3-6. Discussion groups consisted of between four and ten pupils with a good mix of both boys and girls.

The table below provides a breakdown of those interviewed in each case study school

All interviews (including the pupil discussion groups) were audio recorded and later transcribed and coded in NVivo. The interview schedules used for both pupils and staff can be found in Appendix A.

Ethics

INTERVIEWEE	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4	CS5	CS6	CS7	CS8	CS9	CS10	TOTAL
Headteachers / Senior Leaders (HT/SLE)	1	1	0	1	2*	1	1	2	1	2	12
Teacher in poor mental health (TPMH)	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	10
Teacher in good mental health (TGMH)	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	2	11
Teaching Assistants (TAs)	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Pupils	9	6	0	10	9	5	6	8	7	4	64
TOTAL											99

*Includes a consultant working in the area of wellbeing

The table above provides a breakdown of those interviewed in each case study school.

All interviews (including the pupil discussion groups) were audio recorded and later transcribed and coded in NVivo. The interview schedules used for both pupils and staff can be found in Appendix A.

All interviews were conducted using the ethical guidelines as set out by the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2018) for Educational Research in line with standard practice for Leeds Beckett University. All interviews were confidential and both schools and teachers have been anonymised in this report. To protect the identity of participating schools and those who were interviewed, each participating school has been given a case study number (i.e. CS1). All interviewees signed consent forms and received information sheets about the project in advance of the interview taking place.

Permission to talk to the pupils was sought through the school. Parents of participating pupils were informed of the visit in advance by the school and given the opportunity to ask questions. The schools made it clear that no personal information about the pupils or their families would be sought. Pupils that formed part of a pupil voice or pupil council within the school or, in the absence of such a forum in the school, pupils that the Headteacher felt would be confident talking with adults from outside, were selected for the pupil discussion groups. Teachers with poor mental health self-selected to participate in the study. Despite the sensitivity of this research, all of these teachers were happy to participate in the research once assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given.

Research challenges
As is usually the case with such research, accessing the schools was the biggest challenge. However, once schools were on-board, despite the sensitive nature of the research, talking to staff proved unproblematic with most interviewees proving to be willing volunteers.

Overview of participating schools

There was a mix of urban and rural schools amongst the ten participating schools. Five schools were located in Yorkshire and five in the East Midlands.

Schools had a range of Ofsted rating: two were outstanding; three were good; two required improvement; and one was judged to be inadequate at its last inspection.

Four schools were local authority (LA) maintained/community, three were Church of England, two were academy converters and one belonged to a multi-academy trust (MAT).

Interviewees
The majority of interviewees were female - reflecting the gender makeup of the primary sector[6] - with just six interviewees being male, two of whom were headteachers. Headteachers, (or in their absence senior leaders) were interviewed to get an overall picture of the school context both in general terms and in relation to the schools' approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Of the 21 teachers interviewed, eleven considered themselves to be in good mental health whilst ten considered their mental health to be poor or variable. Some of those who were currently in good mental health had experienced poor mental health in the past, usually at a previous school. It should be noted that some of the teachers interviewed were also senior leaders as several of the schools were quite small and teachers often held multiple roles; but all those classed as teachers regularly spent some time during the week in the classroom.

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[6] DfE, School workforce census 2017 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017

Section 3:
Findings

This section presents the findings from the research and draws exclusively on data gathered during the school visits. It begins with an overview of the mental health and wellbeing context of the ten case study schools.

The findings are then presented under three key themes that arose from the data collected which are directly related to the research questions outlined earlier in the introduction of this report:

▶ Factors affecting teacher wellbeing and mental health;

▶ The impact of teacher wellbeing and mental health on their teaching; and

▶ The impact of teacher wellbeing and mental health on pupil progress

Note: all data presented in this section has been anonymised by both school and individual. However, in some cases, due to the small number of schools involved, the school particularly, may be identifiable by those who are familiar with the project.

Mental health and wellbeing context of participating primary schools

CS1 is a medium-sized 'outstanding' Church of England, voluntary aided primary school in West Yorkshire. The senior leadership team had developed a range of initiatives to reduce teacher workload as well as other strategies to improve staff wellbeing. One member of staff had taken time off on extended sick leave due to poor mental health. Another member of staff was identified as having experienced poor mental health but had not taken time off work at the time of the interview and was thriving.

For the past 18 months or so **CS2** – a 'good' community inner city school in a deprived area of the East Midlands – has had a 'massive' emphasis on mental health and wellbeing for both staff and pupils following a period of high staff absence. In 2016, around one-fifth of staff at CS2 had time off as a result of mental health issues identified by their doctors. This resulted in 151 days of absence in one academic year at a cost to the school in excess of £20,000 to cover teaching. The Headteacher commented: 'about two years ago we had an incredibly high rate of staff absences that were related to stress, particularly depression that was identified via their GPs and sick notes.' It was a particularly difficult time for the school with Ofsted arriving and the Headteacher on long-term sick leave (unrelated to mental health). Mental health and wellbeing now unpins every aspect of the school and they have a designated mental health lead who is also a member of the senior leadership team. There has been a lot of staff development and training on what mental health is, and how it affects children and staff. All teachers have been trained in yoga and meditation. Currently CS2 has just two teachers diagnosed with mental health problems, neither of which have taken time off work, as a result and last year their staff absence rates, due to poor mental health, was zero.

CS3 is a large LA maintained primary school in West Yorkshire that is currently rated as 'requires improvement' by Ofsted. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who receive special education needs and disability (SEND) support is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is at the national average. One member of staff had experienced poor mental health in the past but was now back at work and thriving. There was no dedicated member of staff with responsibility for mental health and the school was at the beginning of its journey towards embedding mental health provision.

A medium sized 'outstanding' LA maintained primary school in West Yorkshire; the Headteacher at **CS4** has developed a range of initiatives to improve the wellbeing of teachers, including reducing the bureaucracy of planning and assessment. The school has also implemented wellbeing days for pupils and staff have been provided with extensive professional development to support them in managing their own mental health and the mental health of their pupils. One teacher had taken time off due to poor mental health but was back in work with the support of the leadership team. The school was prioritising resilience as a theme which was embedded throughout the curriculum.

At the beginning of this academic year, (September 2018) **CS5** had a new Headteacher appointed. This inner-city East Midlands junior school is located in a deprived, mainly white British, area and the school recently converted to an academy following a 'requires improvement' judgement from Ofsted. The new Headteacher described the school as a 'stressful place' when she arrived, with pupil behaviour being a particular issue that staff had to contend with. It very quickly became clear to the new Headteacher that something had to be done about staff wellbeing if the school was to move forward. To this end the school is working with a local consultant (who also happens to be a parent at the school) to help staff understand mental health and wellbeing and to put in place a social emotional wellbeing curriculum. Whilst they are only at the very start of their journey, in less than one term the school was now said to be a much calmer and less stressful place. Whilst no one particular member of staff – beyond the Headteacher – is responsible for, or driving forward, the mental health and wellbeing agenda, staff have been invited to form a wellbeing team. The level of need to address the issues was said to be highlighted by the fact that 12 out of 16 members of staff showed an interest in volunteering to be part of the group. The Headteacher commented: 'for me that in itself tells a massive story'. One of the key interventions that has already made a difference, especially to pupil behaviour, has been the introduction of Poppy, a PAT– pets as therapy – dog.

