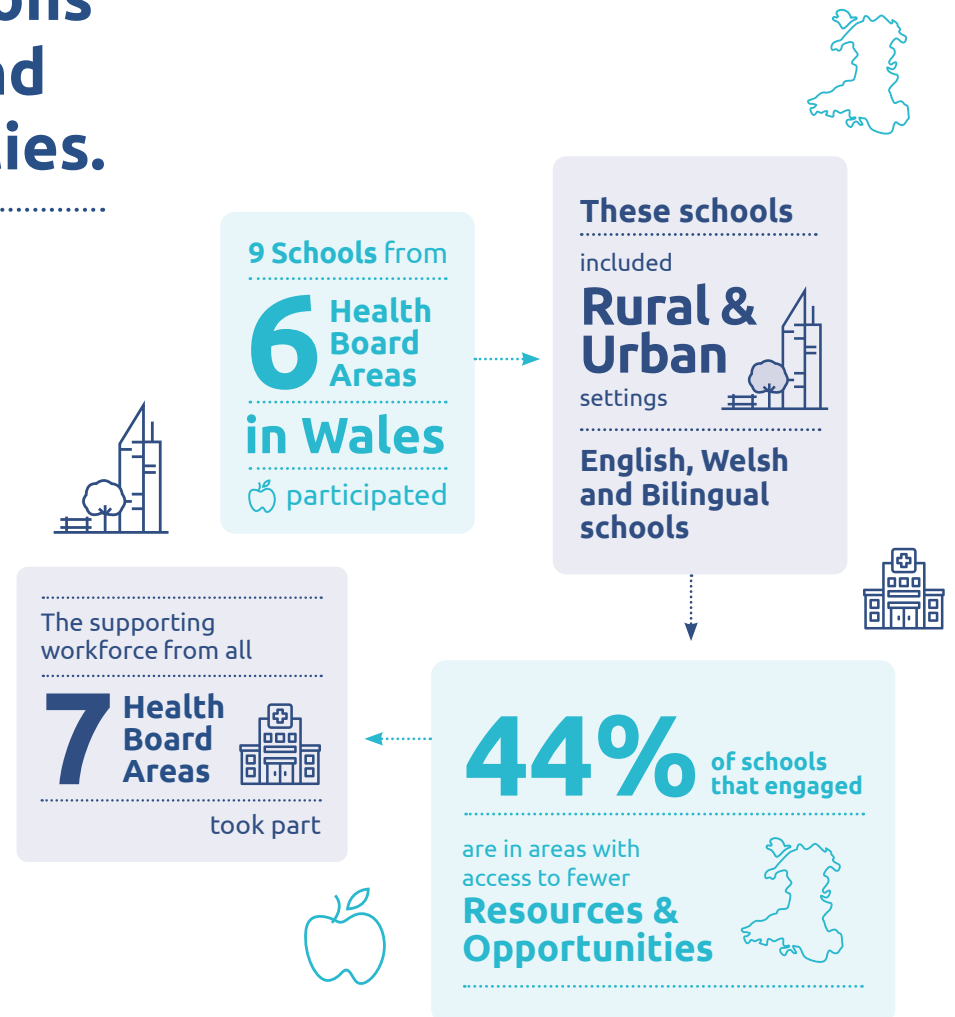


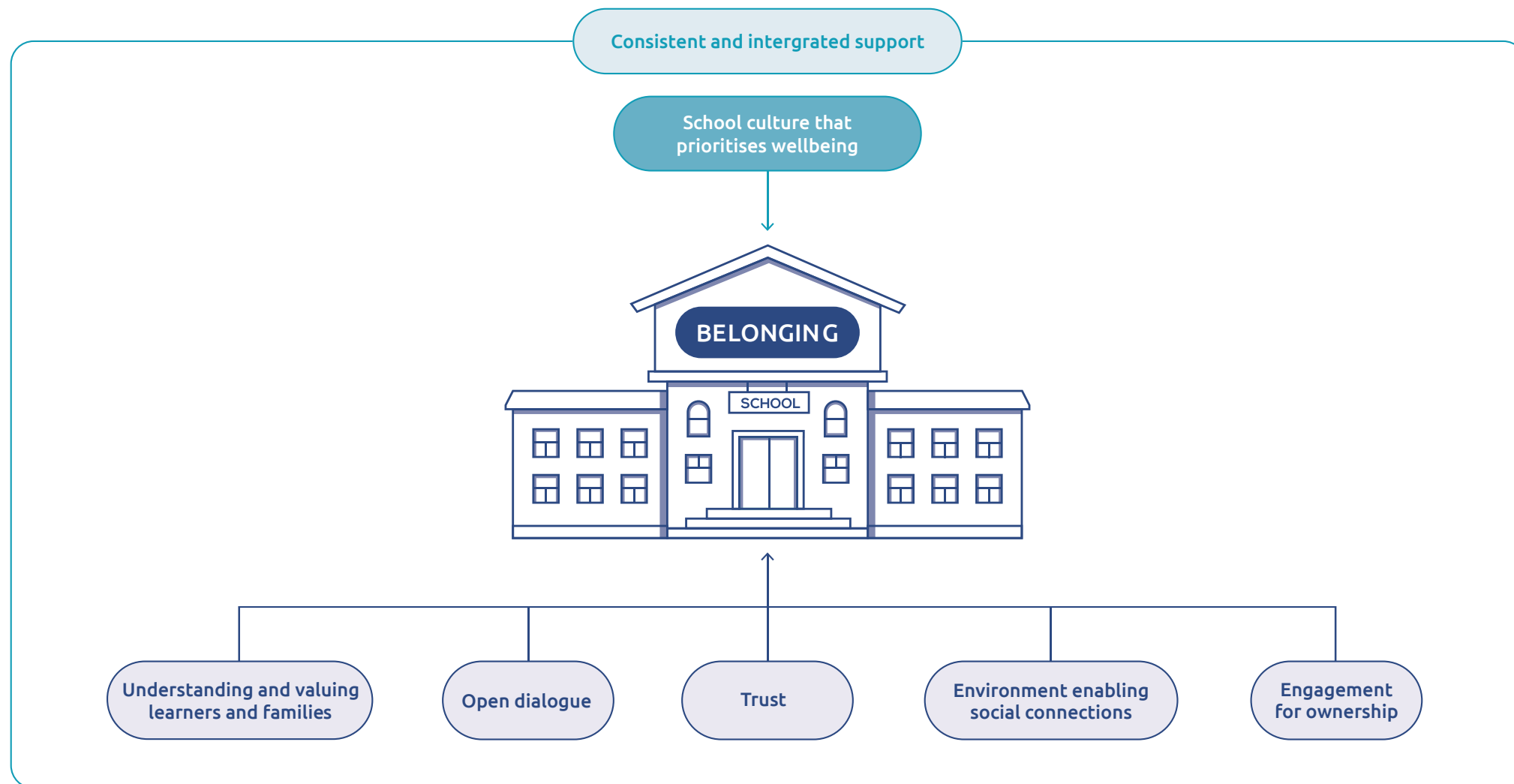
## Planning and implementation of actions to protect and promote emotional and mental wellbeing in school communities.

Schools across Wales are implementing the [Welsh Government's statutory Framework on embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing](#). The Framework supports schools to promote positive mental wellbeing, prevent mental ill-health, and improve support for individuals where needed.

We held interviews and focus groups with school staff to gather information about their experiences of planning and implementing action to meet their wellbeing needs. We also spoke to the supporting workforce (Implementation Coordinators), considered school action plans, and looked at data shared with us on how schools are progressing.



