



The Staff Wellbeing Group

Why they are so important and how to set one up.



Setting up a Staff Wellbeing Group or Working Party is a great way to really prioritise staff wellbeing within your school. But it can be a daunting task as it might seem there are so many possibilities and ways to do it. Who to invite? What to do first? Where to start? This handy guide will take you through those steps and more. But if you already have a group going (well done!) it will give you some other ideas to think about too.

Who should lead it

I am very passionate that the best person to be the wellbeing lead within a school is often not someone on SLT. That takes a lot of getting used to as they think by giving it to SLT they are showing they are taking it seriously.

But SLT are often the least seen people in the school, they are hard to find as they are buzzing around dealing with issues, in meetings or supporting staff and pupils. So then who? It needs to be someone who sees a lot of people throughout the day, who is respected by colleagues and compassionate and understanding. It is an ideal project for a middle leader, they can show impact and learn how to lead others.

Staff like that see many people throughout the day from across the roles within your school, they will be able to see what is going on and hear how people are feeling.

Where to start

You should start from a baseline, where are we at now? Ideally that would be with an anonymous staff survey (like Nourish the Workplace, ask me how this works) but at least by having a discussion with the group about what is currently offered for staff wellbeing.

Think about the different sections of staff and how they are supported, what is offered to them, how it is received and the uptake of that.

Collate this in a document so you can clearly see where you are starting from. This will also give you evidence of how you have made an impact.

After listening to what your staff would like to see going forwards, both in terms of what changes they would like to see, but also what they would like to keep. Don't go changing everything unnecessarily

It will seem daunting at first but remember you don't have to do everything immediately, this is a wish list and a vision for the future.

Who should be included

You should aim to have representatives from all sections of your staffing body. It should be an open invitation to all, but encourage participation from someone from SLT, a teacher, teaching assistant, non class based support and admin/site/finance. How many you have will depend on how big your school is and the different departments you have.

You may also want to include a governor and parent helpers if you have them, they are important stakeholders too.

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Give all staff a voice

Having representatives from each section of staff goes some way to meeting this, but they should be there embodying the title of representative. They need to speak to other staff, find out their views and bring them to the meeting.

When staff feel heard, they feel empowered and part of the team. Even if you can't do all of the things they suggest, just asking and listening to their views goes a long way in terms of morale and engagement.

Moving forwards

From the information you have gathered sort the ideas into categories of short, medium and long term plans. There will be things you can easily change now, probably by buying some extra teaspoons next time you are in the pound shop! There will be others that need some time and planning and others that are a long way off, probably due to funding. But they are all relevant and valid. Make a document showing this to share with all staff so they can see their ideas have been listened to and acted upon.



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How to fund it

Yes, it will cost money to make progress, and I know that is very tight for schools now. What follows are some suggestions, they won't all work for your situation and community, but you won't know unless you ask. Don't be too proud to ask for help, people want to help and often don't know how. However if none of these ideas work for you then take to social media to ask if anyone has any ideas on how they did it. You don't need to do this by yourself!

- Ask the school community. This works especially well for things like revamping the staff room or staff toilets. Most people have spare cans of paint in their garage and many people have things like pictures or soft furnishings that they don't want any more but haven't got around to getting rid of. You might even be able to get some new furniture!
- Sponsorship. Reach out to the local businesses in your area and ask for donations. They could fund a whole project like paying for Nourish the Workplace (not sorry at all for a shameless plug!) or paying for further training on behaviour. Some local companies might be able to even provide training on communication and team building. You can offer to put their business's logo on the next school newsletter, have information in the staffroom. It's not selling your soul, it's helping.
- Apply for grants. This does take a lot of time and work, but well worth it as they are big sums of money that could pay for extra staffing hours or a big build. Involve your community in this too, there may be parents who are proficient in this and could be a valuable help to you.

How to tell if it's working

The most powerful thing you can do is listen to your staff. Having an effective wellbeing group makes this much easier as between them they will be in touch with everyone. But a more formal, anonymous survey to ask their opinion is very valuable, you can then compare that to the baseline you started with. Notice is the other key word, take the time to notice on a daily basis. How happy are staff? Can you hear laughter? Is the staffroom being used? Are many staff off ill? Very often it's the small things that really matter to staff, keep an eye on them.

How often you should meet

Unfortunately I don't actually have an answer to this! It needs to work for you and your wellbeing group and only you know that.

If you meet too often it will negatively impact yours and your team's wellbeing, which is not what we want.

If you meet too sporadically, nothing will get done to move forward, which is not what we want.

You could try digital solutions to help, not just a WhatsApp group or email chain as that can get difficult to follow, but try team work solutions like Asana and Trello, their free platforms are great for things like this in between physical meetings or working collaboratively on a document on something like GoogleDocs. Communication is the answer, ask the people in your group what they are happy with and take your own workload into account too.

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When you meet resistance

In this day and age any progress towards a better working environment should be welcomed with open arms, but we would be naïve to think that will be the case for everyone. Somewhere along the line you may meet some resistance.

Fully communicating your intentions goes a long way towards breaking down these barriers. It's hard to argue with someone who is working at making things better for all. Also trying to understand why the person is fighting against you really helps. A head teacher may be nervous about what might come out of a survey, leaders sometimes take it very personally when staff are negative or want changes as they feel very strongly about a sense of place and it is against them, not the school in general. Staff may feel this is 'just another token approach' and you will need to work hard to gain their trust.

Listen to the resistance, you might not agree with it, but it is valuable information that will help you help more people in the long run

It might be hard, but remember why you started the process and it will help you through. Find other people running groups like this to find support for and be kind to yourself.