![Education Scotland logo] **Education Scotland**
Foghlam Alba

Health and wellbeing: a thematic review

A report by HM Inspectors

March 2022

Contents

Foreword

This report examines a range of approaches taken to support health and wellbeing in establishments nominated by local authorities. Across Scotland, staff are working with creativity, resilience and innovation to prioritise the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. They are adapting admirably in an intensely challenging environment to support their learners. Since March 2020, staff have had to adjust frequently to new guidance and safety measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A central feature of the last two years is the caring and compassionate approach of staff, and of children and young people, to support the wellbeing of one another. In the face of the pandemic, most staff have a heightened awareness of the wellbeing needs of their learners and families. They have adapted their curriculum with an increased focus on emotional wellbeing and resilience. Supporting mental wellbeing has been a key feature of recovery for schools and settings.

COVID-19 has disrupted the predictability and routines of schools and settings since March 2020 and continues to create day-to-day pressures. Despite this, staff across schools and settings are playing a key role in supporting children, young people and their families.

Gayle Gorman
HM Chief
Inspector of
Education

Background

The Scottish Government's 'Education Recovery: Key Actions and Next Steps' document outlines that HM Inspectors (HMI) will undertake national thematic reviews as part of the contribution of education to Scotland's COVID-19 recovery.

This is the second national thematic review by HMI describing current practice on key aspects of Scottish education. It aims to promote improvements in Scottish education by drawing on the professional view of HMI. This view has been developed through discussions with practitioners, stakeholders, learners, reviewing documentation, and observing learning and teaching in schools and early learning and childcare settings.

The wide scope of our activities gives us a secure and unique evidence base drawn from observing practice at first hand across the whole country. This evidence base enables us to draw conclusions about the current health and wellbeing challenges facing the education system, how schools are beginning to tackle these challenges and the impact of these on learners.

Our intention in publishing this report is to feed back the evidence we have gained from our national thematic review on children's and young people's health and wellbeing. We have also made reference to staff health and wellbeing as part of our findings. We hope this report will stimulate professional reflection and dialogue about the challenges in supporting learners' health and wellbeing as a result of the pandemic. As well as sharing our key messages about current practice, this report includes case studies of establishments that demonstrate effective practice.

Introduction

This report is based on evidence gathered during visits undertaken in November and December 2021. HMI visited eight stand-alone early learning and childcare (ELC) settings; 17 primary schools (including 14 with nursery classes); 15 secondary schools; six special schools; one community learning and development service; and one Gaelic school. The sample of 48 schools and settings visited covered a wide geographical spread of urban and rural areas across Scotland. Appendix 1 provides a list of the establishments visited.

This report considers some of the main challenges schools and settings are facing in connection to supporting children's and young people's health and wellbeing, including:

- improving mental and emotional wellbeing;
- dealing with the impact of social isolation and resilience;
- supporting physical wellbeing;
- minimising the impact of poverty on wellbeing;
- supporting transitions as children and young people move into school; and
- staff wellbeing and professional learning.

Mental and emotional wellbeing

In almost all establishments, supporting the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and their families is quite rightly a key feature of school recovery or improvement plans. Effective leadership is ensuring a strong commitment to supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. In most cases, establishments, services and communities are building on existing arrangements to address mental health and wellbeing problems. For example, they work closely with local authorities, who provide useful guidance and support to establishments to create mental health and wellbeing policies. This work results in staff having a sharp focus on promoting children and young people's mental wellbeing. Comprehensive, whole establishment approaches are also helping to tackle stigma and perceptions often associated with mental health issues.

"We are learning how to cope with our feelings and to treat other people the way we want to be treated. We can recognise triggers that make us angry."

(learner)

Almost all establishments are providing increased levels of support to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and their families. Schools recognise that for many children and young people the pandemic has resulted in lower levels of confidence and higher levels of anxiety. Across a significant number of establishments, children and young people have less belief in their own capacity to do well. This is having an effect on their confidence and motivation. As a result, they are more inclined to ask for help and support from staff. Learners' ability to work and complete tasks independently within a classroom setting has diminished. Children's and young people's social relationships with peers have also been negatively affected. Staff have to intervene more regularly to support children and young people to manage their emotions and resolve any breakdowns in relationships with their peers.

