



Chameleon PDE
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

“How Are You?”

Swindon teachers & school staff wellbeing during
Covid 19 Pandemic

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Introduction

Chameleon PDE were commissioned by Swindon Healthy Schools to gain insight into the impact the Covid 19 pandemic has on staff working in educational settings across Swindon.

A short, anonymous online survey was designed that questioned respondents on how they had been affected by the pandemic and if they felt local support in the form of an online mental health support/counselling service would be beneficial.

The information gathered will help inform public health on the need or otherwise for a mental health support service for staff based in educational settings across the Borough.

Survey Sample

Teachers and other staff working in educational settings across Swindon were encouraged to participate in the 'How Are You?' survey.

726 staff completed the survey, which represents approximately 20% of Swindon's 4,000 school staff (estimated figure supplied by SBC). This sample size is sufficient to make inferences from the findings of the survey.

Three educational sectors were represented as follows:

- 55% work in a Primary School environment
- 26% work in a Special School environment
- 19% work in a Secondary School or College environment

Those who completed the survey work in a variety of roles within the settings:

- 11% SLT
- 38% Teachers
- 30% Teaching support
- 21% 'other' e.g. admin, business support



Key Findings

Emotions related to work.

Staff were asked to rate how they had felt with regard to a range of emotions/mental states on a scale of 1-5 over the past year. Stress scored most highly closely followed by 'overwhelmed' and anxious.

Emotions at home

70% reported feeling more tired than usual and 40% felt lonely at times. Only 18% reported that the conditions over the past two academic years have not affected their personal lives.

Working hours

55% of respondents felt they had worked **significantly** more hours over the past year. However, 17% reported working less.

Vaccination

A significant majority of staff working in schools (87%) believe they should have been offered a covid vaccine before schools reopened.

New academic year

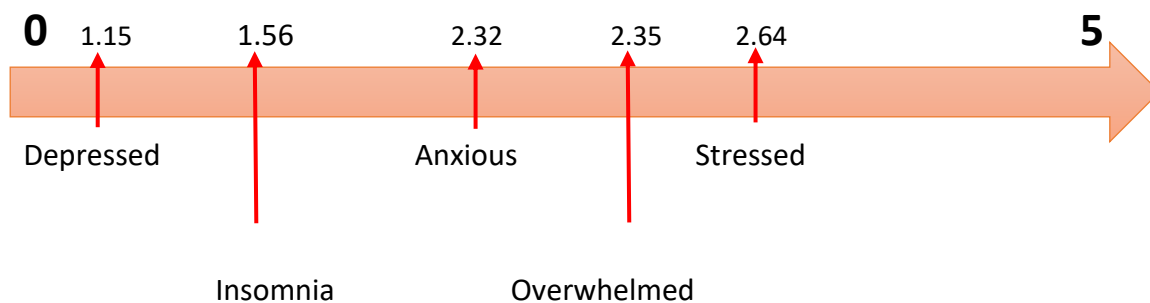
When asked to comment on what the future might hold there appears to be some cautious optimism with 57% feel the worst is behind but are cautious, and 47% feeling positive and looking forward to 'normality'. However, 57% feel there will be ongoing mental health problems to deal with and 40% feel worried there will be more virus problems.

Mental health support

40% of staff reported that they would use a service similar to Kooth if it were available. A further 52% felt this type of service would be a good idea but wouldn't use it themselves. Only 8% of respondents felt that this type of service would not be useful.



