



Making best use of pupil mental health and wellbeing data

Learning from HeadStart schools using the Wellbeing Measurement Framework

Intended audience

HeadStart partnerships and their local HeadStart schools will find this collection of case studies useful when thinking through how they can make the best use of the information yielded by the Wellbeing Measurement Framework.

Other local authorities and schools, who are thinking of measuring and monitoring their pupil's mental health and wellbeing, may also find these case studies informative and helpful towards formulating their own approach.

About HeadStart

Started in 2016, HeadStart is a six-year, £67.4 million National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. HeadStart aims to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

To do this, six local authority-led HeadStart partnerships are working with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design and try out new interventions that will make a difference to young people's mental health, wellbeing and resilience. The HeadStart partnerships are in the following locations in England: Blackpool; Cornwall; Hull; Kent; Newham; Wolverhampton.

Background

About the Wellbeing Measurement Framework

[The Wellbeing Measurement Framework \(WMF\) survey](#) is part of the national evaluation of HeadStart. It is a set of validated questionnaires that assess positive wellbeing, behavioural and emotional difficulties, the presence and strength of protective factors such as perceived support at school, at home and in the community, and the ability to deal with stress and manage emotions.

Each year, pupils in participating schools across all six HeadStart areas are invited to take part in the survey. The survey is completed online and pupil responses are anonymous. The response rates to the survey are very high with over 85% of pupils in target year groups responding. In total, over 30,000 pupils respond each year and every participating school is provided with an online report which shows how the mental wellbeing of children and young people in their school compares to others in the HeadStart programme.

While the WMF is a key element in evaluating the HeadStart programme, it needs to meet a second purpose of providing information useful to schools to inform their thinking and planning of mental health support for pupils. To that end, the Headstart Learning team worked collaboratively with partnerships to choose the questions and structure of the survey. Young people were also involved in this process through Common Room Consulting; their views were sought around the structure and they made suggestions for extra questions.

Main features of the Wellbeing Measurement Framework report

The report presents an analysis of pupils' responses to questions on the 17 areas below:

Mental health and wellbeing	Emotional strengths and skills	Support network
Emotional difficulties	Managing emotions	Family support
Behavioural difficulties	Problem solving	Community support
Difficulties with peers	Coping with stress	School support
Attention difficulties	Goal setting	Peer support
Positive wellbeing	Empathy	Participation in community
	Helping others	Participation in home and school

Funnel plots are used in the report to allow for national comparison against all HeadStart schools. These plots place the result for all 110 (approx.) secondary schools on one graph with each school represented as a dot; every school can distinguish themselves in their own report as their school's dot is highlighted on the plot. The graph takes into consideration the different sample sizes across the schools (i.e. number of pupils completing the survey in that year group in that school). Dots outside of the yellow area are those where we can be confident the school lies above or below the average for that measurement area.



Figure 1: Example funnel plot

There is also a longitudinal graph which shows how a school's average score against each measurement area has changed over time. An example of this can be seen in figure 2.

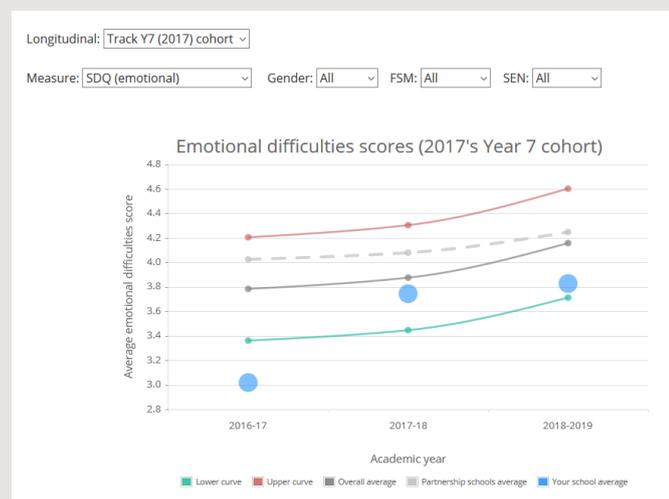


Figure 2: Example longitudinal graph

The report gives a red, amber or green rating against each of the measurement areas depending on whether scores are significantly worse, better, or not discernibly different from national schools. Examples are shown in figure 3.