# What made a difference?

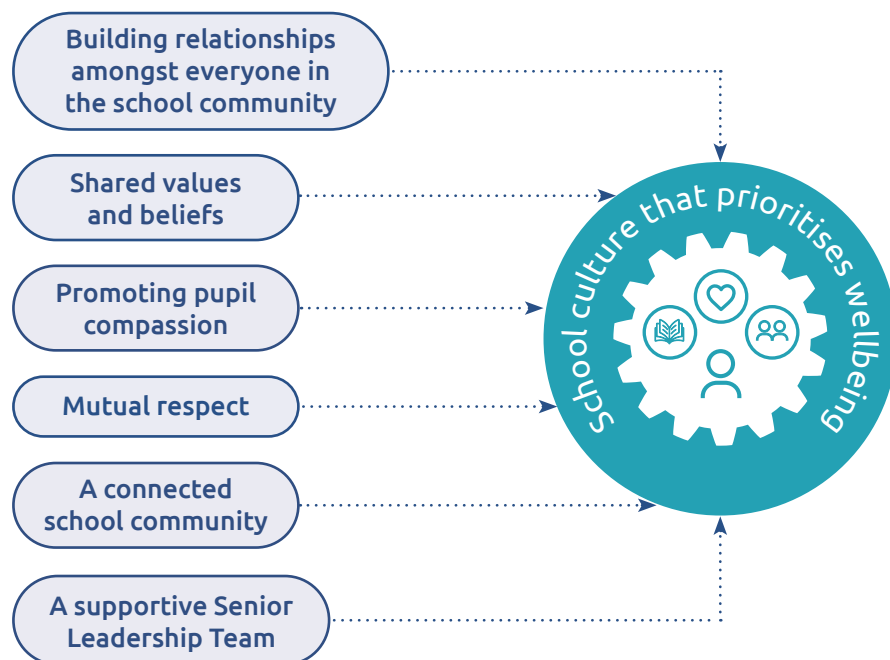


# What made a difference?

## School culture that prioritises wellbeing

A school culture that prioritises wellbeing was found to be very important in helping schools to successfully plan and implement wellbeing actions.

Some of the ways schools have developed a culture that prioritises wellbeing are shown in the diagram below:



The process relies on emotional and mental wellbeing being seen as an important part of school life.

Schools found it easier to adopt a culture that supports wellbeing when:

- Mental wellbeing is embedded as a topic within the Curriculum.
- A continuous improvement approach is taken.
- Policies and procedures that promote mental wellbeing are established.
- Shared terminology to discuss emotions and mental health is used.

We are actually a community.  
Communities do work best together.

**Wellbeing Lead**  
Special School



# What made a difference?

## Belonging

A sense of belonging to the school is important for promoting emotional and mental wellbeing. Belonging means feeling an emotional attachment to the school. It includes feeling accepted, respected, included, and supported. When staff feel a sense of belonging to their school, they are more aware of the wellbeing needs of their community. They are also more likely to place value in planning and taking action to improve the wellbeing needs in their school.

When learners and their families feel like they belong to their school community, they are more likely to get involved in activities that promote wellbeing and see this as worthwhile. Being more engaged helped staff feel a greater sense of autonomy and connectedness. In contrast, when staff, learners and families feel disconnected, without a sense of belonging to a school community, they are less likely to want to invest their time in making improvements.

They feel that there's value in what they're doing, and if there's value in what they're doing, they'll push for it, they'll work on it, they'll develop it.

**Wellbeing Lead**  
Special School



# What made a difference?

## Belonging

Our findings suggest that settings can encourage a sense of belonging to a school community by:

- Developing empathy to understand and value individual learners and families, their lives, and what matters to them.
- Creating an environment where everyone can talk openly and is supported to contribute.
- Establishing trust between the school and families, as well as between staff and learners.
- Creating a pleasant and fit-for-purpose indoor and outdoor physical environment, that supports social connections.
- Engaging school-staff from all levels and giving them ownership and autonomy in planning and implementing actions.

One of the things we value here is we know our children.

**Senior Leadership Team Member**  
Nursery and Infant School



A pan oeddwn i yn rhannu hwn gyda staff, oeddwn i'n gweud "mae hwn yn gyfle i ddathlu yr holl dda ni'n wneud... i ddathlu'r holl waith caled a'r gwaith da sy'n cael ei wneud bob dydd gan staff a disgyblion hefyd, a'r gymuned gyfan."

**Wellbeing Lead**  
Secondary School

And when I shared this with staff, I said, "this is an opportunity to celebrate all the good that we do... to celebrate all of the hard work that is done every day by staff, and pupils too, and the whole community."

**Wellbeing Lead**  
Secondary School



# What made a difference?

## Consistent and integrated support

Schools benefit when Implementation Coordinators and Health Promoting Schools Coordinators work closely together with a common purpose. It helps to maintain school relationships and encourage progress with planning and implementation of actions.

It's making sure that whoever has the contact with the school is saying the same thing and they know the support is there.

Implementation Coordinator



I think a lot can be said about shared learning and partnership working, having that integration and all working together, because there are a lot of organisations that are working in the arena of health and wellbeing or emotional health and wellbeing. And I just feel like if we all joined efforts up it would have much more of a significant impact than everyone working in silos with little pots of money.