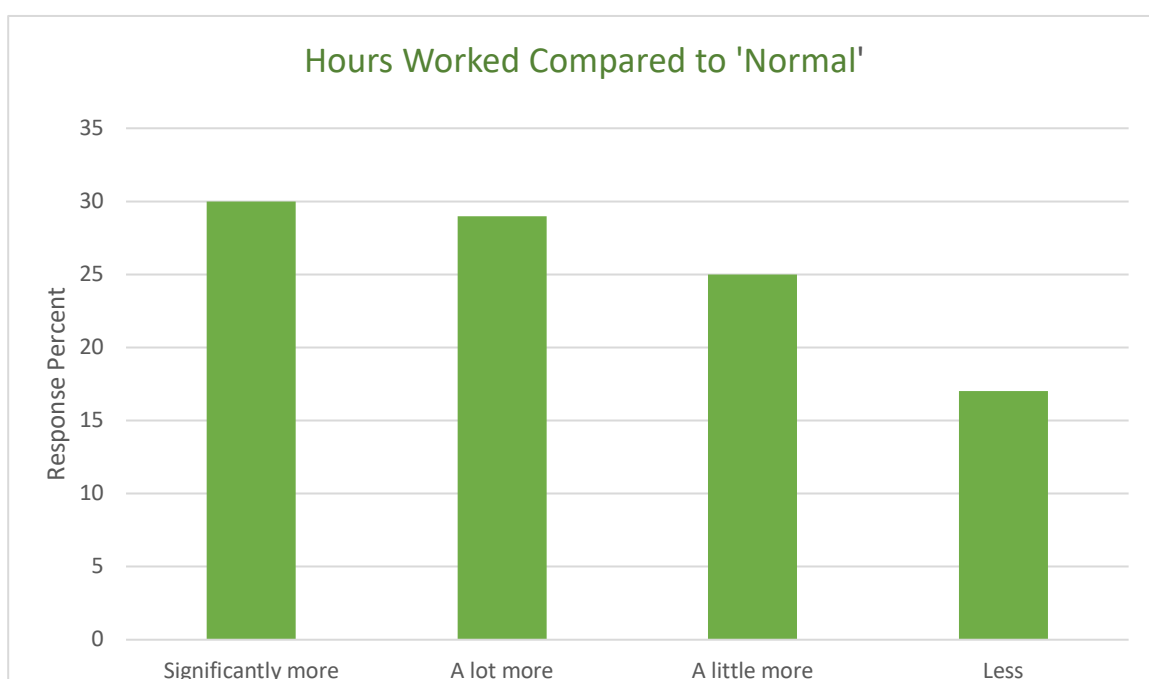
1. Emotion on Working Days



Teachers were asked to rate how they have felt on most working days over the past year using a scale of 0 (not affected) - 5 (extremely affected).

Their answers (average scores) suggest that many have felt stressed, anxious or overwhelmed on a regular basis in their daily work. Far fewer appear to have felt depressed as a result of the additional strain they have experienced.

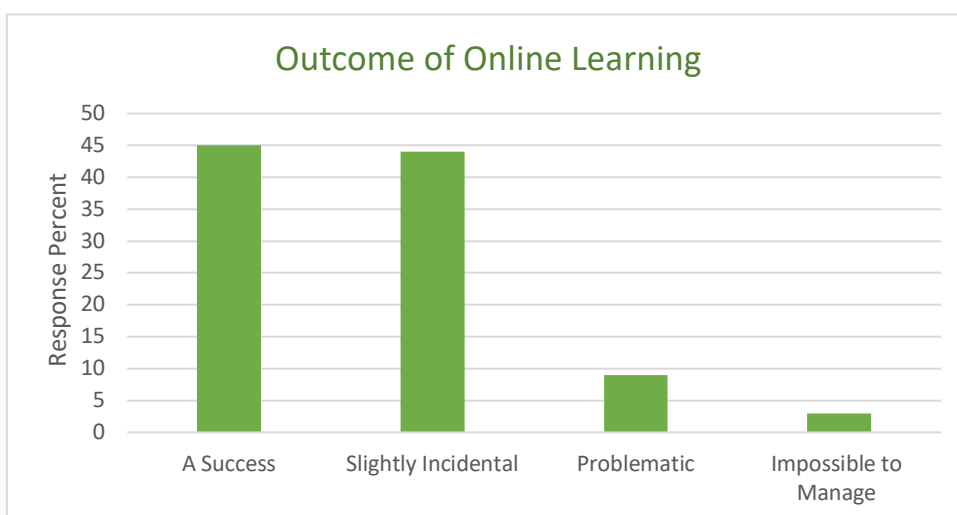
Working Hours





The data suggests that 55% of respondents have worked significantly more hours over the past year. Only 17% report working less hours, so we can safely assume that over 80% of staff working in educational settings have seen an increase in their working hours because of the pandemic.