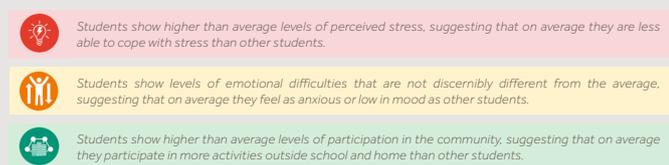


Figure 3: Example RAG rating



Case Studies

The following three case studies have been provided by schools and HeadStart partnership school leads as positive examples of how schools are using WMF information. The case studies demonstrate how the WMF is being used by some schools to help identify areas of strength and challenge, and to plan provision which addresses these findings. Drawing on the three case studies, we identify common themes about the usefulness of such a measurement tool and offer suggestions for putting into practice learning that emerges from the WMF.

NOTE: Due to the coronavirus pandemic and school closures, some of the planned activities that were identified in these case studies have needed to change or be postponed.

Case example #1 Homewood School, Kent

Brief overview of school and WMF completion rates.

Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre is a secondary school based in Tenterden, Kent. It is part of the Tenterden Schools Trust and has just over 2000 pupils across year 7 to year 13. Whilst it is a 'non-selective' school, it sits within Kent's 'selective system' and offers different learning pathways depending on pupils' strengths and abilities; for example some students follow a challenging curriculum equivalent to that at a grammar school whilst other students may follow a pathway such as the innovative I-College.

Between 300 and 600 pupils have taken part in the survey each year, dependant on the year groups required to participate; over 90% of those pupils identified as eligible to complete the survey have done so.

What has Homewood School found useful about the WMF?

Homewood School has found the 'RAG' rating to be a useful starting point for a conversation with the school's leadership team, when planning where to prioritise provision. For example, if emotional difficulties were shown to be 'red', it would stimulate discussion regarding what provision would be best suited to support improvement.

The funnel plots have provided valuable context for Homewood School's results, allowing them to see how they compare to similar sized schools across the country, and how far away from the national average they are.

The longitudinal graphs have been a useful starting point for identifying any areas of mental health and wellbeing that may be declining to prompts discussion about mitigating actions. The longitudinal graphs also highlight which areas have improved for pupils and therefore help to support decisions around continuing particular types of provision.

What plans have been put in place due to the results of the WMF?

Based on demographic analysis of the results which showed girls in Year 9 to be struggling with anxiety, plans have been put in place to run a 12-week course on self-esteem and anxiety with Year 8 girls: it is felt that this preventative method will be more effective and help with the transition into Year 9.

The results are shared in assemblies to all pupils, reinforcing how important mental health and wellbeing is and allowing pupils to understand how the school is responding to the results. It is felt that showing pupils the results close to the time the survey is going to be completed again is helpful as it makes the results more relevant, contextualises the questions they will be asked and demonstrates that something will be done with their answers.

Key audiences who need to be informed of the results include parents and carers and the internal 'Strategy Team'. To communicate with parents and carers, a text is sent with a link to an online letter detailing the results; this is found to be an accessible and effective method. With regards to the Strategy Team, a presentation is delivered summarising the results and highlighting areas of improvement.

A key area of focus to ensure the process of implementing the survey runs as smoothly as possible is gaining staff buy-in, based on learning from previous years of running the survey. Homewood School has an internal HeadStart team who champion the survey and who oversee the production of a pack for each form tutor, detailing why the survey is important and reflecting on previous results. Training is delivered to those staff who are directly involved in implementing the survey, for example the teachers who will be introducing it and in the room as pupils complete it, to ensure they have the knowledge and confidence to answer questions or any concerns raised by the pupils. Staff buy-in seems to have been greatly improved since these steps were introduced, enabling efficient and effective implementation.





Case example #2 Heath Park, Wolverhampton

Brief overview of school and WMF completion rates.

Heath Park is an inner-city community school with approximately 1200 pupils from year 7 to 13. There is a rich cultural diversity in the school, with a high proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, primarily from Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds. Heath Park was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in 2014 and is recognised as one of the top performing secondary schools in the country based on its exam results.

In 2019, over 500 pupils took part in the WMF from Year 7, 8 and 9: over 90% of those pupils who were eligible to complete the survey took part.

What are Heath Park's plans for using the WMF results?

There are discussions taking place about the potential to continue carrying out the WMF after HeadStart comes to an end and to use it as a monitoring tool; if there is movement against any of the areas of mental health and wellbeing being measured in a negative direction, proactive steps can be taken to stop or tackle the issues. This commitment of resources is a testament to the value of the WMF to the school.

What benefits has Heath Park found from implementing the WMF?

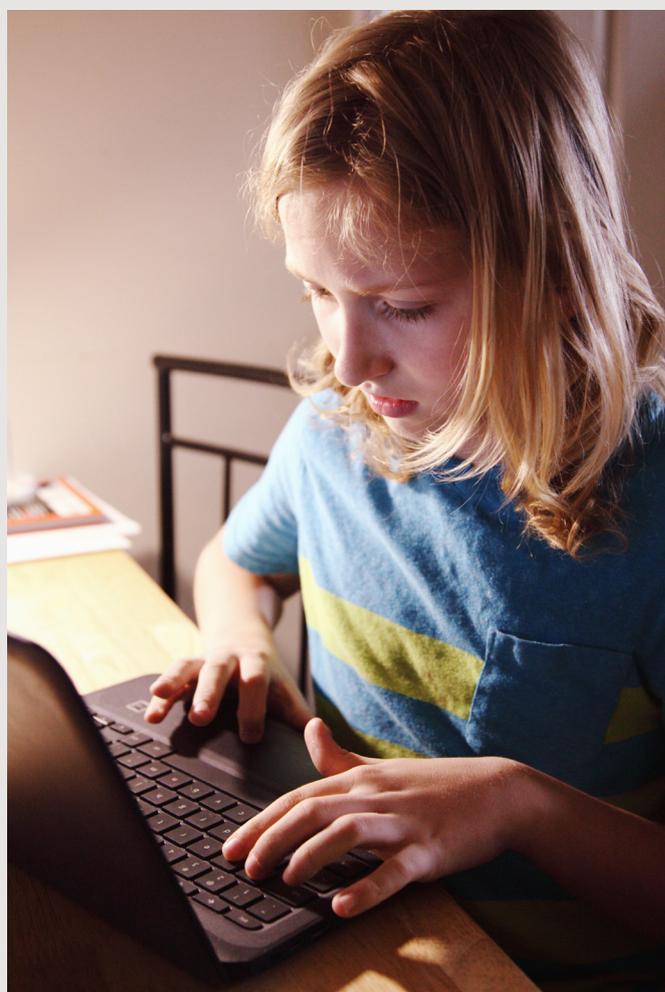
The tool covers many different aspects of mental health and wellbeing under one direct questionnaire and gives an output of a single report. The school felt this was of benefit because it makes both the process of measurement more efficient along with the ability to interpret and utilise the results without having to visit multiple sources of data.

Being able to easily filter the results on the accessible, online report (for example, Year 9 girls, or Year 7 pupils who have special educational needs) allows for the identification of different groups of pupils who are perhaps struggling with a particular aspect of their mental health and wellbeing.

This information is invaluable in ensuring those pupils are signposted to the relevant HeadStart interventions and other support programmes provided by the school.

The report helps to identify prevalent issues in the pupil population so that with relevant training and guidance, teachers and pastoral staff can be appropriately informed and prepared if they recognise a particular issue arising. It has helped to raise awareness among staff about pupils' mental health and wellbeing. It has helped to inform and educate staff about how their pupils are feeling and the struggles they are dealing with, and staff can use this understanding to better support pupils.

Whilst there were already groups of children being identified by the school as well as pupils reporting issues themselves, the survey reinforced many of these concerns and also highlighted new groups of pupils that could benefit from additional support. For example, pupils at risk of not being in education, employment or training are identified through free school meals data identifying pupils that may require additional support in later life. Being able to filter the WMF against those pupils receiving free school meals helps to highlight any specific mental health and wellbeing needs and therefore tailor our approach to pupils at risk of not being in education, employment or training.





Case example #3 St Mary's College, Hull

Brief overview of school and WMF completion rates.

St Mary's College in Hull is a Roman Catholic school with around 2300 pupils in years 7 to 13, representing over 40 countries and communities from around the globe. It was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in 2010 and granted World Class School status in 2017.

Over 300 pupils at the school have taken part in the WMF each academic year since 2017; on average, above 90% of those pupils who were eligible to complete the survey took part.

How was pupil mental health and wellbeing measured before the WMF?

Prior to using the WMF, some of the strategies for measuring and monitoring pupils' wellbeing at St Mary's included parent and pupil surveys based on the requirements of the Ofsted inspection framework. Occasionally this went further with a more detailed survey that dug a little bit deeper than standard questions such as "do you enjoy school?" or "are you happy?". Attendance data has also been used as a proxy to good wellbeing as it has been assumed that, if attendance is high the pupils are feeling safe and secure and enjoying coming to school.

However, it has been recognised by the school that there are drawbacks to these methods and measurement techniques; they are subjective and the line of questioning can sometimes be skewed by what is perceived as most important at that time, perhaps missing more general aspects of wellbeing. Because of this and the non-standard nature of the questions, results cannot be compared with other schools, making it difficult to know whether the scores are typical and to highlight areas of strength and concern.

What are St. Mary's plans for using the WMF?

The new Ofsted schedule prioritises young people's wellbeing and personal development and, although

St Mary's is an Outstanding school and is not due to have an Ofsted visit in the near future, it is felt that having such information to show inspectors can only be of benefit.

Currently, it is very much being used as a part of self-evaluation; as a Roman Catholic school that has diocese inspections, this is an important piece of information showing very positive data. These data are helping to move away from giving opinion-based, and potentially biased, views of how pupils are feeling to providing more robust insights into pupil wellbeing.

It is also essential, particularly as pupils get older, for them to see that mental health and wellbeing is important and that it is valuable to monitor such things; the WMF helps to demonstrate to pupils that mental health and wellbeing is taken seriously at St Mary's.

However, the school feels that in addition to carrying out the survey, there is a duty to present the results back to pupils, using the results as a catalyst for discussion and showing how they are being used to support school provision. Another benefit of the WMF according to St Mary's is that the results are anonymous, which means the findings can be fed back to pupils without fear of anyone being able to identify themselves or others who took part. A group of student leaders come to explore the issues highlighted by the survey and to make suggestions as to what factors could be influencing pupil wellbeing. The relevant head of year has delivered an assembly to share the findings with other year groups. This assembly aims to act as positive affirmation that emotional health and wellbeing is a priority at St Mary's and demonstrates that the door is open for pupils to speak out when they feel the need.

What benefits has St Mary's found from implementing the WMF?

The school identified a number of ways the WMF supported them to overcome the limitations posed by previous surveys such as subjectivity and focus:

- The set of questions have been selected by experts and cover a range of concepts. Having others choose the concepts avoids potential bias.
- It is challenging to measure and quantify less tangible constructs such as emotions, mental health and wellbeing. Using standardised questions that have been tried and tested and are known to measure those concepts helps to overcome this issue.
- Being able to compare school data with other local schools and even schools nationally is a huge benefit because it contextualises the results and enables the school to identify areas of strength of challenge. It is important for the school to get a sense of how their pupils are faring when it comes to their mental health and wellbeing, relative to their peers in other schools both in Hull and around the country.

Key themes

Across the three case examples of how the WMF has been useful and the activities it has driven, some key themes have emerged for those wishing to make similar use of such surveys and data.

Involve a wide range of staff in the interpretation

Often, summary figures (such as averages) and graphical representation of those figures can give the impression of greater certainty of precision that these surveys can offer. Because of this perceived certainty, there may be a tendency to draw immediate conclusions based on the information they yield, but the reality is that child and youth mental health data is messy and complex. Therefore, having the right people in the room including pastoral staff, administration staff, classroom teachers and strategic staff enables a more considered and thoughtful discussion to occur. Each of these disciplines will all bring different perspectives to the conversation i.e. administration staff may be more cautious about the limitations due to quality of the data, teachers can add detail and richness to the stories underpinning the data whilst strategic leads can offer insight into wider, whole school population factors that may be influencing trends. Set ground rules for these conversations to make it a safe space for encouraging curiosity and critical thinking around the results.

Breaking the data down into subgroups

The WMF report breaks the results down into subgroups: year group completing (e.g. Year 7 and Year 9) male and female, Special Educational Needs and Disability status (SEN), and Free School Meals (FSM) (used as a proxy for economic deprivation). Breaking down the overarching results into these groupings helps to identify more specific needs and therefore target any planning and support.

Sharing results with pupils, parents and carers

Closing the feedback loop with both pupils and parents and carers demonstrates that their time and effort was worthwhile and that there is a genuine drive to be honest and responsive to the results on the school's part. This will potentially yield a longer-term benefit by motivating them to get involved with or consent to future activities.

This feedback loop is also helpful as it allows schools to draw on pupil and parent and carer perspectives to deep dive into what these results mean and what can be done to maintain or improve them. Parents and carers may be able to provide insight into what they are seeing in the home environment whilst pupils can offer reflection on strengths and limitations of the WMF itself, and offer insight into other experiences which may be influencing the results. Involving pupils in discussions around what to do next empowers them within the decision-making process and encourages all-round engagement.

Using the WMF as a tool for external validation

Whilst first and foremost the WMF is an approach that aims to drive internal recognition of strengths and challenges and support continuous improvement, it can also be a valuable signal to external stakeholders that the school is committed to understanding and improving its pupils' mental health and wellbeing. For example, changes in 2019 to the Ofsted framework have placed more focus on the culture of the school and how it supports pupils' personal development, of which good mental health and wellbeing is a cornerstone. Therefore, being able to demonstrate that as a school, the mental health and wellbeing of pupils is understood, monitored and actively improved upon by using an evidence-based process and by making data-led decisions is an advantage.

Take-away message

The WMF results give a school great insight into the current mental health needs and strengths, and levels of wellbeing and supportive factors, within their pupil population. It helpfully contextualises the individual school results against other HeadStart schools, providing a useful starting point for informed discussions around strategies to improve or maintain current levels.

About the HeadStart Learning Team

The Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU) at the Anna Freud Centre and University College London (UCL) is working with The National Lottery Community Fund and the HeadStart partnerships to collect and evaluate evidence about what does and does not work locally to benefit young people now and in the future. Partners working with the EBPU on this evaluation include the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) and the University of Manchester. This collaboration is called the HeadStart Learning Team. Previous partners in the HeadStart Learning Team include the London School of Economics (LSE) and Common Room.

We would like to thank the HeadStart partnerships in Hull, Wolverhampton, Kent and Kernow for providing case studies for this document and the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC), who supported the HeadStart partnerships with this work.