Strengthened relationships in school communities have improved the wellbeing of children and young people. An increasing number of schools have planned approaches to build positive relationships, develop a nurturing ethos and raise awareness of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Children and young people are benefitting from a positive school ethos underpinned by supportive relationships. This is helping them to feel a stronger sense of connection with their school. Staff have shown real strength in how they are responding in a caring and compassionate manner to various wellbeing needs presented by their learners.

Senior leaders are aware that for some children and young people, the return to school routines can be overwhelming. Senior leaders share that implementing approaches such as staggered entry times, having no bells and offering breakfast clubs are working well to support children's and young people's readiness to learn. Most schools and settings provide identified safe spaces to support learners with their emotional and social development. This helps children and young people to cope better with challenging situations. For example, in early learning and childcare settings, sensory areas are often used to help children relax. Most establishments provide children and young people with useful opportunities to access sports and games during breaks and lunchtimes. These provide children and young people with well-planned opportunities to connect with others on a social level, and rebuild friendships.

Almost all staff identify an increasing number of children and young people who require support to regulate their emotions. Almost all staff emphasise the importance of nurturing approaches as an effective strategy in supporting the wellbeing of children and young people. In a few examples, staff are using nurturing approaches more widely to support wellbeing at a whole establishment level. For example, in one primary school, teachers use a nurture profile to identify wellbeing needs for their class. They use this profile to create a whole class health and wellbeing programme to support children's wellbeing. Staff have an increasing focus on building relationships to help children and young people overcome emotional stress and express their feelings calmly. For example, there is now widespread use of 'emotion' check-ins to support wellbeing. In examples that are working well, staff and learners have a common vocabulary to describe emotions and feelings. This vocabulary enables children and young people to talk about and manage their emotions more effectively.

"We have 'emotions tubs' and daily check-ins that help us to show how we feel. If we need to speak to the teacher, they make time to chat. It makes us feel better."

(P3 learner)

Almost all establishments have improved the mental, emotional and social health and wellbeing curriculum through developing learning programmes. Staff in establishments are now beginning to evaluate programmes and courses to determine the difference they are making for children and young people. Staff are providing children and young people with more opportunities to think about their mental and emotional wellbeing and promote better mental health and wellbeing. Equipping children and young people with a range of strategies to better manage emotions and promote good mental wellbeing is a feature of many health and wellbeing programmes and courses. As a result, there are increasing opportunities for learners to develop their coping skills and manage relationships and behaviours.

A number of schools and settings are using the wellbeing indicators to identify common themes. In a few establishments, staff are using digital technologies to gather feedback from children and young people about their wellbeing needs. For example, one secondary school uses digital questionnaires to gather information about young people's wellbeing. Staff also provide QR codes that allow young people to contact individual staff, including senior leaders, discreetly, and discuss their wellbeing needs. Staff analyse children and young people's responses to identify areas of focus for school and setting-wide approaches.

"The best part is the level of nurture which permeates the school. It is tangible with children and parents."

(headteacher)

1. Case study. Argyll and Bute Council

During the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in concerns for children and young people. For example, staff noted a significant increase in the numbers of children and young people displaying distressed and distressing behaviours in schools and settings. They also recognised an increase in children and young people feeling isolated and struggling with peer relationships and friendships. Local authority officers aimed to identify significant common issues that could be addressed using a whole authority strategy. Prior to the pandemic, the Educational Psychology Service had worked with colleagues to carry out an audit of practice across schools and settings identifying a need to build a consistent nurturing strategy across the local authority, developed as Our Children Their Nurturing Education (OCTNE).

Professional learning for staff was introduced to support the development of the strategy. The learning, aimed at supporting all staff to understand attachment theory and, the impact of trauma on wellbeing, also helped staff to be clearer about their role in supporting learners' wellbeing.

With additional local authority pandemic recovery funding, Nurture Teachers provided specific support for the most vulnerable children. This was aimed at building the capacity of staff to support individual children and young people better.

