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Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Foreword

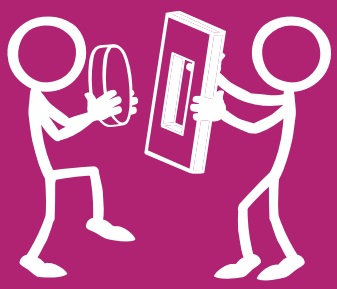
by Professor Mick Waters

The staff of a school is the most valuable resource that can be used to help children to acheve, succeed and enjoy their lives at school and beyond. Wouldn't we want to look after that resource, treasure it, help it to grow? Schools rightly focus upon their children but well being is about the whole school.

This resource helps schools to think through approaches to supporting their people. It cuts through all of the fads and trends to get to what really matters. It has suggestions and ideas rather than gimmicks. It offers suggestions for what might work for schools as well as considering what the thinking is behind the suggestion.

Kelly has pulled together her experience in many schools where the quality of learning is influenced by the quality of the place; what it feels like to be there, how people get on and treat each other, how they develop a sense of value. Is it a happy school?

Use it, enjoy it and see the benefits in tems of well being for children and adults in school.



What is wellbeing?

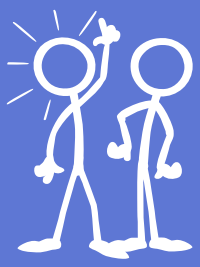
Mental health has become an increasingly conspicuous feature of the education landscape in recent times. Mental ill health certainly isn't new but our understanding of it, and more significantly, our developing understanding of what can influence it, is improving all of the time. Many schools are recognising that the education system itself plays a part in how mentally healthy both staff and pupils are, with stress being cited as a key factor in our diminished sense of wellbeing.

Wellbeing is our state of emotional 'wellness'; how we feel about the world and about our place within it. Our wellbeing impacts all aspects of our lives; our work, our relationships (with ourselves and with others), our leisure, even our dietary choices and levels of exercise. Whilst our environment, genetics and our access to medical support have their parts to play, the most significant contributors to an individual's sense of wellbeing are their behaviour (their conduct and interactions), their attitudes and their lifestyle choices. We are the keepers of the power when it comes to unlocking our own happiness and it is because of this that wellbeing must come from within; it cannot be done to us although the actions of others can certainly help. Happily, there are some identified factors to help us with this self-support and they are the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing is an evidenced-based model that highlights key aspects in shaping our wellbeing. The original piece of work was carried out by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) on behalf of the government Foresight's 'Mental Capital and Wellbeing' project, considering how to improve everyone's mental capital and mental wellbeing through life. Their findings suggested that even a small improvement in wellbeing can help to decrease some mental health problems and also help people to flourish. The 5 actions to improve personal wellbeing can be summarised as connect, take notice, give kindness, keep learning and be active.

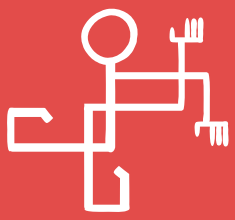
Many schools have got on board with introducing these '5 ways' with pupils, sometimes to wonderful effect. Whilst this is great, we do need to ensure that the actions shape the very fabric of our settings. Special event weeks or drop down days are lovely but will not bring about meaningful, sustainable change if the learning isn't woven throughout our provision and nowhere does this carry greater impact than with the staff themselves.

Children learn far more by what they see and feel, than what they are told. Even the most engaging, carefully resourced lessons are no match for positive role modelling of the behaviour we wish to promote; so if we want to get wellbeing right for children then we really need to get it right for the adults who influence them.



Well, we do staff yoga...

Activities to positively influence staff wellbeing can be great; whether it be yoga, mindfulness or even just a one off wellbeing staff meeting. However, you do need to ask yourself one key question in setting up and partaking in such activities... 'so what?' What difference is this going to make to the wellbeing of the adults in our school community? The answer could be something like... ***"a huge difference because when we surveyed the staff we found that most really wanted a time to come together and unwind while doing something to improve their core strength and flexibility."***



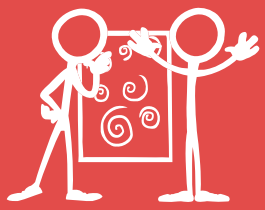
On the other hand, it might be,

"Oh cr#%! If they make me stroke crystals and any of that rubbish then I'd rather have the time to get on with this pile of marking." Year 6 Teacher

A nice idea from a keen staff member won't necessarily suit everyone and while it's perfectly okay to not please everyone, don't be too quick in thinking that you've ticked any boxes in improving staff wellbeing by offering just one commonly associated activity without first assessing staff needs.