CS6 is also at the very start of their wellbeing journey and, like CS5, they are an inner-city East Midlands school, located in a deprived area. Over 30 languages other than English are spoken by pupils at this larger than average junior school. They recently converted to an Academy following an 'inadequate' rating from Ofsted and received a new Headteacher at the start of the last school year (September 2017). A member of the senior leadership team is the designated wellbeing lead. They have already set up several nurture groups for children that they feel will benefit from additional support and they are looking to develop the five ways to wellbeing (connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give). In terms of supporting staff, the lead teacher would like some staff meetings to be designated to raising awareness of staff mental health. They have already made available to staff flyers and other literature relating to mental health and wellbeing. They are also working with an external consultant and have trialled lessons from the Anna Freud Foundation with Year 6 pupils.

CS7 is a 'good' small rural Church of England primary school in West Yorkshire. This is a smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have SEND is below average. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and therefore eligible for support through the pupil premium is well below the national average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. One member of staff had experienced poor mental health but was now back in school. The Headteacher had also experienced stress but had not taken time off work. There was no designated member of staff with responsibility for mental health provision but several initiatives had been introduced to improve staff wellbeing over recent years.

A small, rural Church of England, primary school in the East Midland, **CS8** is currently graded as 'good' by Ofsted. The majority of the children at the school are White, British. Whilst there is a low level of need amongst the pupil population – with just two eligible for pupil premium and one on the SEND register – the school has noticed an increase in the number of children requiring pastoral care and additional support because they are struggling with anxiety. A member of the senior leadership team is also the designated Mental Health Ambassador for the school. This September (2018) they introduced 'Wellbeing and Wonder' sessions on a Monday morning for all pupils. They are currently involved with the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families in a joint LA and NHS initiative aimed at bridging the CAMHS (Children and Mental Health Services) referral process. In terms of staff, whilst they do not currently have anyone off work with poor mental health it has been an issue in the past.

CS9 is a medium sized LA community primary school in a mixed catchment area in West Yorkshire. The Headteacher was leading on staff wellbeing due to concerns about teacher retention across the LA. Two members of staff had experienced poor mental health in the past. At the time of this research, one teacher was back at work and the other had resigned from the school, having decided to leave teaching.

Finally, **CS10** is an inner city larger than average primary school located in a deprived area of South Yorkshire. Over a quarter of pupils are EAL (English as Another Language) with more than 20 other languages spoken at the school. Part of an Academy group, the school is at the start of its mental health and wellbeing journey having launched their intention to work towards their mental health award (through Leeds Beckett University[7]) the week before the research visit. All schools in the Trust have pledged to complete the award by 2020 and it forms part of their overall Developing Excellence Plan which aims to promote healthy food, lifestyles, mental health and wellbeing, not just of pupils and staff but also of parents. Each school within the Trust - including CS10 - has set up a mental health and wellbeing group. However, they do not currently have an issue with staff being absent due to poor mental health.

[7] https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/carnegie-school-of-education/research/carnegie-centre-of-excellence-for-mental-health-in-schools/school-mental-health-award/

Triggers

Teachers reported a number of factors that might trigger feelings of anxiety and stress, some of which were directly related to their professional lives, some to their personal lives and some that concerned both.

Work-related stress triggers included:

▶ Busy times of the year, for example assessment periods, in particularly KS2 SATs;

▶ Extra curricula activities;

▶ The unexpected, unplanned;

▶ Keeping up with the pace of change and growing demands; and

▶ Changes in school leadership.

> It's never about the same thing. It can be about preparing for registration week, or complaints, it changes. Things change, they can pile on and pile on. Nothing is ever piled off. Things keep on being added.
>
> *(TPMH, CS1)*

> I think, for me, I'm good at hiding it, but occasionally you just reach your limit. You're tired, you might have had loads of things to do, the work pressure is piling up, things like Christmas nativities, and fates [sic] and singing carols and things like that... we are not robots. I think people like to think that we are.
>
> *(TGMH, CS2)*

> Just that there are times when it is so busy and there is so much to do, so much work to do outside of school, as well as inside of school, I think that can have an effect because there isn't enough time to do everything.
>
> *(TPMH, CS8)*

> We get more and more asked of us but no one taking it away and the days aren't any longer.
>
> *(TPMH, CS4)*

Non-work-related stress triggers included:

▶ Relationships, especially when a relationship breaks down or is very new;

▶ Family illness or bereavement, particularly in the case of elderly parents or young children; and

▶ Childcare.

> I've noticed everyone in my school is at that age where they have parents that are getting older, their children are growing up, so a lot of the mental health issues that you hear about are stemming from other things that they are having to cope with in their personal life. Three years ago, I had a bit of a blip. My dad's got Parkinson's and he deteriorated very quickly and needed support and I was having to go out of school in the day to go and help him.
>
> *(HT, CS7)*

Teachers reported that experiencing one of the above as their primary stress trigger had a knock-on effect. For example, if a teacher relies on parents for some of their childcare and one is taken ill, it not only leads to the natural stress and worry of having a sick relative but also the practical problem of how to fill their childcare gap. This then inevitably impacts on their ability to perform at full strength as an educational professional.

One teacher with poor mental health (CS4) explained how a few years ago, she had a parent who was struggling which led to substantial childcare issues and impacted on her performance in the classroom. She felt really guilty because she could not give the children enough time. Her mother was not coping very well with them so she felt she had to be at home when not teaching to take over the childcare. This meant she had no time to do the things that she needed to do in school after teaching such as tidy up at the end of the day, set up in the morning or putting up displays. This highlights how personal stresses can spill-over into work. Other teachers commented on the difficulty of balancing work and home life at times of personal crisis:

> I've had a few personal relationship issues. You can't say it doesn't affect your work, because it does. It's hard to balance a new relationship and a teaching career. They all impact on each other and being a teacher does take more of your time than you think.
>
> *(TGMH, CS4)*

> I think there have been times in this job when it has affected my mental health because I think it is the balance between work life and home life. I think that's what becomes the difficulty, especially when you're having troubles at home it's hard to separate yourself, that becomes hard sometimes.
>
> *(TPMH, CS8)*

> The main cause was the workload which was enormous. I have a little boy and I was planning a wedding. Everything was just a little bit too much.
>
> *(TPMH, CS10)*

Many of the teachers interviewed talked about wanting to be perfect or in control. One even confessed to being borderline OCD (Obsessive, Compulsive Disorder). It would appear there is a certain characteristic trait in some teachers that drives them to deliver everything to perfection and to maintain control; at times when this is not possible they become anxious and stressed.