2. Adaptation to Remote Learning

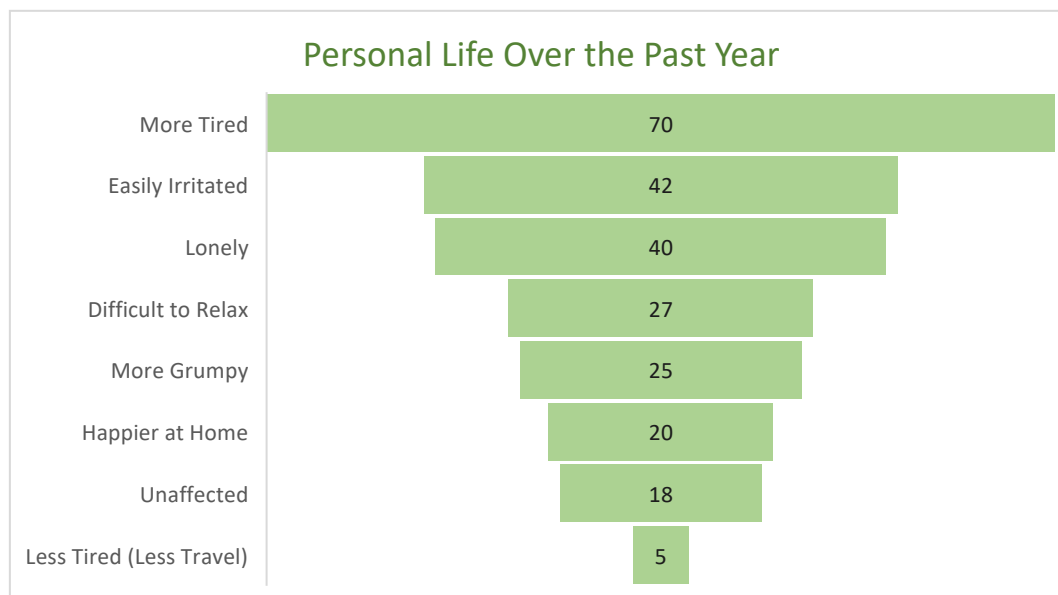


Overall, the adjustment to remote/online teaching has been quite positive. 89% report feeling confident or 'ok' about online teaching. Almost half, are confident that adapting to online/remote learning has been a positive success (45%); whilst 44% recognise it to be 'okay most of the time'.

Just 11% felt that the switch to learning remotely has been difficult to manage and has provided poor quality teaching.

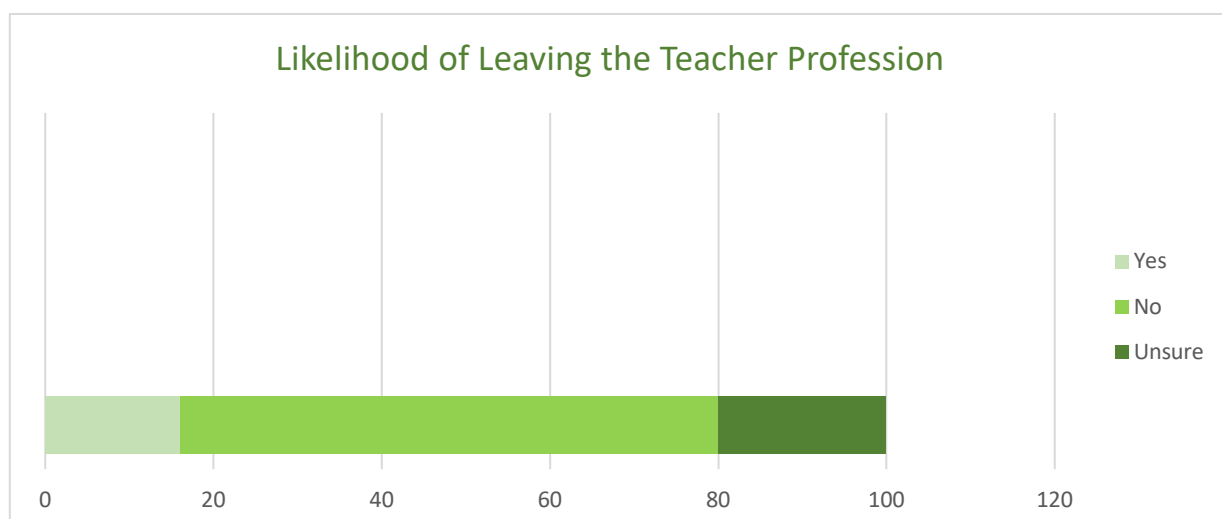


3. Effect on Personal Life



A significant number of teacher's personal lives have been negatively affected. Increased tiredness was the most common issue with 70% more tired than usual. Over one third (40%) have reported feelings of loneliness or isolation and a further one third also have recognised that they are more irritable than usual. Additionally, over half of those who participated agreed that it has become 'difficult to relax' and are 'more grumpy than usual'. 18% of staff reported that their personal/home life had been unaffected.