What is the emotional climate?

Identifying pressure points



Some people are really good at measuring the emotional climate of a school and some of them may even be able to dig a little deeper to find out where the pressure points are.

To do this effectively you need;

Honesty - if people don't give you the full picture of what they are thinking and feeling, then you simply won't be able to progress very far in bringing about meaningful change.

Objectivity - ideally, you need someone neutral to gather the thoughts of the staff, as you don't want bias to shape the direction of discovery.

Senior leadership with a thick skin - people in any workplace can enjoy a grumble, sometimes with good reason, or sometimes because they are just more Eeyore than Tigger. Whatever comes up, The SLT need to be ready to listen and ready to adapt if they are serious about improving wellbeing.

Willingness to change - it sounds obvious that if you are looking into making improvements then you may well need to make changes; but many people actually don't want to change what they are doing, or to change any of their systems and processes. That's fine; but be honest about it but also recognise that improving wellbeing isn't something that is done during mental health awareness week by the teachers in Key Stage 2 or in the Red Class assembly.

Wellbeing in schools is a whole community consideration

A good place to start with assessing need is with a simple anonymous staff survey. Include all staff, not just teachers and TAs; Midday Supervisors and office staff are hugely influential in shaping the wellbeing culture of a school. Office staff are often the first voice or face to greet pupils and parents; the way they do this matters, significantly. Midday Supervisors often have an underappreciated role in school and yet their ability to interact positively and efficiently with the pupils, each other and the teaching team is crucial to a genuine culture of wellbeing. When they get it right, teachers know nothing about what they've done, when they don't, teachers can be managing the fallout from pupil disputes throughout the afternoon then from their parents after school. Poor management of emotional and behavioural need is a very reliable way of undermining any lovely work that may be going on to promote happy play times.

The results are in...

Staff surveys provide a rough baseline of staff thinking; they are not the complete picture. Think of a few team members that represent the extremes, they will help you identify the acute needs and the areas that may not be so pressing. Speak with a variety of people; the most positive and constructive people, someone fairly new and someone with a more lengthy experience of the setting. Identify others who are generally very critical, or disillusioned, or conspicuously stressed. Ensure you speak to someone who job shares or who has just returned from a period of leave (such as through maternity leave, illness, change in family circumstances etc.). You're aiming for as full a picture as possible by providing everyone with a voice (via the survey) then drilling down to the detail with a few choice representatives. Obviously, in a smaller school you may end up just speaking with everyone. In essence, there are two key questions to ask;

1. What's good about working here?

2. What happens here that makes life harder than it needs to be?

Further unpicking with a simple 'tell me more' should reveal suggestions for possible improvements or at least areas that the whole team can have a puzzle over.

This may be a challenge for some school communities. Consider asking someone who can be completely impartial to speak with the team so that staff members can speak freely without concern of offending others (or indeed the questioner!), you may well learn more this way.

Small things can make a big difference

Improving staff wellbeing is a process, not a quick fix tick box exercise. That said, small changes can make a world of difference so while the groundwork to this process may take some time investment, the actions to improve could be very simple. For example, if the identified pressure point is something like 'I don't feel that my efforts are recognised by the SLT' or 'I feel like I just exist in my classroom, I don't see anyone other than the kids most days' then these could be very easily improved by the whole community being reminded to take notice of one another, to identify personal strengths of another and actually verbalise this thinking, to build opportunities into the day to come together without the children (some schools don't routinely break or lunch together). Other pressure points may be to do with policy and practice, this shouldn't be onerous either. The job is the job so there's no getting away from that; but it is both realistic and completely appropriate to review and refine practices that are causing unnecessary stress to the team. However, this is just creating the right climate for a wellbeing culture, it isn't a guarantee that everyone will get on board.