Teachers also felt responsible for pupils' progress and attainment and even for being the children's 'safe adult'. One teacher commented:

> It's also about the social side of it, making sure that the children are safe and secure. Making sure that those children that come in every day that don't have breakfast, are getting breakfast, or haven't got a school coat or jumper that they have one for going out at playtime. On top of that, it's the parents as well because some of them have mental health issues, so it's dealing with that.
>
> *(TPMH, CS2)*

Whilst it is generally assumed that poor mental health - such as stress and anxiety - in teachers is caused largely by the pressure of work alone - particularly increasing workloads - this study found that this is not necessarily the case; it is only part of the story. It would appear, from this small sample, it is a combination of both personal life and professional pressures, and not just the actual act of teaching but the ever-increasing social/carer role teachers are expected to assume, especially in schools located in areas of high deprivation. Indeed, it would seem to be a finely balanced tightrope that teachers walk daily. When life and work are both running smoothly most teachers can and do cope. But when one or the other becomes more challenging than usual - for example, a breakdown in a personal relationship or sickness amongst the family or the pressure of SATs or assessment periods - that is when the difficulties arise. As one teacher observed: 'most people will be ok if everything else is ok in their life', (TPMH, CS4). Another teacher commented:

> You can just about cope with everything that is thrown at you... but it is usually the personal family stuff, if that goes, you're tipped. It seems things in school, they can pile on and you can cope with barely any sleep or whatever, and you can still get through fine and get everyone to where they need to be, it's the personal and family things.
>
> *(TPMH, CS7)*

The impact of teacher wellbeing and mental health on teaching

Effect on teaching from a teacher's perspective

Teachers felt that performance and delivery in the classroom was below par at times of poor mental health with one commenting: 'teachers who are not in a good state of mind cannot teach effectively' (TGMH, CS6). Some senior leaders reported that a teacher's confidence might suffer or that pupil behaviour in the classroom might deteriorate. The general consensus was that to be fully effective teachers need to be in good mental health:

> If the teacher is competent and enjoying their work, then naturally that's going to impact on how the kids feel. So, you can't come into school and deliver a really good lesson and be positive, which is what the children want to see, if you're feeling hurt or worried or anxious or depressed.
>
> *(TGMH, CS1)*

> I think we know that when a teacher has good mental health, the quality of their performance is higher. They are in the building so the children have consistency with their known teacher. There is very much that positivity in what they are doing and how they are relating to the children. It shows in their performance, but because they are performing and operating at a higher level, it therefore translates into the quality of their teaching and performance in the class. So as a by-product, if you have good mental health, as a teacher, the quality of teaching and therefore the pupil outcomes, are higher. Where there is poor mental health the teachers aren't maybe as resilient. So, for example, where you might have monitoring and evaluation, the teachers may not take feedback as positively. Because if they are in a low mood they may not be as ready to take on board feedback and developmental improvement. So again, the quality of teaching doesn't improve.
>
> *(HT, CS2)*

> You've got to be 100% on your game as a teacher I think. And if you feel slightly under the weather or just not fully healthy in your mind, you can't perform in the way you normally would do.
>
> *(SL, CS7)*

Teachers, who had experienced poor mental health in the past, reflected that they were most likely to seek help at the point where they realised they were not performing to the best of their ability and that their poor mental health was impacting negatively on the quality of their teaching:

> I had realised that the children were suffering and that progress wasn't brilliant they weren't getting what they needed from me. You tell yourself to just get on with it as such, which some people would do and some people can't.
>
> *(TGMH – previously poor, CS3)*

> I tried my best to put the children first when I was in school. But my mind was elsewhere. I struggled for a couple of weeks. Then the Headteacher pulled me aside and said: "you're not alright are you?" I said no and it was the first time that I actually cried. Then I took some time off.
>
> *(TPMH, CS4)*

> People around the school comment that you don't seem very happy and I do think it did affect the class at the start of the year because of building those relationships. They weren't getting the best of me. It did affect them... So mental health does affect your relationship with your pupils and their learning if you're not delivering it as good as you can. I had my mind on other things so I wasn't doing the things I should have been doing like verbal feedback, simple things. You miss opportunities.
>
> *(TGMH – previously poor, CS4)*

Some teachers talked about how it had affected their relationship with their pupils, especially if it had resulted in taking time off near the start of the school year. A teacher (CS10) who had previously experienced poor mental health from mid-October to mid-November explained that he usually spends the first half term getting to know his pupils, getting attuned to them and getting to know their needs; building a relationship with them. He felt that by October half term his pupils would have been ready to learn, or as he put it, 'ready to go'. But because he had that month off, he felt it had put everything back. He felt like they had to start all over again. It was February half term before they really got going. He felt that a full term of learning was lost.

Teachers with poor mental health tried not to let it impact on others. However, some did confess that others may notice when they were 'grumpy' and know when to stay out of their way.

There were several ways in which those experiencing issues of stress and anxiety were said to affect others including:

▶ Increased workloads;

▶ Giving them more problems to resolve;

▶ Having to cover extra classes;

▶ Difficulty in maintaining relationships;

▶ Difficulty with social or professional conversations;

In some cases, working with a colleague who is not coping well increases the stress levels of others, putting them in danger of going down the same path.
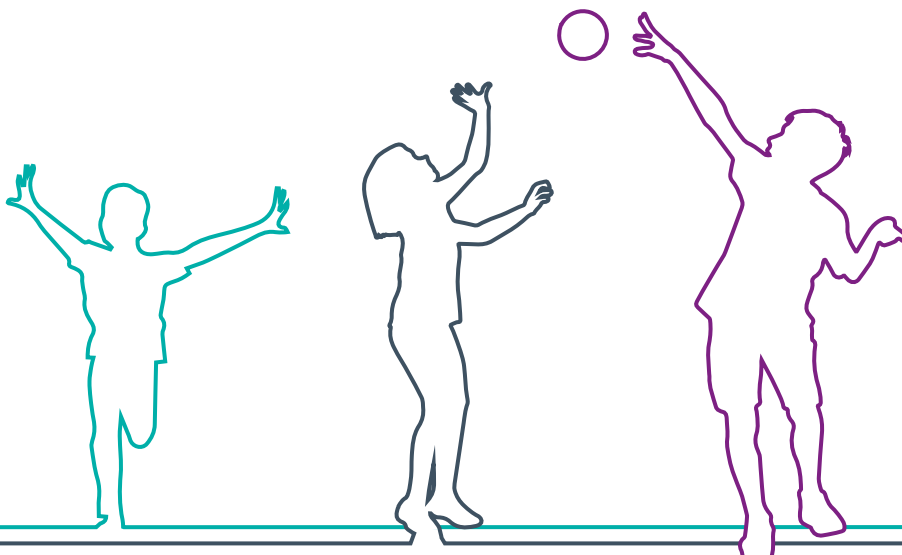
In general, teachers with poor mental health did not feel they impacted negatively on their colleagues. However, some of their colleagues disagreed. For example, a teacher in CS1 who was experiencing poor mental health absolutely felt he had no impact on others, stating: 'I'm very self-contained.' When stress builds up he gets it out of his system so that no one else knows. However, when a colleague was asked about the impact of those with poor mental health on them they commented: 'You get pulled down by them. You want to help them…but it can bring everyone down.'

One teacher and senior leader (CS6), with good mental health explained that if a teacher is off (for whatever reason) he has to cover the lesson. This has a knock-on effect for everything he does. His responsibilities with his class 'takes a hit'. As do his responsibilities outside of the class that affect the school in a broader sense. Whilst is can be difficult, he tries hard not to let the situation 'bog' him down.

Others commented:

> …it is tricky when you have people off and you're doing extra duties, it's tiring. You might as well keep going, you're going to help them out. The kids are going to benefit from it. If I only get five minutes for my dinner I only get five minutes. For me it's not the end of the world, but I know for other people it would be. So, I just see it as me helping the school which will benefit the school, the staff and the children.
>
> *(TGMH, CS2)*

Coping strategies

There were two types of strategies in place that helped teachers cope with their mental health and wellbeing; individual and school-based.

Individual coping strategies:

Teachers reported numerous coping strategies which they employed to keep themselves mentally healthy and able to cope with the demands of the job. Some strategies were specific to those who were, and have always been, in good mental health. Some helped those with poor mental health cope better and some were common to both.

Coping strategies for teachers in good mental health included:

▶ Developing resilience;

▶ Exercising;

▶ Flexible working;

▶ Their beliefs; and

▶ Undertaking new learning.