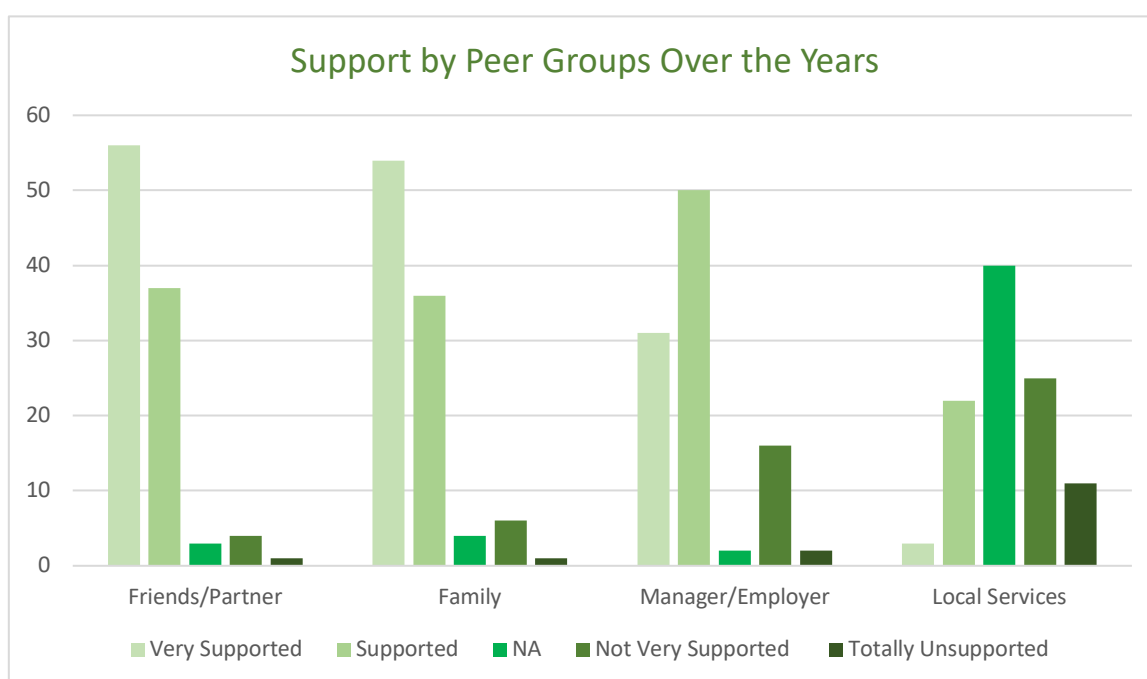
4. Effect on future career choice





When asked if the pandemic has increased the likelihood of leaving the teaching profession, the majority (64%) selected 'No'. However, the remaining respondents were closely split between 'Yes' (16%) and 'Unsure' (20%). Not all respondents were in teaching roles, however, the majority who left additional comments were teachers and these were split between positive comments about the profession and some less positive comments from those who were likely to either retire or look for alternative employment.

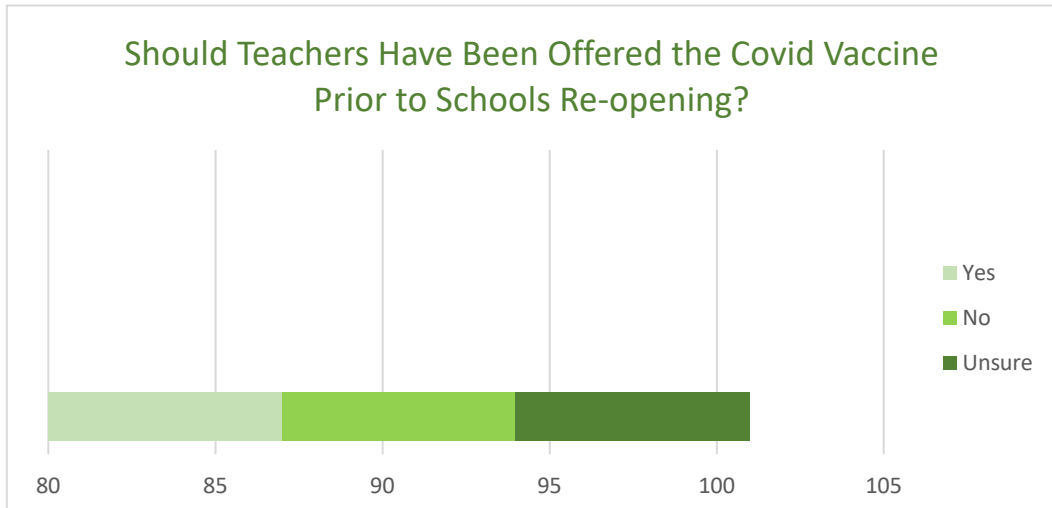
5. Peer Support



Teachers were questioned about their access to available support across the recent year. The data suggests that most supportive group were friends, or a partner (56%) closely followed by family (54%). It is certain that the group offering the least assistance was the local services, as only one quarter of teachers felt adequately supported. Employers have been viewed favourably on the whole with 81% obtaining sufficient support from an employer (i.e. very supported or supported).