A change is as good as a rest?

Ultimately, individuals need to take responsibility for their own happiness and if a setting has gone through this process of identifying where the needs are and have actively addressed these needs (including signposting to external support services where necessary) then perhaps one of the last considerations should be, 'is this the right job/school for you?' This isn't intended to sound as final as it seems. If asked with genuine interest and positive intention then it could spark the exploration of other employment opportunities. Many schools work as part of a cluster or trust making the possibility of a change of scene, role or key stage, or even the prospect of taking a sabbatical, both realistic and potentially beneficial for all parties concerned. Professional mobility may not appeal to everybody but that may be a matter of low self-esteem, fear of change or the thinking that the familiar skills won't translate into other employment opportunities; teachers often fail to recognise how transferable their skills are resulting in a feeling of professional entrapment for some.

The concept of professional mobility as a distinct means of improving the quality of teaching (supporting professional development, sense of purpose, personal interest and thus wellbeing) is further described in the independent review of education in Wales report, Teaching: A Valued Profession, which is well worth a read when considering how things could be different in education.

https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-11/teaching-a-valued-profession-report-of-the-independent-review.pdf

Good for Adults, Good for Children

In considering how a school culture can better support wellbeing, it may be helpful to use the following framework. With wellbeing at its core, this framework recognises that all aspects of school life influence a child's experience of the curriculum and that the curriculum itself is everything that the school community represents and delivers; the full educational experience.

For a child to learn, to achieve and to thrive, they must be in a state of readiness and to have their basic needs met. They must feel safe, they must feel valued, they must believe in themselves and have positive role models around them. Therefore, investment in the wellbeing of staff, parents and carers is hugely valuable in shaping an environment for success for all.

This framework, however, is just a starting point, a suggested means of auditing your current provision. Adapt it to suit your setting, add what happens in your school that reflects what is unique and special about your community and the evidence that others will see to substantiate this. Your personalised document could help inform your induction packs for new staff members or even your school prospectus.

For help and support with any aspect of this process, email Kelly Green at kelly@learnhappy.org.uk

Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Framework of Standards

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School experience for pupils

Theme	What happens	What you will see
Wellbeing (physical & emotional)	• School helps me to feel happy. • School helps me to be healthy. • School helps me to understand that illness is a normal part of life and what I can do to better help myself. • I learn how to look after my body and mind. • I learn about how my mind and body responds to triggers. • I am helped to develop healthy coping strategies. • School helps me to feel safe. • I know who I can talk to when I have a problem. • I have lots of opportunities to be active at school. • I have places where I can feel calm and relaxed at school. • I have times when I can feel calm and relaxed at school. • I am helped to feel positive about myself. • I am helped to feel positive about my learning. • I have a say in what happens in my school and I help to make decisions about what goes on. • I understand how my body changes as I grow into an adult and how this affects the way that I feel towards myself and towards other people.	Children will appear relaxed and happy. They will use positive strategies to cope with difficulties and setbacks. Children learn about basic neuroscience, that we can't help our emotional response but we can learn to manage our behaviour. Children will know about healthy lifestyle choices. Children learn that our bodies and minds exist in a constant state of flux and that this is normal. They will learn how to help manage low points or challenges by paying attention to what their body or mind needs and by caring for themselves in a kind and respectful way. Children learn about vagal tone and explore various healthy activities to help improve it. Children will confidently explain what to do or who to talk to if there is a problem. Children will show kindness and compassion towards one another. Children will have opportunities to share their thinking with the SLT (through student councils or similar) and will be able to identify how their feedback has shaped life in school. Children will learn about how their bodies change from infancy to adulthood and how this affects emotional changes too.
Relationships & safeguarding	• I learn about being a good friend. • I learn about treating myself and other people with respect. • I am helped to value my body and mind and to keep myself safe. • I learn about healthy relationships. • The adults in my school respond to behavioural needs with kindness and help me to find positive ways of expressing myself. • I know what a support network is. • I know who I can talk to about anything that worries me. • I learn about love and how families are all different.	Children learn about respect, self worth and consent as part of their understanding of healthy relationships. They will learn about 'uh oh' feelings and what to do if you don't feel safe. Children will be taught about the range of normality and of how we are each unique and special yet still have lots in common. Adults in school are ACEs* aware and use their understanding of behaviour as communication to support all children compassionately and consistently. Children will learn about support networks; identifying who to talk to and when. Children will learn about love in the context of different families including families with same sex partners. *ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences, formerly referenced as trauma)

Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Framework of Standards

School experience for pupils (cont.)