Coping strategies for teacher who are at times in poor mental health include:

▶ Accessing counselling;

▶ Avoiding social media, especially during non-school times;

▶ Music;

▶ Prioritising;

▶ Putting on an act in the classroom;

▶ Reducing hours;

▶ Taking up meditation;

▶ Taking PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time at home; and

▶ Using humour in the classroom.

Strategies common to all teachers were:

▶ Being organised;

▶ Limiting the amount of work they do at home;

▶ Putting time aside for hobbies; and

▶ Talking to family and friends.

Prioritisation and organisation appear to be key skills that those prone to poor mental health often reported learning after they had had a crisis; a sign that beforehand they were seeking perfection and thought they could (and should) do everything all of the time. They came to realise that this is not always possible and sometimes there have to be compromises, as these teachers explained:

> I've got to that stage in teaching now where I can think, I can organise myself. I can prioritise my workload. A lot of the little things you do when you are an NQT like, classroom displays etc., I leave that now to the TAs or classroom assistants or volunteers. I focus on what is important. It's about delegation, but also knowing that this can wait. It's just prioritising workload and making time for yourself and thinking I'm going home now, I need to put my mind at rest, when I feel like getting back to it I will get some work done without feeling guilty.
>
> *(T2PMH, CS1)*

> Making lists, I'm very good at making lists and prioritising. That way I can see that all the things I'm stressing about can actually be achievable and put into some sort of logical order. Sometimes you think I've got this to do and that to do, when am I going to do this and when you actually start and write it down you think, it's not actually that bad.
>
> *(TPMH, CS2)*

> Your job list is never done. You have to find peace with it.
>
> *(TPMH, CS4)*

> It's the realisation that you can't do everything 100%. I think I came into the job 8/9 years ago, thinking, right, I'm going to do everything, 200%, fire it out all of the time, but then it takes over your life so you have to say right, what's the priority?
>
> *(TPMH, CS8)*

> I used to think that if I didn't get things done people would think badly of me but now I think, actually tonight I'm absolutely exhausted so I'm not going doing anything. If I choose not to plan one night but I have an idea, it's not the end of the world. I'm much better at prioritising.
>
> *(TPMH, CS10)*

School-based strategies:

Most of the schools had, or were about to put into place, strategies to help staff cope with issues of mental health and wellbeing. Some were whole-school strategies that included pupils as well as all staff. Some were practical, work-based strategies whilst others were more about giving emotional support or boosting moral. School strategies included:

▶ Adhering to a range of policies such as staff attendance. At least one school had a wellbeing policy in place;

▶ An afternoon off during the term for staff to do with as they please;

▶ Being more aware of how decisions taken by senior management affect staff;

▶ Buddy system – where everyone is paired up with someone (in a different year group) they can talk to when they are feeling stressed. 'Sometimes you don't want to go to the senior managers or the HT if you have a problem. You just want to have a more relaxed chat with your buddy,' (TPMH, CS2);

▶ Having an open culture throughout the school driven by the Headteacher and the senior leadership team;

▶ Headteachers being more visible in the classroom to support staff;

▶ Including wellbeing in performance targets;

▶ Inviting staff to form a wellbeing group; and

▶ Longer summer transitions from one year group into another, (i.e. moving from year 4 to year 5), which one school (CS10) reported had helped both staff and pupils;

▶ Managing or reducing workloads, for example one school (CS4) is aiming to go back to paper planning instead of what was described as 'beautiful schemes of work, typed up in loads of detail' that are just not necessary;

▶ Phased returns for staff who have been off sick;

▶ Random acts of kindness, with one school having an impromptu 'happiness fairy' (see below);

▶ Rationalisation of initiatives, ensuring they are joined-up and there is no duplication;

▶ Staff training around mental health and wellbeing, of both children and adults;

▶ Subscribing to the Schools Advisory Service (SAS)[8] that can be accessed anonymously and confidentially; and

▶ Treating staff well and with respect.

Two of the above are worthy of further explanation.

First, the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in performance management targets at CS4. For one interviewee this meant he had a late start on a Friday, not arriving in school until 'bang-on' 8:15am. He commented: '*I prepare the night before but don't come in until 8:15am. I go to McDonalds for breakfast and a coffee. It's my treat, because every other morning I'm here from 7/7:15. So Friday morning is my treat morning.*' Some members of staff are required to leave at 3:45pm. As part of their mental health target they are encouraged to go home and shut off and do whatever they want for the evening.

The second strategy can be found at CS7 where someone has taken on the role of a 'happiness fairy'. It is not a formal initiative but rather something that someone has taken upon themselves to do around the school. Whilst it is not a strategy as such, it was something that, according to the Headteacher, had lifted everybody in the school. To explain, someone in school set up an email via their IT providers and emailed everybody to say they need to look out for each other, to celebrate common interests and be to there for each other. They asked for those who were interested in being involved to message back. It was all done in a poem form. 'Loads of people were going, this is great, yes, count me in count me in.' As a result, some people have found a bottle of wine on their desk in the morning or a bar of chocolate. Or a little gift or a card or something. And there have been emails going around saying, "thanks to my happiness fairy, I'm going to really enjoy my treat tonight, thank you for thinking of me." The Headteacher described it as 'just supportive'.

[8] https: A specialist insurance services provider for the education sector

> **Several schools had pre-emptive proactive strategies in place that were driven by the Headteacher and the senior leadership team.**

Several schools had pre-emptive proactive strategies in place that were driven by the Headteacher and the senior leadership team. These mainly centred around the senior leadership team being more aware of staff moods – something that is much easier to do in a small primary school – and having an open culture in the school that encourages staff to talk and keeps the lines of communication open.

> We have a Senior Management meeting each week and one of the standard items is staffing. We talk about any staff that we are concerned about, because we want them to be ok. It's not that we are concerned about the job that they are doing, that's completely different. It's more the personal side of things. That's not just myself, it's my Assistant Head and my Deputy Head as well because they'll get different vibes from their position that I get from where I am.
>
> *(HT, CS4)*

> It's about being flexible and staff understanding that they don't always have to stick to the timetable. It's trusting people.
>
> *(HT, CS7)*

> It is almost, knowing their personalities, and with it being a small school, you're working very, very closely with people and you get to know them on a closer level, if you like. So, you are aware of what may work well with them or some of the ways to deal with them. It's that emotional intelligence; that is what I'm getting at.
>
> *(HT, CS8)*

> It's about picking things up as a team. We have moved away from "this is your class, these are your pupils." If one teacher is feeling that they are struggling, they will take on that responsibility together, talk about it, and have collective responsibility for progress... They know what's coming up and when. It's that clarity of communication between us all.
>
> *(SL, CS10)*

A senior leader at CS2 summed up the general direction many of the case study schools are moving:

> As a leadership team we just started to become more aware of how our decisions, how our practices, affect our staff. We can't take the stress away; we can't make it a school that has no stress, or no pressure, that's just not reasonable. The job is high stress, high pressure because it comes with accountability. And with any accountability comes stress. So, we can't remove the stress, but what we can do is be aware of it and try and put measures in place to reduce it and manage it so that it is reasonable.
>
> *(SL, CS2)*

However, sometimes, some schools miss the fact that their teachers are stressed, whatever the reason, and, as a result, fail in their duty of care towards their staff. As one teacher with poor mental health highlighted:

> I feel like the teachers in my old schools should have noticed that I wasn't coping. I was staying in school until 10pm every night and they should have questioned that to see if everything was alright at home. They didn't question it and I didn't go home because I was experiencing domestic violence by my partner. So, I stayed in school and worked and worked and they let me. In fact, they just piled on more work.
>
> *(CS3, TPMH)*

> **I feel like the teachers in my old schools should have noticed that I wasn't coping.**
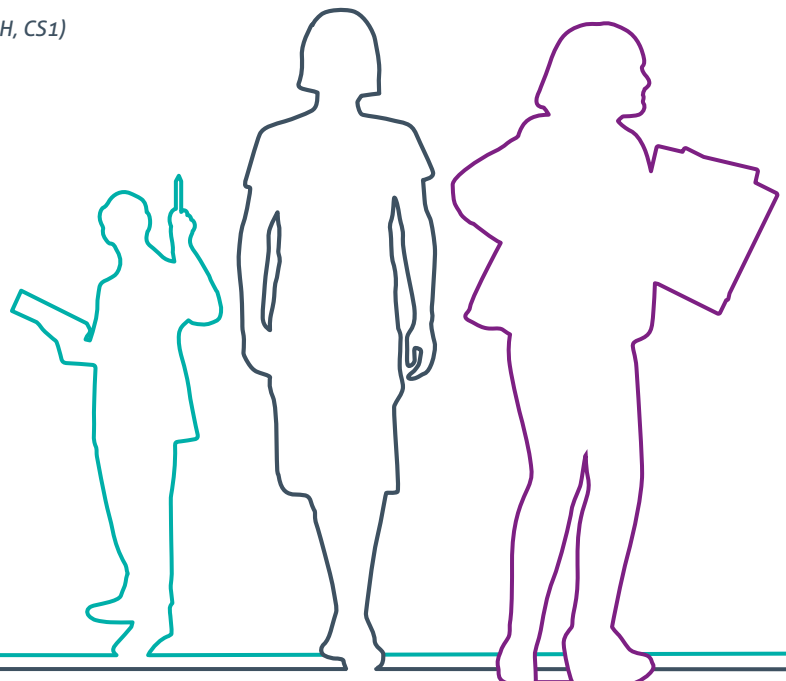
Accessing support

Most teachers knew where to go to for support should they need it. Many felt comfortable approaching their Headteacher or a member of their senior leadership team. CS2 had recently conducted a psychologically-safe staff survey which found that all staff at the school knew who to go to and felt comfortable going to that person to talk about their mental health should they need to. One teacher stated that: 'Professionally, my first port of call would be my Headteacher, because I respect his opinion. And I think he will actually think about my wellbeing and the wellbeing of the children'

(TGMH, CS6).

However, this was not the case for everyone. One of the teachers with poor mental health at CS1 clearly felt their current Headteacher was not as open or approachable as they could be, commenting:

In terms of leadership, I don't think anyone dare go and knock on the door and say it is all a bit too much. You need to hear it from the leaders. Just someone that says: "we know you are human". The previous Head organised Wellbeing Team fun activities. Especially on the first day back. We went to the seaside once. Socialising made us really happy and relaxed. We did ballroom dancing. It just reminded you that we are human and can have fun. Now you walk in and no-one says good morning, you go and make yourself a drink, sit yourself down with the laptop and at 9 o'clock your children come in and that's when you leave that table. And the same happens at night.

(T2PMH, CS1)

The impact of teacher mental health and wellbeing on pupil progress

The impact of a teacher's mental health and wellbeing on pupil progress was explored not just with the staff at each primary school but also with their pupils.

Understanding wellbeing and mental health: the pupils' perspectives

The majority of children who took part in the pupil discussion groups were familiar with terms such as mental health, stress and anxiety, even where their school was only at the beginning of their wellbeing journey. They were less likely to have heard of 'depression'; some schools used different terminology calling it 'having a grump on' or perhaps being in a blue mood.'

> Mental health is something that you can't see but that you have. You feel like you are stuck in a wall.
>
> *(Pupil, CS5)*

> It's like, not checking your heartbeat or anything like that; it's like checking your mind.
>
> *(Pupil, CS8)*

> Anxious – when you're very, very scared.
>
> *(Pupil, CS4)*

> Depression - It means you're very upset about something and you can't get it off your mind and it's causing you different problems.
>
> *(Pupil, CS7)*

Children were most familiar with the term stress and many could recall a time when they had felt stressed, either at home or at school. Some Year 6 pupils were feeling stressed by their impending SATs and some were anxious about which school they would be going to next year. Most pupils were feeling happy on the day they were interviewed. All pupils agreed that it was normal to feel a range of different emotions at different times and that adults experience these emotions just as much as they do.

Knowing a teacher's mood

Staff felt that pupils - especially those in Years 5 and 6 - are able to pick up on their teachers' mood – no matter how much they try and hide it - and that it does have an adverse effect on how they both learn and behave in class.

> The children pick up how the teacher is feeling that day. And it might be that they are not as organised as they need to be. And the biggest thing that you see then is a frustration and it's almost as though "well, I'm giving you the work children and you can't do it" but actually if you unpick it its maybe you weren't quite as prepared as you needed to be because you're having to deal with something else.
>
> *(HT, CS8)*

Discussions with the children confirmed that this was indeed the case.

Pupils talked most about their teachers being stressed. They were able to identify immediately at the start of the day what sort of mood their teacher was in. They picked on their teachers' facial expressions, particularly whether or not they came in with a smile or, in one case, dancing. Children also picked up teachers' mannerisms and general attitude towards the class.

" All pupils agreed that it was normal to feel a range of different emotions at different times and that adults experience these emotions just as much as they do. "

Sometimes when you're doing something wrong, they get angry. Their facial expressions. You can see from their face if they are angry or happy.

(Pupil, CS2)

When she can't find the rubber, "where's the rubber, I can't find the rubber." When people take her white rubber. Sometimes she starts to shout when she is stressed.

(Pupil, CS4)

Teachers who were stressed reportedly became short-tempered with their pupils and uncharacteristically irritable when things did not go according to plan. This could be anything from the IT not working properly to the pupils not understanding the work they were given. Sometimes pupils said the teacher may forget what they had asked the class to do.

If the teacher is feeling really grumpy, the teacher is like "urrrh".

(Pupil, CS4)

Our teachers gets pretty mad when someone can't understand a really easy maths question.

(Pupil, CS6)

Sometimes they start telling people off more frequently because they are having a hard time so some of the kids get a hard time.

(Pupil, CS7)

When they are happy they will shout in a good way like when we win or something like, 'yesssss, we did it' [hands up in the air – victory shout]. When they are stressed, it is more of a "what are you doing?" shout.

(Pupil, CS6)

One girl (CS5) told how last year her teacher was sometimes having a 'tough time' and when they failed to do their work in class the teacher 'freaked out and removed herself', commenting that 'sometimes she just got overwhelmed.'

Some pupils reported that their teachers can be stressed at different times of the year, especially around assessment times:

At the start of the year they are really energetic, but when it gets later on in the year they get less [energetic]. Towards test times for KS1 and KS2, they get stressed.

(Pupil, CS7)

Pupils reported that when a teacher is stressed, classroom behaviour deteriorates: 'they try to talk but everyone talks over them, (Pupil, CS5). Some senior leaders (especially at CS6) confirmed that this is often the case.