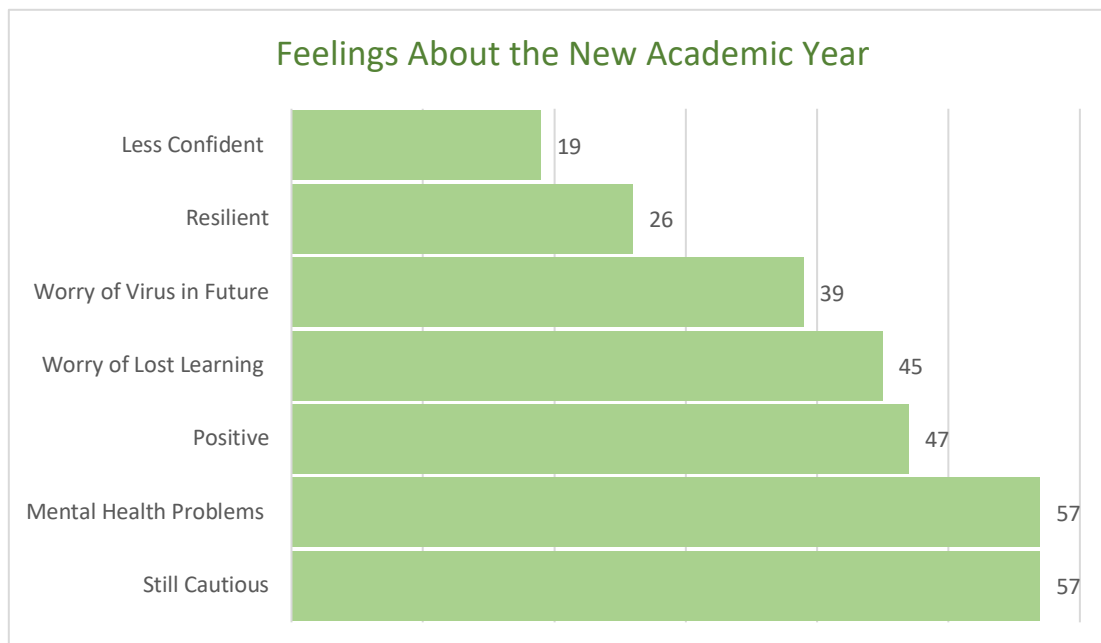


6. Vaccination Prior to Re-opening



This result indicates the strength of feeling that staff in school have about the need to be prioritised for vaccination. 87% share the opinion that, as front-line workers, they should have been offered a covid vaccination before schools reopened. Only 7% felt that they should not have been prioritised with a further 7% 'unsure'.

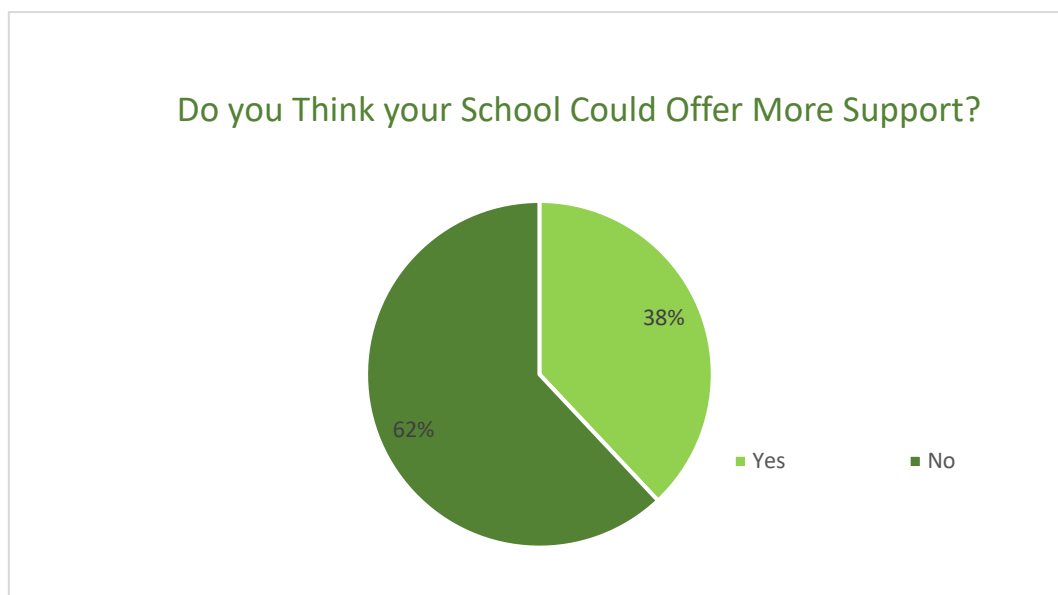
7. Feelings about the future





In every five teachers questioned, almost three feel that the worst is behind us, but still remain cautious when looking ahead to the next few months. An additional three in every five are concerned about an increase in mental health problems they will have to deal with. Close to half (45%) of the participating teachers are worried about the lost learning that children have experienced, although around a quarter feel that children and adults are generally resilient and will bounce forward in the future academic year.