Nurture teachers model nurturing strategies in schools and support staff to develop more nurturing learning environments and experiences. The nurture teachers gather and share information about the social, emotional and mental development of learners. Staff use the information to inform individualised support plans to ensure they have appropriate targets for identified children and young people. This enables them to meet the needs of children and young people who require support to overcome barriers to learning.

As a result of this work, staff are more able to understand learners' behaviour and use nurturing approaches to better support children and young people. Staff teams collaborate more in a reflective, solution-focused way to support children and young people presenting with distressed behaviour. More children and young people understand their emotions and use the strategies they have learned to self soothe.

Almost all schools and services identify a greater number of children and young people who require support from specialist agencies and partners for their mental and emotional wellbeing. This includes support with emotional regulation, distressed behaviours and loss and bereavement. Responding to increased levels of such behaviour remains an ongoing challenge for schools and settings. Schools and settings are working with staff from partner agencies who have specialist knowledge and skills to respond to complex mental and emotional wellbeing needs. In response to supporting a greater level of need, a few schools have re-organised their pupil support structures. This includes the appointment of designated family support workers. These changes to staffing structures support children and young people more effectively. In addition, senior leaders strive to ensure that partners provide valuable targeted one-to-one and small group support for children and young people. Staff make regular contact with the most vulnerable children, young people and their families to ensure appropriate ongoing support can be provided. Staff are clear that partnership working and targeted approaches are essential to meet the wellbeing support demands that COVID-19 has created.

"Partnerships are extremely important to the everyday life of our school. I honestly cannot emphasise too strongly the value they add to the experiences we are providing for our children and their families."

(headteacher)

2. Case study. Arnwood Nursery, Glasgow City Council

Senior leaders recognised that COVID-19 restrictions were having a negative impact on the wellbeing of families and increasing their feelings of isolation.

To address this, staff now use the wellbeing indicators to identify children who require increased levels of support and care. Practitioners use a variety of approaches to track children's wellbeing. They use the wellbeing indicators as a point of reference when observing and when engaging with children during play activities. They use the information to inform an overall assessment of children's health and wellbeing. Some children have mini wellbeing plans that staff review daily, or as required.

Overall, practitioners have a better understanding of children's wellbeing needs and are more able to provide appropriate support. As a result, children are happier, more settled and enjoy their learning.

In the majority of establishments, therapeutic approaches to address the issues of COVID-19 are now an increasing feature of the health and wellbeing provision. Staff recognise that therapeutic approaches help children and young people to resolve conflict, trauma and emotional issues. For example, in one secondary, learners participate in counselling programmes that are reducing average anxiety scores from moderate to mild levels across all counselling activities. Young people value access to therapy and counselling. In primary schools, there is an increased use of therapists to explore children's experience of trauma through play. Therapists meet with families to provide them with insight into their child's emotional wellbeing needs. This provides parents with more information about their child's needs and approaches to support their child.

In a few secondary schools, an increase in bullying and anti-social behaviour in the local community has presented new safeguarding issues for children and young people. Staff continue to work with partner agencies to share information and create personalised packages. This provides children and young people at risk with valuable support. Staff in most schools provide specialist support or signpost families to available counselling services. Children, young people and their families access counselling services for a range of issues. These include bereavement, self-harm, anger management, suicide prevention and eating disorders. Children and young people share that counselling is helping them to cope with the issues they experience.

3. Case study. Bellshill Academy, North Lanarkshire Council.

School staff identified that young people's anxiety has increased and their confidence and motivation have decreased as a result of the lockdown periods. On returning to school, young people worried about contracting COVID-19, and were concerned for family and friends. Staff recognised that young people who experienced bereavement during this period had been particularly affected.

Staff developed a whole school health and wellbeing strategy to align with approaches their partners take in supporting young people. As part of this, they introduced the Distressed Brief Intervention (DBI) programme, which is provided by voluntary groups. This provides 14 days of support either in the school or virtually and offers young people the opportunity to speak with a trained NHS counsellor. Young people can be referred to the youth counsellor service or other provision at the end of the 14 days if required.