Whilst some pupils felt that their teachers try their best to hide when they are feeling stressed from them, the pupils could still tell. One girl at CS5 observed: 'some are sad inside but they look happy outside. They try not to show it.' Another girl at the same school commented: 'they don't show it because they don't want us to worry.' A pupil at CS8 commented:

When she's like frustrated, in the morning I can tell because she's normally really happy. She's frustrated because she is trying to hide it. But because I've been with her for nearly two years, I can sense it. I'm just like; I know it's not going to be a good day.

(Pupil, CS8)

To sum up, teachers were seen as stressed when:

▶ They are unusually short tempered;

▶ They shouted at the class more than normal;

▶ They get upset when pupils who do not understand the work they are given;

▶ The work pupils produce is judged by the teacher as not being up to standard or as incorrect;

▶ Classroom behaviour deteriorates; and

▶ Less work than usual is completed during a lesson.

Pupils reactions to stressed teachers

Pupils proved to be quite attuned to the mood of their teacher. Some children tried to help them to be happier by:

▶ Asking the teacher questions s/he can help them with;

▶ Behaving;

▶ Cheering them up by doing something nice for the teacher and being kind to them;

▶ Giving the teacher some time to get things done;

▶ Keeping quiet or not talking so much in class;

▶ Not upsetting the teacher further or making it worse;

▶ Trying to get others to stop taking; and

▶ Trying harder.

Some pupils felt an obligation to try and make things better for the teacher, the class and themselves.

> When our teacher is having a bad day, we just try to help them. We don't want to make it worse so we just get on with our work.
>
> *(Pupil, CS9)*

In some schools the pupils (particularly at CS8) were not averse to going to tell the Headteacher or another member of staff, when they felt their teacher was not coping very well, especially if they feel it is resulting in them being unfairly treated.

> The children in this school tend to seek me out as the person to talk to and they will do that sometimes rather than talking to their own teacher. To me that says something. And two children from the class where the teacher's mental health, I would say is probably not as healthy as it should be, they are two children that will come and speak to me, or have spoken to me, and have said, "We don't know what to do. We feel that things are not quite right".
>
> *(SL, CS8)*

> "When their teachers are happy and in a good mood, pupils said their lessons were more creative, fun, relaxed and they were given more interesting work to do."

The effect of a teacher's mental health on pupils' progress

When their teachers are happy and in a good mood, pupils said their lessons were more creative, fun, relaxed and they were given more interesting work to do. Children were keen to impress their teacher and work hard for them. They all felt they made more progress when their teacher was in a good mood.

However, when their teacher was in a bad mood and stressed, children felt it had a detrimental effect on their learning. Children reported that, at such times, they often worked in silence and they tried not to upset their teacher further. Their learning 'slowed down', they found it difficult to concentrate and the quality of their work was not as good as usual. This was because they tried to finish their work quickly:

> 'it makes me rush. So that I don't get told off for not finishing It', (Pupil, CS8). When the teacher was stressed, some children were left not knowing what they were supposed to be doing, they became confused or got 'a bit muddled.'
>
> *(Pupil, CS4)*

These exchanges between children highlight how a teacher's negative mood can sometimes affect the whole class:

CS1:

Extract from pupil discussion group

Interviewee: So when your teacher is sad or stressed how does that make you feel in the lesson?

Boy 1 : The class is silent, there is no talking.

Girl 1: It makes you feel down. You feel stressed as well.

Girl 2: When the teacher's upset, it makes everyone else silent and makes everyone really unhappy.

Boy 2: She gives us more work and we have to work in silence.

CS2:

Extract from pupil discussion group

Interviewee: How does it make you feel when your teacher is sad??

Girl 1: It makes me want to prove that they don't need to be angry at me. That I can actually do this.

Girl 2: It's not you particularly; they've got too many things going on in the class.

They found this distracting when the teacher had to spend time shouting at other pupils.

> If the class gets too noisy, it's really annoying. Because if people are shouting, it's the whole class, and the whole class has to be punished. You have to stay in at your break time.
>
> *(Pupil, CS2)*

> People messing about means the teacher is focusing on them and all the others are just waiting whilst the ones misbehaving are messing about. It slows down the lesson and their learning.
>
> *(Pupil, CS5)*

The senior leader at CS6 had data evidence to show that in classes where a teacher had poor mental health or was perhaps in a negative mood, that pupil behaviour often deteriorated, especially by the end of the day, which then had an adverse effect on pupils learning. She explained:

> You can see dips in the behaviour data where on certain days you can feel that, that teacher didn't seem happy and there have been three children sent out. And sometimes it's the way the teacher reacts to the behaviour. Sometimes the teachers' reaction says it all. Sometimes you might have five children sent out and on other days, there might not be any. For me, it is how the teachers have reacted to the behaviour. Sometimes it's because they have followed the behaviour policy brilliantly and sometimes it's because they have missed a few steps out. Because that's just the way they are feeling. And that then impacts on the children's learning because they are sent out of the lesson so they miss out on chunks of learning.
>
> *(SL, CS6)*

The effect of teachers covering classes on pupil progress

Children in the study had all experienced having a cover teacher stand in for their regular classroom teacher (but not necessarily as a result of the teacher being off through poor mental health) at some time during their school life. Their views varied on how much it impacted on their learning, often it was directly correlated to how often and for how long, the cover was required. For those where it was minimal or where the cover teacher belonged to the school, it had not presented too much of an issue. However, for others where cover had been longer-term or involved multiple teachers, it was more problematic. Here pupils agreed that it had affected their learning and progress. Some pupils found it confusing, reporting that they often got different messages from different teachers and different styles of teaching. The only time they worked harder for a cover teacher was when it was the Headteacher. The following extracts from CS2 and CS7 pupils highlight some of the difficulties they have experienced with cover teachers:

CS2:
Extract from pupil discussion group

Girl 1: When we were in Year 4. I think it may have happened that we had loads of teachers. When we had our first teacher we learnt quite good stuff, but when we had the second teacher we had to start all over again. We started over and over and over again

Boy 1: It's hard to concentrate with them, because you have a new teacher.

Girl 1: They have new ways of how they do it.

Boy: This teacher taught us a different way to do it and then another tells you different

CS7:
Extract from pupil discussion group

Boy: When we were in Year 4, one of our teachers had to have an operation and everyone got really annoyed because we had to have a constant stream of supply teachers for a month and we didn't get to know them much and some people in the class were worrying about the teacher and stuff.

Girl: When we had a supply teacher, they didn't have enough info on what we were learning so it kind of "ping-ponged" every time we had a new one. And they started teaching us new stuff and we hadn't properly got into the last lesson. It was a bit confusing.

CS9:
Extract from pupil discussion group

Boy 1: The cover teachers don't know us. They don't know where we are up to in our learning so the work might be too easy or too difficult for us. They might think we have covered things that we haven't yet covered.

Boy 2: They are not as strict as our usual teacher so we don't work as hard for them.

Teachers, especially headteachers, were keenly aware that having cover teachers can be disruptive for pupils:

> When one of my teachers was off long-term, we had a supply teacher, and the marking and feedback and the consistency following school policy that we had worked hard on as a staff, wasn't there... For children it was that insecurity. You've got your teacher in and you're happy with that person and then a supply comes in for some time, it can knock their confidence. They were upset. You'd started to build a relationship and you have started to see that you have brought children along in their confidence, and then that rug gets pulled out from underneath them, and it does have a negative impact.
>
> *(HT, CS7)*

At least one school (CS10) has a policy of not using supply agency staff but covering all classes in-house if possible. They believe this limits the disruption to pupils.