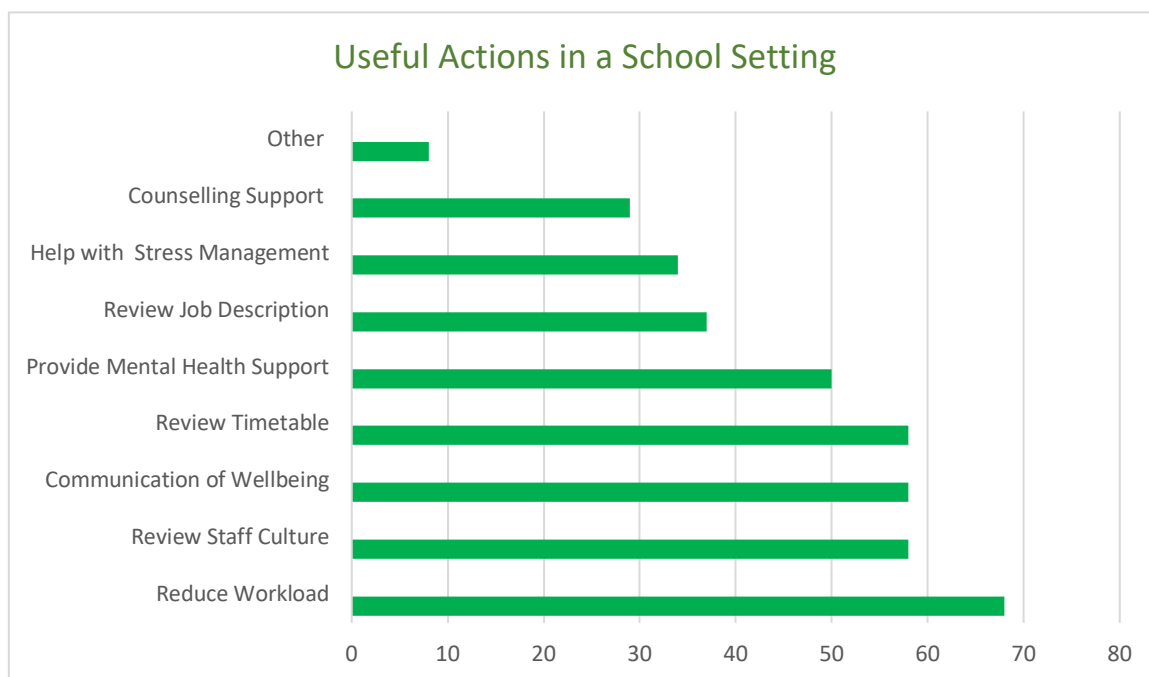
8. Support Within School



Although staff rated the support from their employers highly in a previous question there is clearly a view that schools could do more to improve working life for their employees with over a third (38%) reporting that their organisations could do more to support staff.



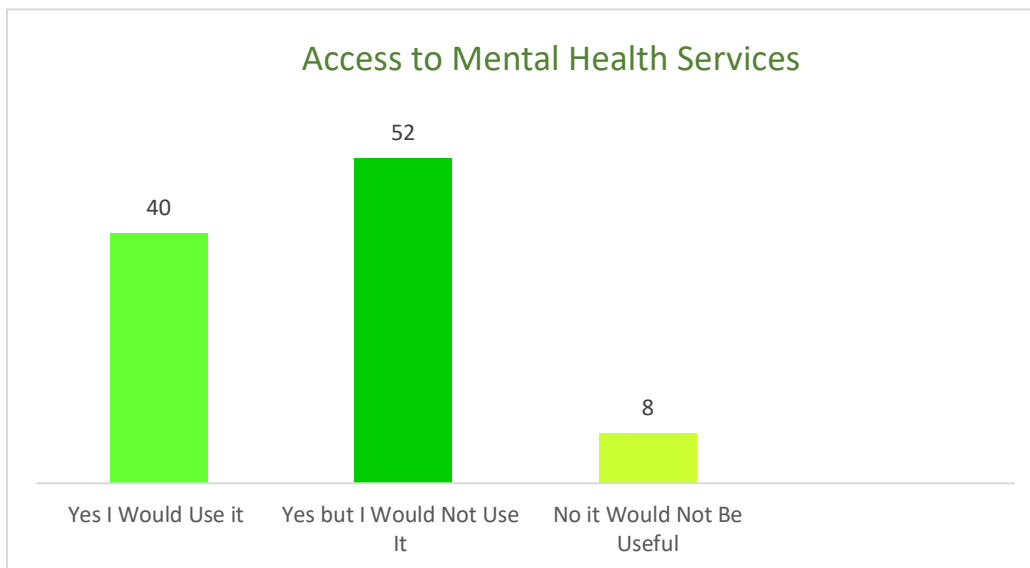
9. School Responsibilities



When asked what would be most helpful in a school environment, the main answer (68% of responses) was suggesting that schools should review and reduce workload. Closely followed by a view that staff culture (58%) and routine (58%) should be reviewed with the purpose of relieving pressure on staff. Fewer were in favour of accessing counselling (29%) than regular mental health support (50%).