Implementation Coordinator



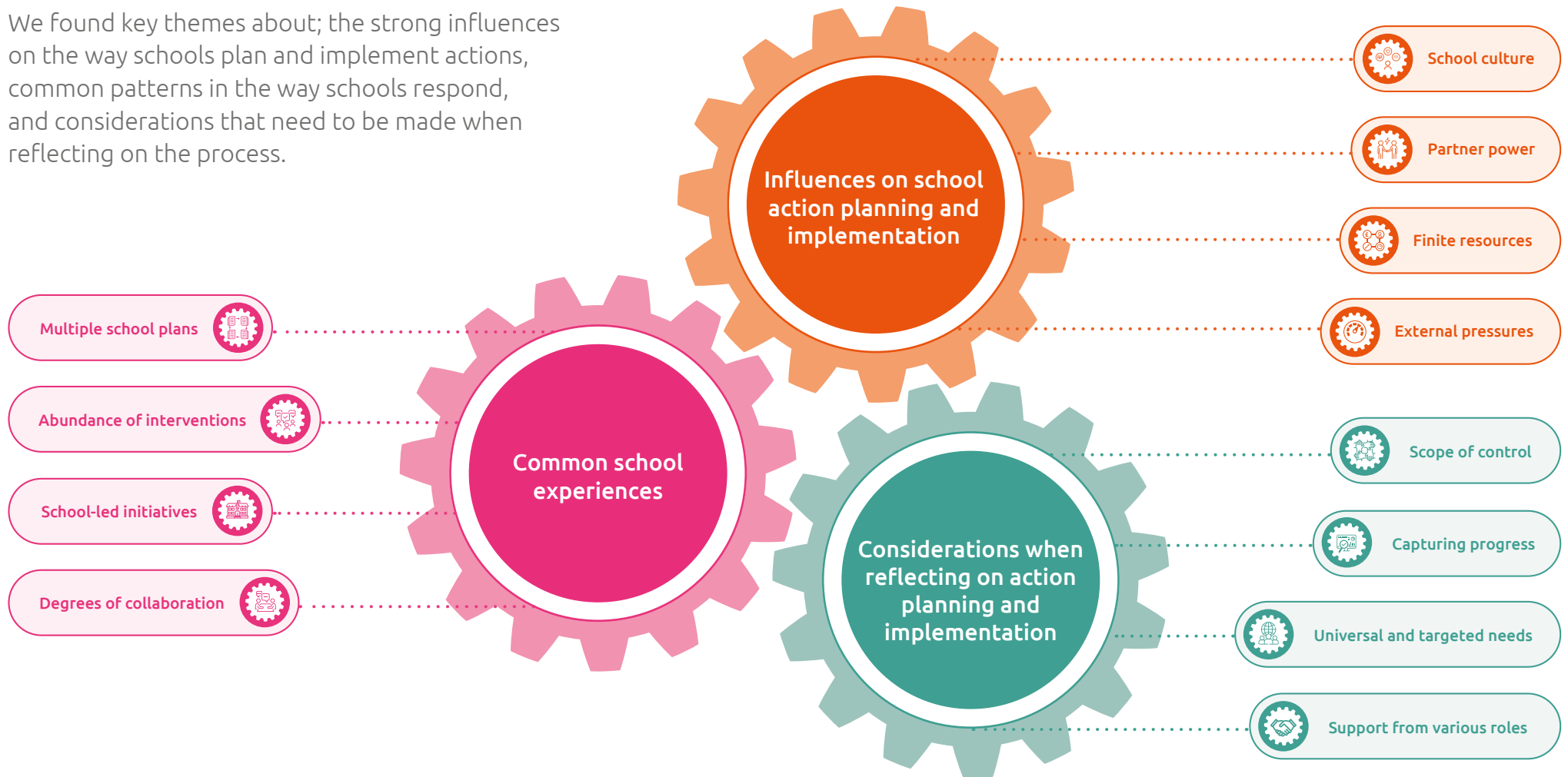
The level of engagement from regional bodies, local governance and accountability structures also seems to influence how successful schools are in embedding the Framework. There are advantages when partners can share practice and resources, and capture information on what is happening in their regions.