" Some pupils found it confusing, reporting that they often got different messages from different teachers and different styles of teaching. "

Impact on pupils' progress from the teachers' perspective:

Teachers were asked about the short and long-term impact on pupils as a result of having a classroom teacher who suffers from poor mental health, or indeed from a teacher being off for a substantial amount of time in any given school year, regardless of the reason.

Interviewees, especially Headteachers, were more likely to report a short-term negative effect on pupil progress as a result of classroom teachers being absent than they were a long-term detrimental impact. Perhaps this is because, for most schools in the study, they had not recently experienced a long-term staff absence. Everyone agreed that it was very difficult to measure any negative impact, especially over the short-term. Sometimes it was said to be just a feeling you got from the pupils in a class where the teacher was known to be struggling; sometimes it showed in their behaviour.

> I suffered domestic violence for years. My partner used to stop me from sleeping. He did things like pour water on the bed so that I didn't get a good sleep and in the morning, I was exhausted so it definitely affected my teaching.
>
> *(TPMH, CS3)*

> It is a very hard one to measure. But I believe that if a teacher has poor mental health it is going to impact on their work. They're not going to be in the right frame of mind. I haven't seen any standards drop. But it's how it feels in that classroom when you walk in. When I do a learning walk through school, its calm, there are conversations going on, you can hear the learning. It's really, really hard to measure it in numbers. It's the feeling that you get when I've walked into some classes, at specific times in the day, it's not all of the time. I've noted that the teacher has been off with them, it's just a different feel when you walk in. It's really hard to put it down on paper or measure it with a number. It just feels different.
>
> *(HT, CS4)*

> When I had poor mental health, I was not able to focus on my teaching. I found it difficult to concentrate on my planning and I struggled to teach with a clear mind. However hard I tried, the other things going on in my life were still there. I couldn't forget about them just because I had walked into school. They were always on my mind.
>
> *(TPMH, CS4).*

> I think as with any walks of life, if you're not performing to the best of your ability, then that will have a knock on effect on your performance. So a teacher who is happy, settled and has a strong sense of wellbeing will perform better than a teacher who's not. And obviously, if you teach well the children make good progress. And if you don't teach so well they don't.
>
> *(TGMH, CS6)*

> The children's progress isn't going to be the same as with that one consistent member of staff that knows them really well. Their behaviour will go so that all impacts on learning. It takes so long for each individual to build a relationship with those children then get prepared and sorted out. All that time they're not learning as much as they would have done with their teacher that would have been with them. It will undoubtedly have an impact.
>
> *(TPMH, CS7)*

> I think the children pick up on how the teacher is feeling and then in turn they are not being given that quality teaching experience so in the short term they are not making that progress that you would expect.
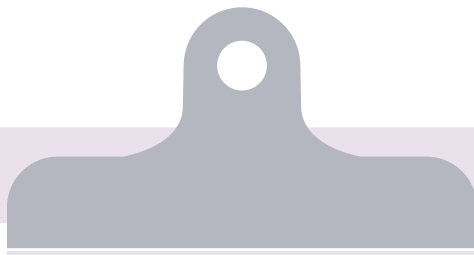>
> *(HT, CS8)*

> I do think it has an impact, it has an impact on them themselves and how they then want to interact with the teacher or not. So I think learning is impeded in that way because I wonder if sometimes if they don't like to ask a question again just in case they might get a snappier answer. Or they might get the retort that perhaps you should have been listening.
>
> *(TGMH, CS8)*

> The class that had a long-term supply teacher made less progress during that time. I cannot give you numbers but they definitely made less progress.
>
> *(HT, CS9)*

In relation to long-term impact, CS2 were able to say with some certainty that poor teacher mental health, that had led to a member of staff having a considerable amount of time off work, had adversely impacted on pupil progress. They had data evidence to substantiate their claim. Their experience is outlined in the following on the next page.

CS2: Evidence of the long-term impact of teacher mental health on pupil progress and attainment:

Their current Year 6 children had experienced a high turnover of teachers when they were in Year 4. Some of the issues had been around teacher depression and mental health. In total, the class had four supply teachers that year, which the Headteacher strongly believed had a 'massive' long-term effect on pupil progress and attainment. The Headteacher explained:

Every time a new teacher comes in you are almost having to start again. The relationships, the security. It isn't just the physical learning; it's actually all the things like the growth, the maturity, the character building, as you move through KS2 children develop all of those skills. You lose all of that when every 8-10 weeks you have a new adult that you have to pick up with. You lose that security of knowing what an adult expects or what the standard is, because ultimately then you get a different adult who wants it done in a different way. So that instability for them has affected them quite massively. And certainly in terms of outcomes, we've not been able to close the gap of that loss of learning as quickly as we would have liked.

The Headteacher went on to describe how pupil progress and attainment was, and still is, visible in the data:

We are a data-rich school. We use a lot of assessment info to track whether or not our children are not just on track in terms of that year, but from where they started. Their expected levels of progress and also their progress from entry and progress within the year. It became apparent, during that year, that because of the change in teachers coming in it was affecting their in-year progress. We then looked at their data when they went into Year 5, the progress from starting point, the gap had widened, because they had lost that year for learning, you've widened the gap. It got to the point where I could not put another supply teacher with those children, it would have meant it would have been a complete write-off for learning in that year, so I went in and taught them for the summer term.

When asked if the data for the cohort had improved, the Headteacher stated that whilst it had:

Ultimately, the overall data for that year group was below expected progress, and the children were off-track with their attainment. We couldn't in 10 weeks close the gap of the loss of nearly 30 weeks of work.

Whilst they put in place a number of interventions for the pupils when they moved into Year 5 to try and improve their progress and narrow the attainment gap that had opened up, these children were not expected to perform to the level they initially had the potential to. This was said to be a direct result of the disruption they experienced in Year 4. Additional evidence was supplied by comparing the Year 6 class (who experienced the disruption) with the current Year 5 classes:

By comparison, our current Year 5 have had consistent teachers all the way through. They have probably all had teachers that you would say all had good mental health. There have been very low rates of absence and things like that. They will probably be one of our best performing year groups.

Further evidence was given by comparing the two current Year 4 classes. One of which has had a consistent teacher and is performing well. The other class had a change of teacher mid-year and is struggling. The Headteacher observed:

In terms of data there is a difference between the two classes. And there is a difference in the behaviour in the two classes again, just because there has been that change.

The main issue with the current Year 6 class following their disruptive year has been that of behaviour. According to the Headteacher:

The class was just not cohesive anymore. That had a big knock-on to their continued learning in Year 5. They had to learn how to function as a class again. Because they just had not been working together, they just had not had that consistency.

Data evidence of pupil vulnerability

There was little concrete evidence (i.e. in the data) that any one specific group of pupils were more vulnerable in terms of their progress due to poor teacher mental health or disruption in the classroom. However, several of the schools did identify that potentially pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and White British boys, especially those eligible for pupil premium (additional funding for publicly-funded schools in England to help disadvantaged pupils of all abilities perform better and close the gap between them and their peers), were most likely to have their progress put at risk. This was said to be mainly due to the disruption of the relationship with their teachers.

Resilience strategies used to mitigate the effects of poor teacher mental health on pupils

One of the research questions asked: What resilience strategies are used by highly effective teachers with poor mental health to ensure that their students thrive? Evidence from the study showed that this was not usually viewed as the responsibility of the teacher who was experiencing poor mental health. Rather, it was dealt with as part of the school's strategic approach to general staff illness and absence.

