



# A 'Whole School' Approach to Wellbeing

## Case Study: Thamesview School

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## Introduction

The effectiveness of supporting staff with their mental, physical, social, and financial wellbeing will be dependent on the level of staff engagement you achieve in your school.

Whilst 100% engagement is unrealistic; you can increase whole school buy in through the establishment of a staff wellbeing group. The role of a staff wellbeing group is to encourage and normalise conversations with staff around wellbeing and mental health. They can create and lead on wellbeing initiatives, engage with staff and signpost available support.

To evidence the impact of a staff wellbeing group, we asked one of our valued Kent-Teach customers, Thamesview School, to share their experiences.

## Case Study: Thamesview School

Thamesview School, established their staff wellbeing group in 2019, headed up by their Assistant Headteacher, Paul Ferguson.

Paul candidly admits that when he took on responsibility for staff wellbeing, the school had already established some great foundations. **Many members of staff were long serving and Thamesview was an inclusive place to work.** Paul and the entire Senior Leadership Team recognised that their staff were their most important asset. **The intrinsic link between positive staff wellbeing and retention served as Paul's biggest motivator when establishing his wellbeing group.**

He initially started by asking if staff were interested in joining a Wellbeing Group and he was overwhelmed by the response. The high level of interest meant applications had to be narrowed down based on roles to ensure all areas of the school were represented. Eventually **a team of 8 Wellbeing Champions was created.**

Their first task was to identify the areas that impacted their colleague's wellbeing. They surveyed staff asking them to identify areas that were impacting negatively on their overall wellbeing and three key themes emerged:

- **Workload**
- **Communication**
- **Physical and mental health**

From this feedback Paul split his team. One group focused on policies and procedures. The next group were asked to devise a programme to improve physical and mental health in staff. The final group focussed on team events to increase staff morale.

## Policies and Procedures

The policies and procedures working group were challenged **with improving staff workload, communication, and policies.**

Initially the team wanted to demonstrate how serious they were about staff welfare and set about creating a range of policies that reinforced this message.

They began by creating a **Wellbeing Policy** which acknowledged the duty of care Thamesview took towards their staff. They then looked for inspiration from other organisations and created an **Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy**. The final policy they introduced emerged from inspiration found within the NHS. Based on the NHS' Zero Tolerance approach, the team created a **Zero-Tolerance Policy** which ensured all staff members were treated with respect. This covered contacts between school and parents both face to face, over the telephone and via email. They also designed and created posters to put around the school highlighting their zero-tolerance agreement.

They then turned their attention to communication and workload. Staff were again surveyed and **the biggest issue that emerged for staff was the high volume of emails they received.** Some felt obliged to respond to emails outside of their working hours and others enjoyed working flexibly but found the volume overwhelming. The difference in working styles meant that a blanket approach was not a viable option. The team instead looked to empower staff by introducing a whole school email disclaimer to manage response expectations.

*'Some members of Thamesview School work at irregular times in order to fit in with their own personal lifestyles, therefore should this email arrive in the evening/at the weekend, please do not feel obliged to respond until the 'normal' working hours of the school day.'*

This **empowered** staff members to reply at a time that worked for them. They also focussed **on reducing the volume of emails and introduced weekly bulletins** designed to communicate key messages to staff in bulk. This saw a reduction in emails which **70%** of staff reported as an improvement.

## Physical and Mental Health

The Physical and Mental Health working group wanted to focus on **normalising conversations on wellbeing.** They decided to **offer a wellbeing initiative per term** with all ideas being generated from the Wellbeing Group and wider staff based.

The initiatives have proved extremely popular and have included...

- ✓ 'Ears that Care' Service - a service for staff members to talk to someone confidentially about their concerns.
- ✓ Mindfulness Colouring books placed in the staff room.
- ✓ Morning meditation classes before school, delivered by a staff member.
- ✓ Introduction of a 'Quiet Room' - A space dedicated to total silence for staff members wanting to experience a break with no interruptions.
- ✓ After school football matches
- ✓ High Intensity Training sessions delivered by Sixth Formers as part of their sports project.
- ✓ Lunch and learn - 30-minute CPD sessions on topics voted by staff.

They have also recently extended their support services to include a **School Counsellor**, as well as offering **Mental Health First Aid Training** to number of staff. Mental Health First Aid Training supports individuals in gaining a deeper understanding of how mental health issues effect people. It also provides them a framework to start open dialogue with their colleagues around Mental Health.

All the initiatives introduced went through an **evaluation process** based on the level of staff engagement. Not all initiatives proved popular and the evaluation process was key to **replacing less popular initiatives with alternate staff suggestions**.

## Staff Morale

The Wellbeing Group wanted to create events that showed their colleagues they were valued and appreciated. They established a calendar of events and dedicated the last week of term specifically to wellbeing.

*In their wellbeing week no meetings could be scheduled after school and all staff were encouraged to leave at 3pm as soon as their duties were done. Wellbeing events were hosted and ranged from treasure trails, easter egg hunts, staff quizzes, bingo and much more. These events saw high engagement across all departments and led the team to consider ways they could evolve their ideas further.*

They introduced a concept called '**Secret Angel**'. It runs three times a year, with staff members anonymously leaving thoughtful gifts and gestures for one another. Any member of staff that wanted to participate filled in a quick survey around likes and dislikes. They were then allocated a Secret Angel who would leave them little gestures over the term. Paul himself has been the lucky recipient of flowers, chocolates, and a penguin ice cube tray due to his love of penguins.

**Making wellbeing initiatives personal really resonated with staff** and this was evident in lockdown when the team created handmade cards to staff thanking them for their support and effort. These thoughtful gifts also extended over Christmas where the team created a staff advent calendar and each day the gift was a donation

made from a member of staff.

The introduction of a **termly wellbeing newsletter** was also another great way to recognise staff and reduce the volume of emails. A **staff recognition message board** featured as part of the newsletter and everyone was invited to send in messages to celebrate their colleague's achievements. **The Senior Leadership team fully supported this and ensure they always shared their thanks and praises with staff.**

### Measuring the impact

Paul believes **listening to staff feedback** is a vital foundation to improving staff wellbeing in school. A **staff survey** allowed Paul and his team to gain insight, set a base line and measure improvements. **Staff testimonials** are also another fantastic way to evidence the difference you are making to your team.

*'Over the past two years staff wellbeing has been promoted effectively and is now at the forefront of people's mind, and in many cases, it was not thought about before. This shift has been led by the TVS staff well-being team who give up their time voluntarily to ensure staff's well-being is considered at all levels. It has been particularly valuable throughout the lockdown periods as staff have been given the opportunity to virtually socialise with other members of the school community which has been so important when we are isolated from others.'*

(Director of Humanities)

*'During my time at Thamesview, I have seen Paul and the Wellbeing team make a huge effort to improve staff morale. This has been done through a variety of different strategies and has really helped bring staff together to talk about topics other than work. This has been incredibly important, especially recently during recent times with the Covid outbreak.'*

*'One of the most important things the Wellbeing team have always made clear is that you can pick and choose what you would like to take part in - there is no pressure to take part in any of the activities or you can take part in all of them which caters to all staff members. I have been at Thamesview for two and a half years and have seen the wellbeing of staff improve greatly.'*

(Creative Arts Teacher)

*'In my opinion the wellbeing strategies that have been implemented by the Wellbeing team have resulted in an improvement in staff retention. It has helped to build and sustain staff morale and job satisfaction and therefore we are better able to support students which is at the core of our profession.'*

(Psychology Teacher)

## Next Steps

Thamesview School have established a culture that works hard to prioritise staff's wellbeing. Paul and his Wellbeing Group continue to evaluate how staff are feeling regarding their Mental, Physical, Financial and Social wellbeing.

They are now looking to progress their Wellbeing Programme even further and are completing a **Cantium PULSE workplace wellbeing survey** to deliver key analytics that will shape their Wellbeing Action Plan this year.

In addition to this work, they are now working alongside Kent-Teach's Wellbeing and Retention Advisors to apply for a Kent and Medway Workplace Wellbeing Award.

There are different level of awards which will be based on an assessment of their Wellbeing programme.

Further progression goals will then be set for the team that continue to focus on:

- Increased productivity
- Creating healthy habits at work
- Improved staff morale and engagement
- Increased employee resilience
- Improved pupil performance
- Reduced staff absences
- Retention of staff

*If you would like to discuss anything in this case study, please get in touch with a Kent-Teach Wellbeing Advisor on 03000 410203 or email [kent.teach@cantium.solutions](mailto:kent.teach@cantium.solutions)*