The DBI programme offers young people quick and timely access to mental health support. This ensures important issues do not escalate and are addressed promptly. Young people value the timely support provided by counsellors and the learning strategies they are gaining to cope with anxiety.

Understandably, children and young people, and their parents are concerned about progress in learning. The cancellation of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) examinations in the initial months of the pandemic and the ongoing uncertainty of the SQA exam diet have created stress for many young people and for the staff delivering the qualifications. To help address worries, staff provide up to date information to young people and parents that take account of the SQA changes caused by the pandemic. For example, staff provide information about assessment requirements and post school transitions. Despite these efforts, there remains increased levels of stress for young people in the senior phase. Almost all schools organise virtual information evenings and parents' evenings, enabling parents to be kept up to date on their child's progress. In early years settings, practitioners now regularly share videos and upload examples of children's learning using online platforms. This enables parents to comment, replicate or extend activities at home.

"I felt it was good for me. I felt safe telling the counsellor my concerns. I was given ideas to help me manage my-self harm. This has been the biggest help to me. I liked the fact I was contacted quickly and given the choice of appointment type."

(learner)

4. Case study. Boclair Academy, East Dunbartonshire Council.

Senior leaders identified a rise in the number of young people who were reporting mental health and wellbeing concerns. Guidance staff expressed concerns about the impact of the periods of isolation, while young people expressed worry about feeling safe.

A community approach is improving how the school talks about, responds to and increases awareness of mental health and mental illness. Over the last five years, the school has formed strong partnerships with many external partners, who contribute effectively to health and wellbeing across the school. Young people in S6 work with 'Mental Health First Aid – Be-in Unity' to support self-regulation, and mental health and wellbeing. Staff support effectively the mental health and wellbeing of young people and recognise the causes of the behaviours young people display. This helps young people to regulate their emotions.

Staff also recognise the impact of poverty on mental health and wellbeing. Staff engaged with the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) using the CPAG toolkit to develop approaches within the school to reduce the impact of poverty. Whole-school staff training has led to a poverty neutral approach to school activities. The recently opened Achievement Resource Centre (ARC) is run by pupils to provide focused, targeted and universal interventions. These support the attainment and achievement of young people for whom poverty is a barrier to learning. Senior pupils and staff use the ARC, which provides a range of items, including toiletries.

These approaches reduce anxiety for young people with poverty related barriers to learning and help support overall health and wellbeing. Staff now have a greater understanding of the impact and complexity of poverty.

Social isolation and resilience

"If you ask around the school, you will find that most pupils think staff are listening and caring." **(learner)**

Schools and settings report an increasing number of children and young people who have experienced loneliness and social isolation due to the pandemic. Despite the return to the routine of being in school buildings, children's and young people's resilience is affected by the ongoing uncertainty and changes to mitigations. As a result, in almost all schools, supporting children, young people and their families to cope with periods of change and uncertainty feature within improvement planning priorities. Senior leaders also express concern about young people's developing over-reliance on social media and online gaming. In some cases, senior leaders recognise that this has resulted in online bullying which exacerbates feelings of social isolation. Staff in schools support children and young people to keep themselves safe online and report any concerns to school staff.

In almost all early learning and childcare settings, practitioners identify losing regular face-to-face contact with families as their greatest challenge. Parents miss the daily personal contact and support from staff. Although practitioners use a variety of ways to maintain contact, such as social media, outdoor meetings and phone calls, building relationships with parents remains an ongoing priority. As COVID-19 restrictions ease, senior leaders recognise that bringing parents into schools and settings is an important factor in reducing social isolation.

An increasing number of children in primary schools require support to rebuild friendships with their peers. In several establishments, staff comment that the requirement of grouping children in 'bubbles' makes it more difficult for children to meet with their normal friendship groups. Staff organise playground games and challenges to enable children to play together and regulate their emotions. They organise virtual assembly sessions to bring the whole school together.

"The school has been amazing in their level of contact with home."

(parent)

In secondary schools, there is a need for staggered intervals and lunch breaks to manage numbers safely. Staff recognise that this has an adverse effect on young people's capacity to socialise with their established friendship groups.