One of the main strategies teachers used with pupils was not to let the children see that they were struggling to hide their feelings. Some teachers talked about hiding behind a mask once they walked into school, having a 'work face' or 'work persona'. However, it is clear from the children's interviews earlier, that this is not usually successful.

Teachers themselves explained how they try to hide their feelings:

> I do try and not let it affect the children at all. I don't think it is fair on them. They've not come to school to think, "Oh, she's got a problem today." So I do try very hard to be my normal jolly outgoing self in the classroom. But when the children have left the room that's when I might just have a minute's reflection time or time away.
>
> *(TPMH, CS2)*

> The only way I could cope was to go down to three days so that I could focus on my ill parents. When I was doing five days, I wasn't giving my best because I had no time to plan lessons and mark work. That helped me to stay in teaching otherwise I would not be here.
>
> *(TPMH, CS4)*

> I try not to let it affect my work, especially when I'm with the children. As soon as I go into the classroom, you put on your mask don't you? You're like: "everything is fine".
>
> *(TPMH, CS6)*

> My opinion is that if you are suffering in some way it's very hard to come into school, it's like putting on an act, you come through the door, you're there, you're the persona and the bright bubbly personality in the classroom and the majority of staff can do that. And they can brush aside things that are happening at home. And they can be that person in the classroom that the children needs and the children deserve. But I think there are times when the children are very intuitive and can read a mood. And they know if they are going to have a more difficult day because the teacher might not be feeling on par, so to speak.
>
> *(TGMH, CS8)*

Final comment

This small-scale exploratory research into the effects of teacher mental health and wellbeing on pupil progress in primary schools provides a valuable snapshot of some of the current issues facing teachers and their potential impact on pupils in the classroom. This study highlights examples where pupil learning has been affected by their teachers' mood, to a lesser or greater degree and that pupils are often aware of their teachers' mood - no matter how hard the teacher tries to hide it. Pupils reported that they were more productive and learnt more when their teachers were happy and teaching was consistent. The relationship that develops between pupil and teacher is also key to a primary child's ability to thrive. Some teachers acknowledged that their poor mental health had a detrimental impact on the quality of their teaching and the progress of their pupils. Pupils were very knowledgeable about mental health and were able to articulate strategies for managing their own mental health. They felt that the use of cover teachers for absent teachers detrimentally impacted on both their ability to learn and on their progress.

It would appear that both teachers and pupils agree that:

> Having the right teacher in the class who is in the right mental health is fundamental to the child's success. The best classes are the ones that have the most stable teachers. The class feed off that. They know that you're a consistent, strong personality in that classroom, every day. And they know that you don't get phased by anything. Then they aspire to that, they want to be like that.
>
> *(TGMH, CS6)*

Section 4:
Key findings and recommendations

Key findings

Teachers' wellbeing and their resilience strategies

► Most teachers agreed that a teacher's wellbeing affects their performance as an education professional, especially their ability to deliver in the classroom.

► Teachers' wellbeing is finely balanced; the difficulty is not necessarily increased workloads as it is commonly assumed, but it can often be a crisis in their personal life - especially relationship difficulties, family bereavement or illness and childcare issues - which tips them over the edge.

► Teachers reported a number of work-related stress triggers including busy times of the year, such as assessment periods; the pressure of extra curricula activities; the unexpected; keeping up with the pace of change; and changes in school leadership.

► Many teachers who experienced poor wellbeing professed to wanting to stay in control and were striving to do everything to perfection all of the time; realising this is not always possible appeared to be a large part of their recovery.

► Being organised and able to prioritise are two essential skills teachers need to learn to maintain good wellbeing. Key coping strategies included talking to family and friends and putting a time limit on the amount of schoolwork they do at home.

► Most case study schools had a number of strategies in place to help staff with their wellbeing and mental health; some were formal, some were more informal in nature. Several revolved around reducing workloads and sharing responsibility.

► At least one school now includes wellbeing and mental health in each teacher's annual performance targets.

► All schools in the study were striving to be more open about wellbeing and mental health.

The impact of teacher mental health on pupils and their progress

► Most children in the study were familiar with, and understood, terms such as mental health, stress and anxiety.

► Children were attuned to their teacher's mood and could usually pick up when they were feeling stressed, even if teachers tried to hide it.

► Teachers were seen as 'stressed' by children when they were: unusually short tempered; they shouted at the class more than normal; they got upset when pupils did not understand the work they were given; classroom behaviour deteriorated; and less work than usual was completed in lessons

► Children learned more when their teacher was happy and performing well.

► Children tried and help their teacher when they were stressed and felt an obligation not to make things worse. Some of the ways they did this included working hard in lessons, behaving, doing something nice for the teacher to cheer them up and giving the teacher time to get their jobs done.

► Cover teachers can lead to confusion and inconsistency in learning, largely due to changing styles of teaching and teaching not being pitched at the right level.

► Children's behaviour in the classroom was cited as one of the signs that all was not well in the classroom and that the teacher was not coping.

► A deterioration in pupils' behaviour, especially in the classroom, was reported when cover teachers were used for any length of time; sometimes it took a long time for this to be corrected.

► Relationships are one of the most important aspects of school for primary school children. The relationship that they build up with their classroom teacher is key to their ability to learn. When this is disrupted, so are their chances to progress and attain their full potential.

This study highlights examples where pupil learning has been affected by their teachers' mood, to a lesser or greater degree and that pupils are often aware of their teachers' mood - no matter how hard the teacher tries to hide it.

Recommendations

This research study has a number of implications for a range of stakeholders, including those delivering initial teacher-training programmes, senior school leaders and those involved with continuing professional development:

School senior leaders:

▶ All school leaders should be proactive in reducing unnecessary workload for teachers.

▶ All school leaders should develop a positive school climate to enable staff and pupils to thrive.

▶ The wellbeing of staff should be a focus of the school improvement plan and should be a standing item for discussion at Governors' meetings.

▶ Senior leaders need to know their staff and be aware of the pressures they are feeling; not just from a work perspective, but also in their personal life.

▶ School leaders should take relevant steps to ensure that supply teachers are fully informed about pupils' current stage of development.

▶ Professional Development for senior leaders should include approaches to enhancing staff wellbeing.

▶ School leaders should improve signposting of external support services. For example, the charity Education Support Partnership run a free and confidential 24/7 helpline staffed by accredited counsellors, which is available to the entire education workforce.

Continuing professional development:

▶ Teachers should be provided with professional development to support them in managing their own mental health.

Initial teacher training programmes:

▶ All teacher training courses should include a module on teacher wellbeing to provide trainee teachers with strategies to manage their mental health and increase their resilience.

Future Research

This study points to the need for further research into the issue of teacher wellbeing and mental health and its impact on pupil progression. Future areas of investigation should include:

▶ A widening out of the study to primary schools in other geographical areas in the United Kingdom.

▶ A longitudinal study, over the period of one school year, to track the impact of measures schools are putting into place to help with teacher wellbeing and mental health.

▶ A study to track the progress of primary school pupils who experience significant classroom teacher disruption in Years 3 or 4 and the impact this has on their year 6 SAT results.

▶ Research into the situation in secondary schools and its impact on pupils, especially for those in Years 10 and 11 that are studying for their GCSEs.

▶ A study to explore the impact of school cultures on teacher wellbeing and mental health.

▶ Further research into non-work-related stress triggers.

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