Theme	What happens	What you will see
Environment	• My school is welcoming and cheerful. • My school feels safe and comfortable. • My classroom displays and resources help me to learn. • My classroom allows me independence. • School displays celebrate my achievements. • I have lots of opportunities to be active at school. • I have places where I can feel calm and relaxed at school.	School is an inviting place to be. It feels warm and purposeful and the people there show genuine affection and respect towards one another. The site allows for varied learning, utilising outdoor space where possible including creative interpretation of indoor spaces. Resources are well looked after and are easily accessible. Displays reflect the ethos of the school.
Child led learning/ personalised learning	• I am able to select my own resources and equipment for learning. • I have some choice in what I learn. • My ideas help to direct some of the learning in my class. • I am helped to learn at my own pace and to set myself good challenges to help me achieve. • I learn about things that are of importance to me. • I am helped to feel good about my achievements • My learning is matched to my needs, my interests and my aspirations.	Resources and equipment are easily accessed and the children are encouraged to select what they need for themselves. Children can explain what they are learning about and are helped to think about how to move on. Children are involved in curriculum design and are helped to make connections between subject matter and the world of work. Children understand the relevance of what they are learning about. Children feel proud of their achievements. Children actively extend their learning when the subject is of particular interest or relevance to them; their teachers and friends help them to do this.
Building characteristics for learning (curiosity, inventiveness, resilience, growth mindset, working collaboratively)	• My lessons are varied and interesting. • I am helped to extend my learning beyond the school day. • I work with different people and in different ways. • I am helped to see mistakes as a chance to learn more. • I am encouraged to take risks with my learning so that I can discover more. • My learning happens everywhere. • I am given time to think and to reflect on the things that interest me. • My teachers and friends help me to think in new ways.	Children are actively engaged in their learning and appear to be enjoying it; they are not merely complying. Children see difficulties as a challenge and feel confident asking for support from others to try out new thinking. They collaborate well, understanding the value and fun of social learning. Children are given time to play as a strategic tool for learning, promoting curiosity and inventiveness. Continuous provision models are evident through all year groups of the school and Early Years specialists are actively used to support the planning and delivery of learning opportunities throughout the school.

Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Framework of Standards

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School experience for staff

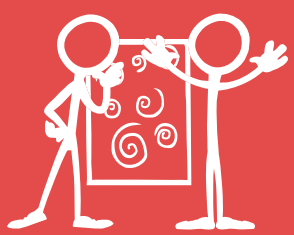
Theme	What happens	What you will see
Wellbeing (physical & emotional)	• School helps me to feel happy. • School helps me to be healthy. • I understand that illness is a normal part of life and what I can do to better help myself and school supports me to do this. • I learn how to look after my body and mind. • I learn about how my mind and body responds to triggers. • School helps me to feel safe. • I know who I can talk to when I have a problem. • I have opportunities to be active at school. • I have places where I can feel calm and relaxed at school. • I have times when I can feel calm and relaxed at school. • I am helped to feel positive about myself. • I am helped to feel positive about my teaching and learning. • I have a say in what happens in my school and I help to make decisions about what goes on.	Staff will appear relaxed and happy. They will use positive strategies to cope with difficulties and setbacks. Staff learn about vagal tone and explore various healthy activities to help improve it. They then teach this to the wider school community through specific curriculum coverage and through role modelling. Staff will know about healthy lifestyle choices and will model these. Staff understand that our bodies and minds exist in a constant state of flux and that this is normal. They will learn how to help manage low points or challenges by paying attention to what their body or mind needs and by caring for themselves in a kind and respectful way. Staff learn about basic neuroscience, that we can't help our emotional response but we can learn to manage our behaviour and they use this to help them support pupils, colleagues and the wider school community. Staff will confidently explain what to do or who to talk to if there is a problem. Staff will show kindness and compassion towards one another. Staff will have opportunities to share their thinking with the SLT and will be able to identify how their feedback has shaped life in school. Supervision models are used to good effect to support staff members; these models may also be used to support pupils through the role modelling of positive coping strategies and in the more literal sense of teaching the children how to use the techniques amongst their peers.
Relationships & safeguarding	• I demonstrate being a good colleague. • I am helped to value myself and to keep myself safe. • I am ACEs aware and respond to behavioural needs with kindness, helping pupils and colleagues to find positive ways of expressing themselves. • I know who is in my support network. • I know who I can talk to about anything that worries me. • I am respectful of diversity.	Staff understand about respect, self worth and consent as part of their understanding of healthy relationships. Staff attend regular training and undertake personal research on a variety of carefully selected health and wellbeing themes. They cascade their learning effectively, making connections between the needs of the child and the needs of the adults. Staff use their understanding of behaviour as communication to support the whole school community compassionately and consistently. Staff can identify support networks; identifying who to talk to and when. Staff understand and are respectful of love in the context of different families including families with same sex partners.