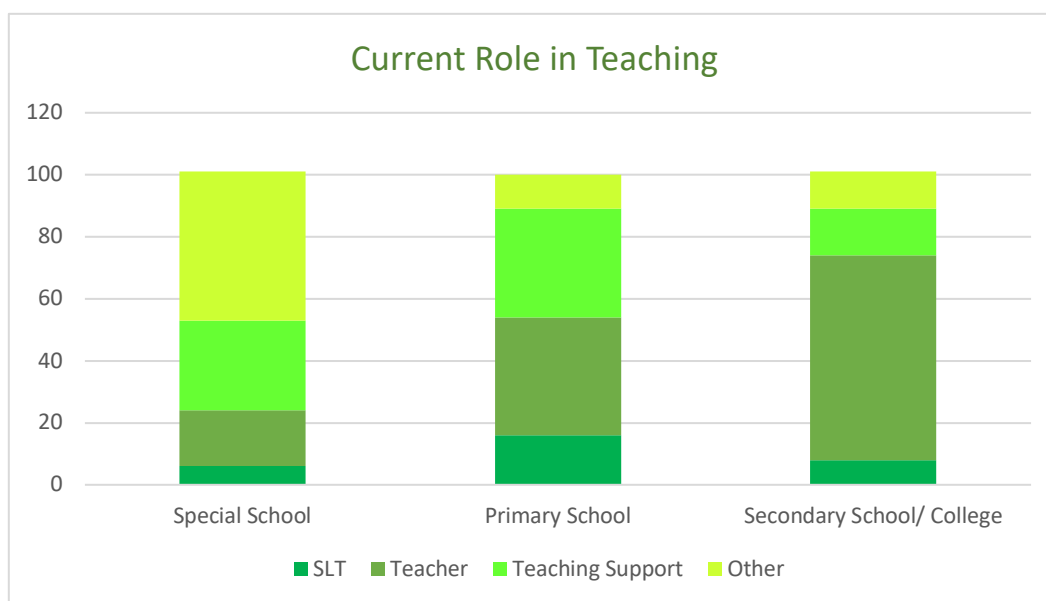


10. Mental Health Support Service for Teachers



A little over half of respondents agreed that a mental health support service, similar to KOOH, would be a positive addition for teachers and support staff, despite not planning to use it themselves. 40% reported that they would use this type of service. Only 8% believe it would not be a useful resource.

11. Sector and Role in Teaching





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Over 700 staff working in schools across Swindon completed the survey, however, there was not equal representation across sectors. Within Secondary Schools and Colleges, teachers are heavily represented (66%) whilst in Primary/Junior Schools, teacher Support (35%) and teachers (38%) are almost equally represented. More Senior Leaders within primary schools engaged with the survey more than other sectors. 'Other' roles are over-represented in Special School respondents, possibly due to the very high number of support staff in special schools. Overall, 55% of those responding were from Primary Schools, 26% from Special Schools with Secondary Schools contributing 19% of responses.

Discussion

Impact of Covid 19 pandemic on staff working in educational settings in Swindon

Unsurprisingly, the Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on staff working in education settings across Swindon. Increased workload and tiredness were the issues that affected the largest numbers of staff and many reported feeling more stressed. Professional and personal life has been negatively impacted for the majority and not being prioritised for vaccinations is likely to have been a concern for many.

Respondents were able to add additional anonymised comments to a number of the questions and significant numbers took the opportunity to give additional information and personal accounts of their experiences across a range of areas. (see examples in Appendix 1).

There were some positive comments but many respondents were angry about their experiences or reported the severe impact on their mental health. Some reported negatively about how their employer had handled the impact of the pandemic on staff.

The most common difficulty faced by school staff in general was managing work-life balance. This ranged from increased workload to prepare for online teaching to having their family members and children at home trying to work or learn simultaneously.



Supporting emotional/mental health of staff in schools

The issue of workload, staff culture and communications within schools appears to be an area where there is concern. To understand more fully exactly how these areas could be addressed further research is required. However, it is possible that by addressing some of the areas that lead to feelings of stress and exhaustion the mental health of staff will also be addressed to some extent. There may be potential to prevent escalation of emotional/mental health problems by reviewing working practices.

There appears to be an appetite for mental health support within educational settings with around 50% of staff feeling this would be useful, however counselling services appear less popular. Once again, understanding exactly what staff would like this support to entail would require further research.

There were many comments about not having time to focus on mental health, being unable to 'fit in' mental health/wellbeing support etc. However, it is important to note that the majority of respondents did not leave additional comments about this.

Leaving the teaching profession

Around two thirds of staff reported that they were likely to remain in education, however, that leaves a third potentially considering a career change. For some, they are close to retirement or would not be considering leaving. Some of the comments suggest a level of disillusionment amongst some staff and there are also personal accounts of struggles with mental health over the past year. However, there were also teachers who commented on how much better they felt when they returned to the classroom and stated their enjoyment of their career.

Who commented and why?

Inviting respondents to leave additional comments can be insightful, however, it is important to weigh up the comments of a relatively small proportion of respondents to the overall picture being painted by all respondents.