Almost all leaders and staff recognise the challenges faced by learners requiring additional support to progress and to cope with change during the pandemic. For some children and young people, this results in highly distressed behaviours that impact negatively upon overall family wellbeing. In almost all establishments, senior leaders are proactive in supporting children and young people requiring more specialist support. The increased demands on social care and allied health professionals during the pandemic has resulted in a reduced number of face-to-face appointments. Staff recognise this has had a significant negative impact on children, young people and families. For example, where children and young people use a hydro pool to aid mobility, having no access to this therapy affects the development of their movement and posture. In almost all schools, senior leaders and staff use technology well to maintain links with other agencies to gather and share information on individual learners. This helps to mitigate against the increased demands on outside agencies and provides children and young and people with valuable help and support.

Almost all staff recognise the additional challenges faced by refugee families, those seeking asylum and those with English as an additional language. Across schools and settings staff ensure key wellbeing resources are translated into a range of community languages to support families. Schools and settings also share information on health and safety relating to COVID-19. This support enables these families to understand how to mitigate against the risks of COVID-19. Being included in this way reduces parents' anxieties and helps them to support their child's wellbeing.

"It was hard coming back. I needed to see my pals. (Youth worker name) knows what I am like, he has got me back into learning and it's ok again."

(learner)

Physical wellbeing

All staff focus increasingly on supporting children's safety and physical wellbeing. They support children and young people well to understand the risks of COVID-19 and encourage them to follow routines and measures to keep themselves safe. In all establishments, children and young people are supported well to understand the importance of hand hygiene and social distancing measures. Risks to physical wellbeing continue to remain an issue for learners, staff and parents. This is particularly the case in potentially crowded spaces such as corridors and meeting areas. School staff use local authority guidance to provide practical changes to school layouts and systems to reduce risks. For example, senior leaders use split interval and lunch breaks to manage numbers in areas of school buildings. In some schools, senior leaders adjust the start and finish times of the day to allow safe movement of children and young people through the building.

Attendance management is a constant challenge for staff in schools and settings. There is an increased focus on supporting those with an existing pattern of poor attendance. Public health measures designed to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and difficulties readjusting to a busy school environment contribute to poor attendance patterns for children and young people. Staff are working well with parents and partners to address attendance issues. For example, staff make direct telephone contact or home visits to families to alleviate their worries about safety in establishments. Staff provide learning packs or online input for children and young people who are self-isolating to support continuity of learning. In a few schools, staff operate a key adult role for young people who find it hard to engage. Young people speak appreciatively of the role the key adult plays in supporting their wellbeing. Attendance issues as a result of COVID-19 remain an ongoing concern in almost all establishments.

Most establishments are providing increased opportunities for children and young people to participate in physical activity during the school day. This includes further opportunities for outdoor learning and family challenges. These outdoor learning activities help children and young people to interact with their peers and they contribute to children's and young people's wellbeing[1].

_____

1. Successful approaches to learning outdoors (education.gov.scot)

"I am very proud of our woodland experiences that support the wellbeing of children and staff."

(teacher)

The effects of poverty on wellbeing

"Lockdown was a real challenge but we 'doorstep visited' arranged food parcels and provided activities for children and pamper hampers for parents."

(practitioner)

Almost all staff recognise that the pandemic has increased financial insecurity for many families. Many of them now have a greater awareness of hidden poverty. Many staff in establishments and services support families to access basic care needs to support their mental and physical wellbeing. In many of the settings and services we visited, staff and community volunteers are delivering a wide range of initiatives to address food poverty. For example, staff and partners run cooking lessons online and provide home economics lessons for families. They provide food packs and instructions to follow a recipe. These lessons provide learning around nutrition and physical health and the food packs provide nutritious ingredients to families experiencing food poverty. Staff signpost families to organisations who provide grants or foodbanks. For example, in one school, staff work closely with a local charity to provide a community larder which provides food and hygiene products. Parents value this support, which helps to reduce their anxiety around food poverty.