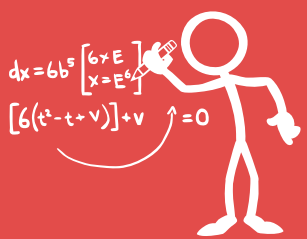
Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Framework of Standards

School experience for staff (cont.)

Theme	What happens	What you will see
Environment	• My school is welcoming and cheerful. • My school feels safe and comfortable. • My classroom displays and resources help me to learn. • My classroom allows me independence. • School displays celebrate my achievements. • I have lots of opportunities to be active at school. • I have places where I can feel calm and relaxed at school.	School is an inviting place to be. It feels warm and purposeful and the people there show genuine affection and respect towards one another. The site allows for varied learning, utilising outdoor space where possible including creative interpretation of indoor spaces. Resources are well looked after and are easily accessible. Displays reflect the ethos of the school.
Building characteristics for learning (curiosity, inventiveness, resilience, growth mindset, working collaboratively)	• My lessons are varied and interesting. • I am helped to extend my learning beyond the school day. • I work with different people and in different ways. • I am helped to see mistakes as a chance to learn more. • I am encouraged to take risks with my teaching so that I can discover more about my own capabilities and those of the pupils I teach. • My teaching happens everywhere. • I am given time to think and to reflect on the things that interest me. • My colleagues help me to think in new ways.	Staff are actively engaged in their teaching and learning and appear to be enjoying it; they are not merely complying. Staff see difficulties as a challenge and feel confident asking for support from others to try out new thinking. They collaborate well, understanding the value and fun of social learning. Staff are given time to play as a strategic tool for teaching and learning, promoting curiosity and inventiveness. Early Years specialists are held in high regard and are actively used to support all school staff with the planning and delivery of learning opportunities throughout the school. Staff are encouraged to explore and develop their own skills and talents through the work that they do with the pupils and their colleagues.





Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Framework of Standards

Curriculum

Theme	What happens	What you will see
Subject coverage	• Our curriculum is shaped by our school community. Wherever possible, it is child led and influenced by themes of greatest relevance to the needs, interests and aspirations of our school community. • We develop our pupils' confidence through the explicit teaching of skills needed for successful transition from one place of learning to the next. • We recognise the necessity for subject coverage that we will be measured against but we are careful to ensure that this does not dominate school life nor compromise our pupils' sense of self worth and achievement. • Teachers know their pupils and assess learning continuously, modifying their planning or delivery accordingly.	Lessons include activities for building characteristics for learning (curiosity, inventiveness, resilience, growth mindset, working collaboratively). Lessons are carefully planned to ensure efficient coverage of skills and techniques that are measured in the SATs. SLT actively seek opportunities to relieve pressure from staff and pupils' who are most affected by SATs preparation, ensuring robust systems for managing stress and for boosting wellbeing. Where a specific need is identified, staff collaborate and research how best to address that need, making curriculum changes or additions as appropriate. These may be one off projects to suit individuals, groups or the whole school. Opportunities for learning are utilised throughout the school site, including outdoor areas and off site visits. These are evidenced through displays and records such as journals, exhibitions, assemblies and performances. Teachers take the time to get to know their pupils so that they can tailor learning opportunities appropriately. They understand that good relationships are key to success and use a range of strategies and initiatives in the classroom to help scaffold their pupils.
Opportunities and experiences	• Our school supports and celebrates achievement. • As staff, we are supported in our own professional development through peer mentoring and support models as well as attending specific training both on and off site. • As pupils, we have a voice in suggesting what clubs are on offer and we have the opportunity to run clubs for ourselves. • As pupils, we take part in a variety of festivals, competitions and special events to enrich our learning. • The school offers a range of special learning experiences both on site and off site to further enrich the curriculum.	Staff and pupils are encouraged to explore and develop their natural talents and interests through courses or clubs as appropriate. Individuals are encouraged to share their interests and talents with their peers and the whole school community through assemblies, clubs and special events. The school takes part in a variety of events that are inclusive and celebratory. Staff and pupils feel proud and privileged to take part in these and effectively share their experience with all stakeholders to promote a sense of shared achievement. Special learning experiences are selected with care to ensure quality enrichment for all involved, ensuring (wherever possible) that they are inclusive for the target group. The learning around these events is carefully planned with preparation and follow-up tasks where relevant.

Creating a Culture of Wellbeing in Schools

Framework of Standards

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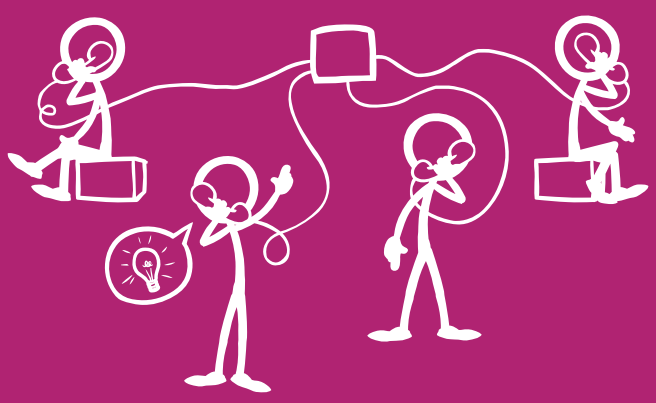
Wider community

Theme	What happens	What you will see
Families	• I am well informed about what my child is learning and why. • I'm invited to contribute to the life of the school and I'm consulted about decisions that affect the learning and personal development of my child. • The school supports my own learning by inviting me to attend workshops and events that will help me to understand how to better support my child. • I know who I can talk to when I have a concern about my child or about my own personal circumstances. • The school helps me to feel valued as a parent/carer and recognises that I sometimes need help with doing the best job I can for myself and my family. • The school works with me to understand my culture, my faith and my community. • The school staff help me to see that their chief priority is the safety and wellbeing of my child and how his or her education is a key component to a safe and happy life. • The school staff try to set my child up for success and values my expertise in helping them to understand how best to do that.	Families engage with the school in a supportive and meaningful way. They feel valued and have faith that the school is working in the best interests of the child. Families support the work of the school through engaging with homework activities, drop in sessions, school trips, classroom help. Parents and carers feel safe approaching the school for help and will engage with the support staff as well as their child's class teacher. Parents and carers follow appropriate lines of enquiry when they have a concern, feeling reassured that their concerns will be taken seriously and will be acted upon when necessary. Home school liaison is clear and effective with parents and carers feeling like they are working alongside the school staff to improve outcomes for their children. School runs workshops, courses and other opportunities for parents and carers to develop their own skills and improve their sense of self worth, helping them to be strong positive role models for their children.



Wellbeing Survey

Please take a few minutes to complete this survey.

For each question, circle the number on the scale that best reflects your thinking with 1 being most positive and 10 being most negative.

1. How well supported do you feel when it comes to your professional development?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. How well supported do you feel when it comes to your work wellbeing?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. How easy does it feel for you to achieve a good work life balance?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

4. How well are your professional efforts recognised?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. How well are your opinions reflected in the life of the school? (Consider both policy and practice)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Please include any comments that you wish to make below. Use the reverse of the sheet if you would like more space.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.