There were some positive comments, but it may be those individuals feeling angry or upset about the past year that have used the survey as an opportunity to vent some of their frustrations. This in itself may be cathartic for them, however, the personal nature of these



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comments are unlikely to be representative of the wider group. It is much more common for individuals to comment on negative rather than positive experiences. As such, they should be treated with caution.

Recommendations

- Share findings with schools
- Consult with Head Teachers on key findings
- Decide on most appropriate next steps including potential further research about:
 - How school staff / school culture can be improved
 - Ways to address work-life balance
 - How to improve communication within school
 - What additional mental health support could be provided in school



Appendix 1

Some examples of comments. Full list is available

1. Most disturbing comment

I felt violated by having to deal with parents in my home over the phone. I choose mental health over physical health and did remote lessons from school even though I was in the vulnerable category as I found the idea of dealing with children in my living room repellent.

2. Comments re: vaccine

Vaccine – should priority have been give to teachers?

As someone who lives with someone who is classed as Extremely Medically Vulnerable I was incredibly nervous about the students' return to school. We should have been top priority to receive the vaccine to enable students to come back. Schools should not have opened until all teachers had, at least, their first vaccination jab. Huge oversight on the Governments part.

ONE HUNDRED PER CENT! I am utterly baffled that we were not. Friends in their forties are working from home and vaccinated, I'm in contact with thirty children (and thus multiple families) yet with no vaccination! It makes me feel really undervalued by the government and like they have never stepped foot in a state school classroom in their lives! How can I social distance with primary children?!?

It felt like we were cannon fodder, being instructed to keep things going, with very little protection, while others were allowed to shield

I continue to feel very unsafe every day in my job and it has affected my overall wellbeing. We are one of the only careers, aside from the police, who are up-close to a wide range of people with no PPE and no social distancing.



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With the 2 metre rule and faceguards, I have been less ill than in a normal year. Assuming this is maintained across schools, I see no reason why teachers need to be given priority.

3. Comments on how to improve wellbeing of school staff

Teachers need a reduced workload and more planning time on their timetables. This would then leave more personal time to be able to look after their own well being. Many teachers work all day and plan all evening. The idea of well being often has to wait until the holidays.

Sadly I think that anything EXTRA for teachers to have to do is dangerous in some schools. For example, if the school wanted to 'evidence' that it cares for its staffs' mental health, these courses could be made mandatory like training. I also think it's a cop out to offer this kind of thing (we have been given self-help books on how to build resilience as a response to illness or absence before).

Not really sure how to respond to this- I currently have no time to support myself (for exercise, cooking for family etc). In the ideal world, a similar service may help but may also be seen as a weakness ie for those who cannot cope with the demands of the job.

Although the intentions would be good, I don't think people would sign up. Largely because of time, there are already so many plates being juggled that teachers & teaching staff often forget about these services being available. Most school staff would benefit from more time to do their jobs rather than another service added which will end up taking up time that they don't have. Most people have a good support network but struggle when they don't have time to access it.

Swindon Borough Council should have thought about Educational staff welfare years ago! Any staff member working under the umbrella of Swindon Borough Council should be offered services automatically like these! I've been teaching in Swindon for over 20 years and they have offered nothing, in terms of any support, for me. Not holding my breath that they will be able to offer anything beyond a short term service option. SBC has a bad reputation of wasting taxpayers money and I would be very surprised if a service like this would be available long term. Road works take a greater priority than staff mental health and welfare. I would love to be proved wrong!!!

When would I have time to do that!!!!



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I don't have the time to spend on this. Too much school work.

I don't think many of us would have the time to use it. Rather than strategies to manage our mental health, we need to address the root cause of many of the issues - unnecessary scrutiny, micro-management and excessive demands from planning and marking.

At the very least it would show that the mental wellbeing of teachers is a thought for SBC.

I believe a strong HR structure in schools would be of greater benefit - plus having a system that encourages teachers to raise issues and not be afraid of consequences as a result of doing so. A reduction in workload has to be at the heart of any future planning. It is not appropriate for Teachers to regularly work weekends and evenings

I am leaving the White Horse Federation as a result of the handling of the pandemic and the pressure that they have placed on teachers without any real thought for their wellbeing.

The lockdown(s) and Government briefings opened my eyes to how completely unsupported education staff (meaning all staff working in a school environment) were in general. Economy coming before personal health and safety and the public threats and encouragement by current Education minister to inform on schools to OFSTED, should they not be doing what the government told them to do- even if their life and that of their families would be compromised. Also after working through Lockdown, to be told that pay to be frozen...again...well what is the point of staying in the profession?? Teaching staff are shown no trust by the government. Experience in the profession is NOT valued as staff who reach certain upper pay scales are deemed too expensive and struggle to get future teaching jobs as schools do not have the funding to employ them!! I would never recommend anyone I know to go in to teaching. Think they would have a better chance of progression and increased pay if working in the local supermarket!