5. Case study. Edinburgh community learning and development, The City of Edinburgh Council

Prior to the pandemic Edinburgh City Council's Community Learning and Development service, established the Discover programme. A keystone principle of Discover is to meet the needs of families living in poverty with dignity and kindness and without stigma. The programme aims to reduce holiday hunger and support learning through activities during the school holidays. Children are referred to Discover primarily by schools. However, on occasion, referrals are made by other professionals and third sector partners.

Since Easter 2020, Discover has been delivered remotely or through a blended approach. With COVID-19 restrictions easing, Discover Summer 2021 delivered a live and pre-recorded online programme. Activities included cooking on a budget, trips and a range of informal learning and social activities.

Children and their parents report feeling less isolated and more active as a result of taking part in Discover 21. Parents' resilience is improved by the practical help to address food poverty. Parents also value the emotional support they receive as most find holiday periods very challenging.

Supporting children and young people with transitions into school

"There are so many things that they (children) have struggled with since coming back to school. They couldn't manage a task by themselves and gave up easily. They needed to be retrained to work out things themselves, to solve problems and to work independently."

(class teacher)

A number of establishments were unable to implement their usual planned transitions for children and young people moving into early years, primary or secondary schools during remote learning periods. This has resulted in parents, children and young people experiencing higher levels of anxiety about moving on to the next stage. Transitions have been especially challenging for children and young people who would normally require enhanced support. The approaches in schools to support enhanced transition such as school visits, residential trips and extra-curricular activities were curtailed. As a result, many children and young people are taking longer than expected to settle into school.

Staff and partners have developed alternative strategies to support transitions into settings and schools and involved parents and carers. Before the transition, staff provided video tours of settings. Prior to starting nursery or school, staff met children online or in small groups outdoors. Parents report this helped to alleviate their fears about their child's transition.

In almost all establishments staff identified that, for some children and young people, returning to schools and settings after periods of remote learning has been challenging. The majority of establishments prepared resources and materials in anticipation of periods of school building closure and remote learning. This helped to ensure they could continue to support children and young people's health and wellbeing. Staff used a range of approaches to support learners on their return to in-school learning through, for example, dedicated timetabling for health and wellbeing activities in the morning. In the best examples, staff planned the health and wellbeing curriculum to include dedicated sessions around transitions and maintaining relationships with others.

"I am doing ok now. I have a college place, but I could not have done it without the confidence that (teacher name) gave me, after I came back after lockdown."

(learner)

6. Case study. Tulach Early Learning Centre, Clackmannanshire Council

Practitioners wanted to make the transition process for children starting school in August 2021 more effective following mostly virtual arrangements for August 2020. They consulted with parents about how to improve the process. A key concern for parents was children's anxiety about being in a crowded and noisy environment.

Staff designed a 'Summer of Wellbeing' programme designed to support children as they moved into Primary 1 and address the concerns raised by parents. The centre offered weekly sessions over the summer holiday to all children due to start school in August 2021. Children came together in class groups to enjoy a series of 'themed' activities in the playground. These included water play, den building, movie making and a barbeque. Staff had a clear focus on developing skills such as teamwork, problem solving, creativity and concentration, as well as the children having fun. The programme was led by staff in Tulach ELC with staff from Abercromby Primary School also attending.

As a result of the 'Summer of Wellbeing', children experienced a well-planned transition programme and staff knew children well when they started school in August.

Staff wellbeing and professional learning

All local authorities recognise that staff face additional challenges and pressures to continue to provide education for children and young people during COVID-19. They have prioritised staff wellbeing well. Local authorities provide a variety of helpful guidance to support senior leaders on how to assess risks associated with COVID -19 in collaboration with staff. This has ensured that staff are informed about ongoing changes to health and safety protocols. Almost all local authorities signpost staff to external support, including access to counselling, bereavement services and occupational health support.

"I felt included in everything and staff phoned and checked in on me. Everyone is valued here."

(janitor)

Most senior leaders support staff very well to cope with the negative impacts of COVID-19 on their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. These include offering daily check-in calls, signposting staff to counselling, and providing pastoral support and opportunities for staff to raise concerns where appropriate. Senior leaders recognise that recently appointed staff face additional challenges by starting a new position during the pandemic. They address these anxieties by pairing new staff with more experienced colleagues to provide them with valuable support.