Schools feel pressure from external influences to address multiple priorities, which compete for time and resources. Clear messages that demonstrate how national policies and initiatives complement each other is important. This enables schools to balance expectations with their unique priorities.



# How are schools planning & implementing action?

We found key themes about; the strong influences on the way schools plan and implement actions, common patterns in the way schools respond, and considerations that need to be made when reflecting on the process.



# Influences on school action planning and implementation



Influences on school  
action planning and  
implementation



A **school's culture and pre-existing work** to improve mental wellbeing plays a part in how actions are planned and implemented. Many settings were already prioritising the emotional and mental wellbeing of learners, families and staff before the launch of the Framework. The Framework affirms this action and strengthens wellbeing as a priority for schools, equal with areas such as literacy and numeracy. Some schools that were already prioritising wellbeing find it more difficult to self-evaluate and action plan. They sometimes find it a challenge to recognise how the work they have been doing could be captured against the **Whole School Approach** requirements.



When schools select interventions to meet their identified needs, internal and external partners show different levels of **control, power and influence**. There are mixed levels of understanding of the roles and responsibilities each of these partners play. Local Authorities can influence the actions schools choose by directing funding at particular initiatives or interventions and staff training. Sometimes interventions purchased at scale do not meet the identified needs of an individual school.



# Influences on school action planning and implementation



Schools are required to address multiple competing priorities with **limited time available and a lack of staff capacity**. The effects of the pandemic present ongoing challenges for learners and staff. Schools are operating in a **pressured** context of industrial action, funding cuts, workforce challenges and have deep concerns about increasing staff workload. The importance of school workforce wellbeing is recognised and continues to influence where action is prioritised.

It just naturally flows in, which is a lovely way for it to work because it becomes part of the school culture then.

**Wellbeing Lead**  
Special School



## Common school experiences



Schools may be working with **several different action plans at any one time**. More strategic and long-term actions tend to be captured in a School Development Plan. Often, actions that address the **Statutory Framework** requirements are written into several plans. This reflects how the work is embedded across school life.

Some schools have focused on developing actions in areas such as **'connectedness'**, or **'communication'**. By doing this, they aim to positively influence mental wellbeing and other aspects of school life. Schools are building confidence in how to identify these areas of focus that act like **'golden threads'**. Making improvements in these areas can maximise impact for a school, across multiple outcomes.



Many **wellbeing interventions** are promoted to schools. There is confusion about the evidence base behind many interventions. The supporting workforce is developing capacity and capability to guide schools in selecting interventions/resources.

So it's this mixed bag and there's just so many initiatives. Some schools have said it's hard sometimes to understand which ones are working well, because there's so many in place. You kind of throw them all at a young person.

Implementation Coordinator



## Common school experiences

Mae themâu sy'n deillio o'r Fframwaith ysgol Gyfan wedi'i cynnwys ymhob agwedd o gynlluniau gwella ysgol ac felly mae'n anodd adnabod adran sy'n benodol ar gyfer hyn.

Themes that derive from the Whole School Framework are included in every aspect of school improvement plans and therefore it is difficult to identify a section that is specific to this.

Senior Leadership Team Member  
Secondary School



I want it to be a true, genuine whole school approach and that's taken a lot of time.

Implementation Coordinator



Interventions and **activities designed and implemented by schools** themselves appear to be regarded more positively by schools than 'off the shelf' intervention programmes or packages that have been bought in from external or corporate agencies.



Schools recognise that true **collaboration and engagement** is time consuming. There is little evidence to suggest that the school community is involved in understanding whether the activity has been a success. Where impacts are considered, they tend to align with criteria set by regional and national governance/accountability structures. It does not appear that schools are thinking about monitoring or evaluation, of the actions they take to promote wellbeing, from the outset.



Dwi di trio edrych fwy am be oedd y llinynnau oedd yn cysylltu mwy nag un peth, oedd yn gallu cael 'impact' ar ddau neu dri pheth.

Aelod o Uwch Dîm Arwain, Ysgol Uwchradd

I have tried to look more at what the common threads are that connect more than one area, and can impact on 2-3 areas.

Senior Leadership Team Member, Secondary School



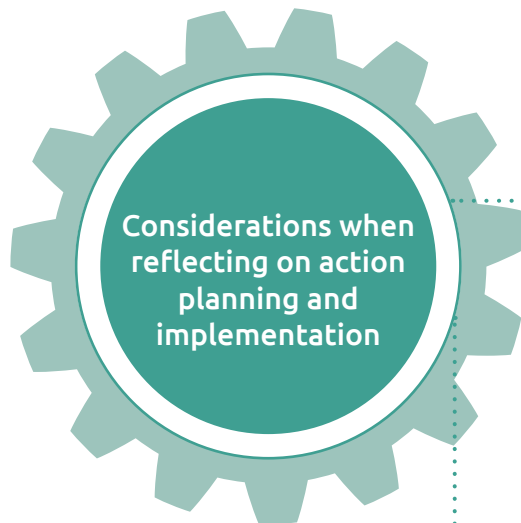
## Examples of school-led initiatives

Domain	Intervention
Understanding the emotional and mental wellbeing needs of learners and staff	Individual learner wellbeing book: shared between learner and class teacher to note what is going well and not so well for the individual
	Emotional Based School Avoidance Approach: understanding push and pull factors for staff
Relationships	Peer mentor scheme, for learners
	Helping staff build peer relationships
	School House meetings: breaking down silos or groups or departments working in isolation or functioning independently
	Pastoral hub with a dedicated staff member
	Welfare officers for each year group
Help and support services	Games night
	Parent Group: an internal support network organised by school to enable parents to offload and access peer support
Workforce	School developed awareness raising campaign to signpost school community members to voluntary and community sector help and support services e.g. use of QR codes on posters
	Staff 'walk and talk'
	Free tea and coffee in staff rooms
	Paying for additional Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time for school workforce
	School developed 'Secret Guardian Angel' initiative to encourage staff to care and be attentive towards each other
Giving staff the flexibility and autonomy to choose how they spend a proportion of their weekly PPA time	

## Examples of school-led initiatives

Domain	Intervention
Workforce	Kind notes: recognising value and sharing positive feedback
	'Cuppa and chat'
	Greeting staff
	Senior Leadership Team (SLT) covering teaching staff so they can be released for PPA time
	Wellbeing Easter egg hunt
Involvement and Engagement	Informal end of week debrief
	Involving teaching staff in decisions
	Regular phone calls with parents
	Linking in with local clubs
	Padlet app for parents to post pictures of their children
Curriculum	Team hashtags, to bring the community together
	Outdoor learning
	Monday morning wellbeing sessions
School Environment and Facilities	Lego therapy
	Designated wellbeing room
	Equipment library
	Litter picks
	Uniform hub
	Book share
	Swap shop
School-run Coffee Shop	

# Considerations when reflecting on action planning and implementation

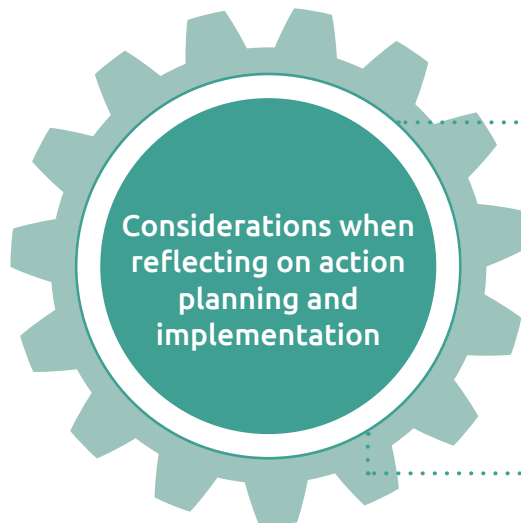


Staff are increasingly required to absorb and respond to problems that children and families are facing. Schools recognise what is **inside and outside of their control**. Whilst they are well placed to create conditions that protect and promote mental wellbeing, there are also many factors outside of school life that contribute to a person's wellbeing. Schools are acting on the things they can influence and understand the important role specialists play in making sure support is sustainable. Schools have a greater awareness of the resources available to them and are expanding their relationships with external partners.

**Capturing the progress** of emotional and mental wellbeing outcomes can be challenging. Improvements to individual and collective wellbeing are not static. It is influenced by multiple factors, is unique to an individual and their circumstances, and may not look like significant steps when reporting.



# Considerations when reflecting on action planning and implementation



Within a school, the **identified needs** and the actions required are sometimes not universal across the whole school population. There may be particular needs for different year groups, or for vulnerable learners. Some interventions might not be appropriate for the whole school. Some actions to address needs will take longer than others and will be more strategic.



The **supporting workforce** is trying to help schools to consider what is working for them, against their identified needs. They are encouraging schools to move away from continuing to purchase and run multiple interventions at once. Implementation Coordinators and Health Promoting Schools Coordinators can support **partnership building**, links to external support or other resources.

And whereas we do our absolute best to be positive role models to give them the toolkit in school, we only have them for six hours a day, five days a week. It can't all come back to schools because we're maxed out.

**Senior Leadership Team Member**  
Secondary School



## Who is involved in supporting the implementation of action as part of a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing?

Individual	Learners & Families
<b>School</b>	Senior Leadership Team: Headteacher, Assistant headteacher, Deputy headteacher, extended SLT
	Dedicated Additional Learning Needs staff
	Teachers
	Teaching assistants
	Pastoral teams
	Family engagement / liaison officers
	Safeguarding leads
	Form tutors
	Heads of year / houses
	Wellbeing leads
	Governors
	Midday supervisors
Kitchen staff	
<b>Local &amp; Regional</b>	Local Authority: Education teams and Wellbeing leads
	Education advisors
	Health Boards
	NHS services: GP, CAMHS School In-Reach teams,
	Counselling services
Consortium	



# Who is involved in supporting the implementation of action as part of a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing?

Individual	Learners & Families
Local & Regional	Implementation Coordinators
	Welsh Network of Health and Wellbeing Promoting Schools Coordinators
National	Welsh Government
	Public Health Wales
	Estyn
	School Health Research Network



# Top tips for schools

1. Make use of your **School Health Research Network (SHRN)** school profile to build an understanding of areas for improvement and to monitor changes.
2. Embed a continuous improvement approach. Underpin action planning with a good self-evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement. Regularly review progress with **School Development Plans**.
3. Access support from local **Welsh Network of Health and Wellbeing Promoting Schools Coordinators** to identify appropriate action to address school-identified needs.
4. Where external interventions are being implemented take steps to understand the evidence-base, making use of the Public Health Wales '**What Works Evidence Summaries**' where appropriate. Consider local approaches to assessing impacts.
5. Take time to celebrate successes in implementing a **Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing**. This contributes to building a sense of achievement and maintaining motivation to continually improve.
6. Invest time into developing a sense of **belonging and school-connectedness** with learners, families and staff, to enable meaningful engagement.
7. Take account of **Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools** guidance on developing effective family and community engagement, which will support the implementation of a whole school approach.
8. Get to know local partners and wider services, understand their roles and responsibilities, and build positive working relationships. The **Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools** guidance on multi-agency engagement will strengthen access to appropriate support.



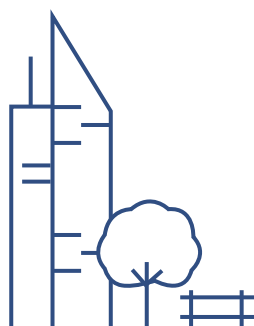
# Recommendations for system partners

1. Ensure local/regional partnership structures consider the **needs and experiences of schools**. Use intelligence from school communities and school-identified priorities for improvement to influence partnership action and investment.
2. Support schools to **understand roles and responsibilities** of different partners and to **develop relationships** across the system. Help schools to **identify who is best placed** to support them with specific needs.
3. Continue to **build capacity** amongst schools and the school-facing workforce to enhance their ability to support schools throughout their continuous improvement cycles and implementation of evidence-based practice.
4. Make use of existing infrastructure, such as the **Welsh Network of Health and Wellbeing Promoting Schools**, when engaging with schools to maximise on existing relationships and to maintain consistency in the workforce connecting with schools.
5. Maximise opportunities to use existing data collection and/or work cross-organisationally when new data collection is required to **reduce survey burden on schools**.
6. Consider the development of co-produced, evidence-based resources to support schools in developing a **sense of belonging** and implementing **meaningful engagement** with learners and families.

## Contact us

For further information please contact:  
[HI-Programme.Support@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:HI-Programme.Support@wales.nhs.uk)

Find out more about Public Health Wales work to **promote individual and community wellbeing**.



<sup>1</sup>Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing - Public Health Wales (nhs.wales)

<sup>2</sup>Community Focused Schools | GOV.WALES