Almost all staff provide peer support for one another through team meetings, informal catch-ups, virtual staffrooms, sharing of resources and signposting to health and wellbeing advice. For example, health and wellbeing champion roles were created within many establishments and services to support staff and learner wellbeing. They provide staff with up-to-date information and pastoral support. These measures are having a positive impact with staff feeling less isolated and more supported. Staff describe the ways in which they feel stronger as a staff team as a result of overcoming new challenges together. However, there remain challenges for some staff groups to come together. For example, staff do not yet fully have access to shared staffrooms and opportunities to meet as a staff team for professional development. Staff note that losing face-to-face interactions with their colleagues increases their feelings of isolation and impacts negatively on their wellbeing.

"Staff wellbeing is essential for children's wellbeing."

(head of centre)

"We have come through a very challenging time but as a staff we are the stronger for it. We feel that there is nothing we can't handle together now."

(staff member)

Senior leaders are proactive and creative in planning for the increased number of staff absences due to COVID-19. There are ongoing challenges staffing classes due to the increase in staff absence. Senior leaders report difficulties in securing temporary cover for classes and, as a result, almost all are required to cover classes regularly to ensure continuity of learning. In a minority of schools, additional staff appointed to deliver specific pieces of work, for example, staff employed through Pupil Equity Funding, are required for class cover. Ongoing periods of staff absence impacts on staff workload.

Almost all senior leaders describe an increase in their operational workload to manage the pandemic. They are concerned that COVID-19 impacts on the time they have to lead learning and implement priorities and actions to ensure continuous improvement.

Staff continue to improve their knowledge and skills to best support the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and their families. Almost all establishments and services provide staff with professional learning in direct response to the emerging wellbeing needs that children and young people face because of the pandemic. For example, in a few schools, staff have undertaken 'Mental Health First Aid' courses. Staff work effectively with partners to undertake specialist training, such as suicide awareness, to build their confidence to support children and young people.

"We will continue to face outbreaks and setbacks, but I think teamwork in the school has seen us through the worst days."

(depute headteacher)

7. Case study. North West Community Campus. Dumfries and Galloway Council

Senior leaders are very aware of the need to continue supporting staff. The school's improvement plan has supporting staff wellbeing as a clear priority.

Senior leaders are supporting staff wellbeing through organising informal wellbeing / social events, which include staff trips. This is helping staff to connect with their peers, build social relationships and provide social support. The school has also introduced 'Champagne moments' where staff can identify others that have supported them, and mark significant staff milestones. This is all helping to build a strong collective team. Staff have also re-established the staff social committee to encourage colleagues to have fun and help them achieve a good work-life balance.

In addition to the informal opportunities available, senior leaders also support staff more formally through regular dialogue, professional learning such as the recent 'wellbeing for educators' event, and structures such as occupational health. Staff value these opportunities, and particularly welcome having access to specialist advice.

8. Case study. Blacklands Primary School and Nursery Class. North Ayrshire Council

Senior leaders identified the need to provide opportunities for staff to take part in professional learning to help them support the wellbeing needs of children as a result of the pandemic. They provide or facilitate training and professional learning in a range of areas, such as attachment theory and work collaboratively with all staff to ensure they feel well equipped to support children in the current context. Local authority officers provide consistent and well-considered support for school senior leaders, with a significant focus on wellbeing. Teachers lead sessions for one another to share positive classroom practice. Staff report that these approaches help them to feel confident in responding to the current challenges and to build their own resilience.

All staff demonstrate a shared commitment to nurturing approaches and these are embedding well across the school. Teachers are applying their understanding of the effects of early adversity and trauma and the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences within classroom practice and across the life of the school.

The headteacher introduced 'walk and talk' sessions, for collegiate activity time. Staff in small groups take a walk in the local area whilst discussing agreed aspects of self-evaluation or school improvement. Completed impact evaluations from teachers show these sessions are well regarded and support mental and physical wellbeing.

Conclusion

This report has charted a range of measures adopted in schools and settings to help address the health and wellbeing challenges faced by children and young people. In a number of cases, there is evidence of emerging positive impact.

Overall, inspectors have observed the caring and compassionate approach of staff, and of children and young people, to support each other's wellbeing. In many of the establishments and services visited, we have identified that most staff have built stronger relationships with parents and have a heightened awareness of the wellbeing needs of families. Staff are increasingly adopting approaches to improve the mental health of children and young people. Professional learning and guidance from local authorities are supporting staff to feel confident in responding to emerging health and wellbeing concerns.

The report also shows clearly that there are on-going challenges that require continued focus. These are:

• Continuing to prioritise the wellbeing of children, young people and staff as part of school improvement priorities.

• Improving further aspects of the health and wellbeing curriculum to equip children and young people with the skills and knowledge to respond to change and uncertainty.

• Building on existing arrangements to monitor and evaluate approaches to supporting wellbeing to ensure they are making a positive difference to learners.

• Maximising the contribution of partnerships, parents and the wider community to enhance staff, children and young people's wellbeing.

• Continuing to support the attendance of children and young people.

Appendix 1: settings and schools visited

HM Inspectors would like to thank local authorities, staff, children, young people, partners and parents for their engagement during the visits and willingness to share their approaches to supporting health and wellbeing.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

- Arnwood Nursery
Glasgow City Council
- Beanstalk Family Nurture Centre
Fife Council
- Frances Wright Nursery School
Dundee City Council
- Glenburn Early Learning and Childcare Centre
Renfrewshire Council
- Glenwood Family Centre
East Renfrewshire Council
- Jigsaw Family Learning Centre
North Lanarkshire Council
- Tulach Early Learning and Childcare Centre Clackmannanshire Council
- Tynecastle Nursery School (virtual)
The City of Edinburgh Council

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- Aileymill Primary School
Inverclyde Council
- Airyhall Primary School
Aberdeen City Council
- Blacklands Primary School North Ayrshire Council and Nursery Class
- East Calder Primary School
West Lothian Council and Early Learning Centre
- Giffnock Primary School
East Renfrewshire Council
- Heathryburn Primary School
Aberdeen City Council
- Holy Trinity Primary School
East Dunbartonshire Council
- Kilbarchan Primary School
Renfrewshire Council
- Logan Primary School
East Ayrshire Council
- Musselburgh The Burgh Primary School East Lothian Council
- Newtongrange Primary School
Midlothian Council
- Onthank Primary School
East Ayrshire Council
- Rigside Primary School
South Lanarkshire Council
- Roseburn Primary School
The City of Edinburgh Council
- Sanderson Wynd Primary School
East Lothian Council
- Trinity Primary School
Scottish Borders
- Beattock Primary School. Early Years Setting Dumfries and Galloway

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- Banff Academy
Aberdeenshire Council
- Barrhead High School
East Renfrewshire Council
- Boclair Academy
East Dunbartonshire Council
- Harris Academy
Dundee City Council
- Hermitage Academy
Argyll and Bute Council
- Leith Academy
The City of Edinburgh Council
- Monifieth High School
Angus Council
- North West Community Campus
Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Northfield Academy
Aberdeen City Council
- Queen Anne High School
Fife Council
- St Peter of the Apostle High School
West Dunbartonshire Council
- Trinity High School
Renfrewshire Council
- Bellshill Academy
North Lanarkshire Council
- Wallace High School
Stirling Council
- Wick High School
The Highland Council

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

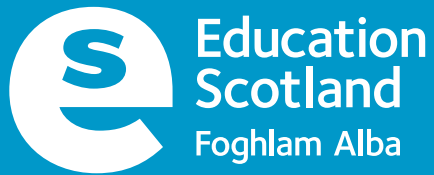- Argyll and Bute Nurture Group
Argyll and Bute Council
- Calaiswood Special School
Fife Council
- Campsie View
East Dunbartonshire Council
- Kilpatrick Special School
West Dunbartonshire Council
- Robert Douglas Memorial School
Perth and Kinross Council
- Westfield
Aberdeenshire Council

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Discover
City of Edinburgh Council

GAELIC SCHOOL

- Sgoil an Rubha
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar