

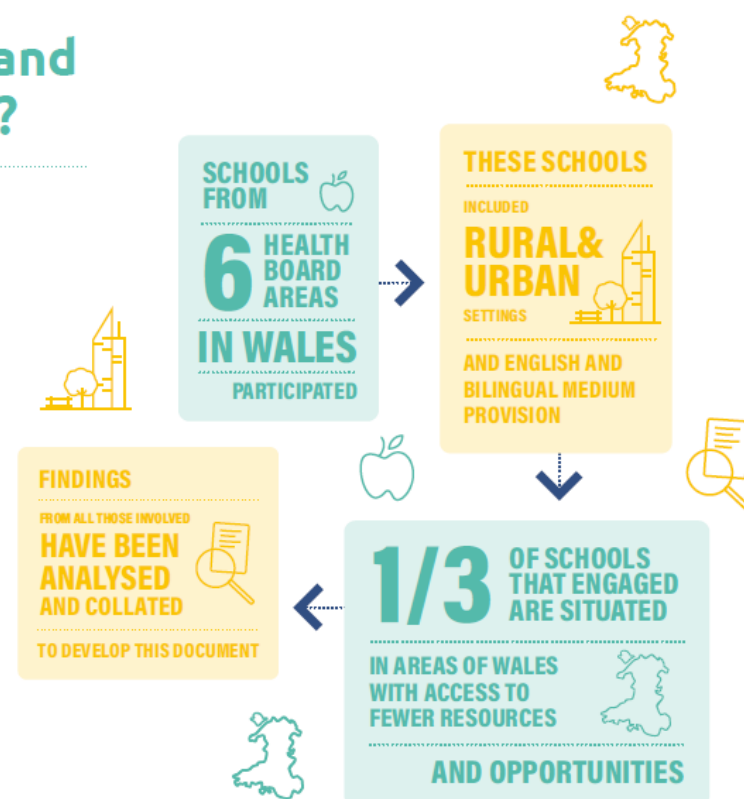
WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING: LEARNING REPORT



How are schools embedding self-evaluation to understand the needs and strengths of their school community?

Schools across Wales are implementing the Welsh Government statutory [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing](#). The Framework supports schools to promote positive mental wellbeing, prevent mental ill health, and take action to support individuals where needed.

We gathered information on how schools are using guidance and tools to self-evaluate their needs and strengths by conducting interviews and surveys with a range of schools with secondary-aged learners in Wales. We also reviewed key documents that were used to support the process.



<https://gov.wales/framework-embedding-whole-school-approach-emotional-and-mental-wellbeing>

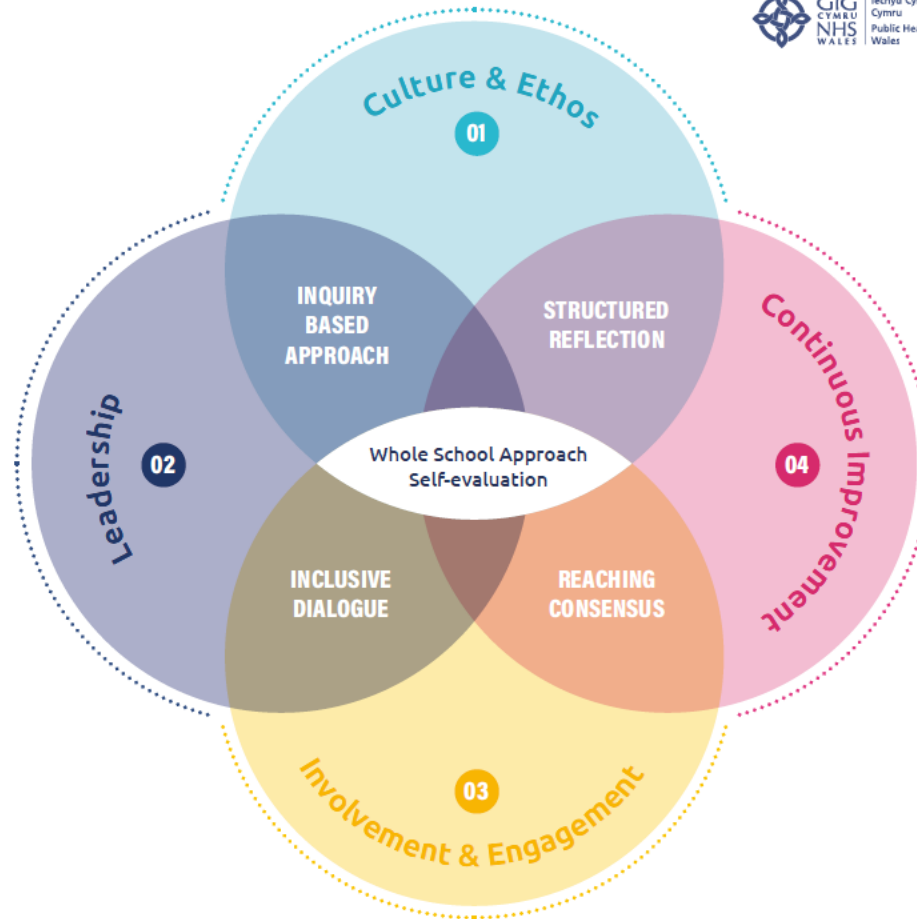
What made a difference?

Key themes associated with successfully embedding self-evaluation as the first stage of implementing the Framework are;

- 01 School Culture & Ethos
- 02 Leadership
- 03 Whole School Involvement & Engagement
- 04 Applying Continuous Improvement approaches

 **90%**

of participating schools agreed that **self-evaluation** has played an important role in their continuous involvement journey by helping them understand their community's **emotional and mental wellbeing needs and strengths**.



What made a difference?

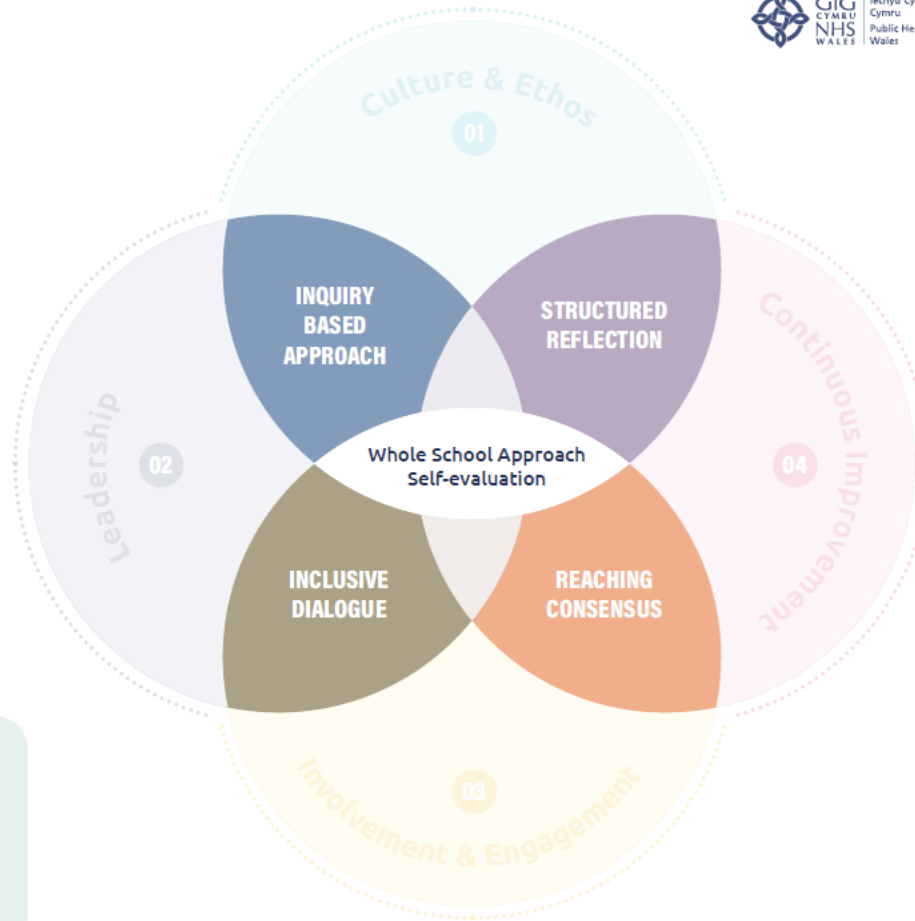
These areas are intertwined with each other and encourage ways of working that support schools on their implementation journey;

- Structured reflection
- Inquiry-based approaches
- Inclusive whole school dialogue
- Reaching consensus on priority areas for action



THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF THINGS GOING ON AROUND THE SCHOOL, IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, WE'RE CHANGING, IT'S HAVING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

Wellbeing Lead
Secondary School



01 Culture & Ethos

We know schools make invaluable contributions to the health and wellbeing of the communities they serve. A focus on educational attainment remains crucial to improving outcomes throughout life.

However, we found a growing momentum to further develop a school ethos that protects and promotes emotional and mental wellbeing through the ongoing adoption of complementary initiatives such as curriculum development and other reforms.

For many schools, the Covid-19 Pandemic created a growing sense of urgency to support the whole school community with its mental health and wellbeing needs.

WE KNOW THAT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IS A PRIORITY, AND WE REALISED PRETTY QUICKLY THAT THIS [SELF-EVALUATION] WAS GOING TO HELP US TO PRIORITISE IT IN THE SCHOOL YEAR.

Wellbeing Lead
Secondary School

The publication of the Framework and accompanying resources provided schools with the opportunity to come together and reflect on the key aspects of wellbeing where they have excelled, and also helped to break down areas for improvement into manageable priorities. Schools reported that the act

of **reflection**, promoted by the self-evaluation process has been beneficial and has supported a significant change in school culture and ways of working.

We found that each school is on a unique journey of **continuous improvement**. Previous practice, experience, and school-specific pressures mean each school will be starting from a different place.

The scale of the challenge and the change required to promote and protect the mental wellbeing of learners and staff is recognised by schools. There is a strong desire amongst school staff to collectively embark on the structured and supported process to embed the Framework, and develop **inquiry-based** ways of working across the whole school community.

IT'S SOMETHING WE ARE ACTIVELY USING TO IMPROVE WELLBEING AS A SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

Senior Leadership Team Member
Secondary School

02 Leadership

Schools that have made a successful start to embedding self-evaluation have either created a specific position to lead the process or have assigned clear roles, responsibilities, and protected time, to members of the Senior Leadership Team.

A key ingredient for success is buy-in from the school's Senior Leadership Team. We found when a wellbeing lead felt supported they were better placed to give a clear steer on the self-evaluation approach, including distributing some responsibility to others, this facilitated a positive change in the **culture & ethos** of the school by fostering an **inclusive dialogue** across the whole school community.

Creating a school environment where leadership is demonstrated at different levels across the staff team has been important for building school-wide commitment and momentum in implementing the Framework.

PRIORITISE THE KEY AREAS, DISTRIBUTE TO OTHER MIDDLE LEADERS, NOT FEELING AS A LEADER YOU HAVE TO TAKE IT ALL ON BY YOURSELF.

Senior Leadership Team Member
 Secondary School



03 Involvement & Engagement



We found that strong **leaders** who championed the self-evaluation process supported involvement and engagement across school communities. This created an **inquiry-based** approach to learning about wellbeing that emphasised the active role of different groups within the school in exploring the topic, drawing on shared learning and experience.



WE PUT CERTAIN STRATEGIES IN PLACE TO MAKE SURE THAT IT'S A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH, EVERYONE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE IS CONTRIBUTING TO IT. WE HAVE PERHAPS HAD TO CHANGE THE WAY THAT WE HAVE WORKED AS WELL AS JUST GIVING IT RECOGNITION.

Wellbeing Lead
Secondary School

03 Involvement & Engagement

Involving different groups across the school community in self-evaluation was beneficial in gathering a diverse range of views. Schools spoke about how learners were often in agreement with each other when it came to identifying areas for improvement, but that staff took longer to agree on priority areas.

IT'S BEEN USED AS A DISCUSSION POINT TO HAVE TALKATIVE, PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSIONS.

Senior Leadership Team Member
 Secondary School

THERE WERE CERTAIN AREAS WHERE THERE WAS A DISCREPANCY BETWEEN HOW VARIOUS GROUPS WITHIN THE SCHOOL VIEWS THINGS. THE AREAS TO FOCUS ON WERE PROBABLY THE AREAS WHERE THERE'S THE MOST DISCREPANCY FOR US.

Senior Leadership Team Member
 Secondary School

There is also some indication that assumptions about particular groups within the school community meant some groups' views were incorporated more than others. **Reaching consensus** on priority areas of action can be challenging in these circumstances.



Learner

Learner voice is seen as particularly valuable, and a variety of methods are being used to involve children and young people. Successful initiatives appear to be those which involve more interaction, such as discussion forums, and pupil committees. Dedicated questionnaires appear to have been less useful.



Staff Roles

Levels of engagement across the diverse staff roles have varied. The involvement of school teaching staff is regarded by schools as important for the successful implementation of self-evaluation. Current pressures on teaching staff are widely recognised, and Senior Leadership Team members spoke of their protective role in finding the right balance to facilitate opportunities for teaching staff to be fully involved in the process.



External Agencies

So far Governors and external agencies have been less involved or not yet part of school activity.



Family

Involving family has been a challenge for schools, but this is not unique to the self-evaluation process.

04 Continuous Improvement

Embedding self-evaluation as part of a whole school continuous improvement approach is recognised as a significant change to ways of working within some schools. The self-evaluation tool and supporting guidance have brought structure and greater cohesion which has been integral to schools embedding the framework. The indicators within the **Tool**, and supporting **Guidance** which explain each indicator in detail, have brought an appreciation of how existing elements of school life were already protecting and promoting wellbeing among learners and staff. When undertaken as a **structured and reflective** process, self-evaluation has assisted in breaking down a seemingly overwhelming task into something more manageable.



COLLECTIVELY, IT'S DRIVING THE SCHOOL FORWARD.

Senior Leadership Team Member
Secondary School

Schools have drawn upon a range of support to facilitate implementing the approach in small steps. This has included adaptations to the self-evaluation tool, and working with Implementation Co-ordinators and Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Schemes staff.

We found that schools utilising the full range of support provided had a more complete picture of emotional and mental wellbeing than would otherwise be gained by using the self-evaluation tool in isolation.



THE SUPPORT FROM COORDINATORS WAS EXTREMELY HELPFUL, THE ONGOING DISCUSSIONS AND PROMPTS REALLY ADDED VALUE TO THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS.

Senior Leadership Team Member
Pupil Referral Unit

04 Continuous Improvement



Using a wide range of data sources to drive improvement helped schools self-evaluate and **reach consensus** on priority areas for action that can be built into improvement planning.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL ABOUT THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS? GAINING A HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE SCHOOL, A CENTRALISED DOCUMENT THAT LINKS TO EVIDENCE. EASY TO SHARE AND FURTHER DISCUSS WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS.

Senior Leadership Team Member
Pupil Referral Unit

WE SEE THE IMPACT OF WHAT'S HAPPENING. YOU KNOW, THE TEACHERS AND THE STAFF SEE THE IMPACT OF CHANGES AND THINGS WE'VE IMPLEMENTED TO LISTEN TO THEM, THE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO SEE THE IMPACT OF WHAT WE'RE DOING.

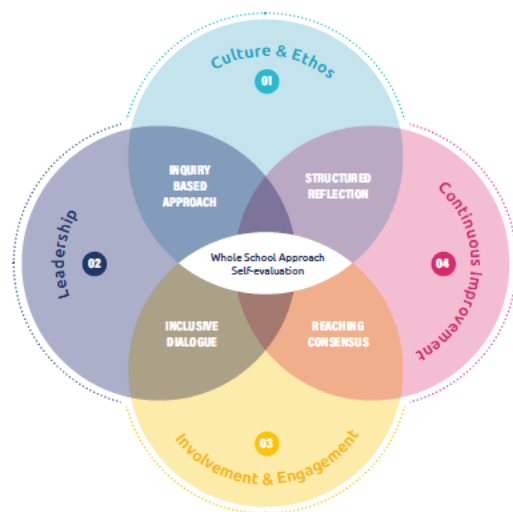
Senior Leadership Team Member
Secondary School

Improvement Plans

Schools involved in this study tend to be selecting between 2-4 priority areas to take forward in their school improvement plans.

The most common priority theme was Leadership and Commitment, followed by Workforce. The next most frequent were within Involvement and Engagement, Relationships, and School Environment. Although priorities will rightly differ between schools, this may demonstrate that schools are focusing initial improvement actions within the core internal workforce, before broadening out into wider aspects of school life, and then later considering connections with external agencies and complementary policies or initiatives.

Implications for practice



Contact us

For further information please contact:
HI-Programme.Support@wales.nhs.uk

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



01 Culture & Ethos:

Identifying where complementary action can be taken for impact across a range of different policies and initiatives can help to maximise effect and reduce the burden on the whole school community. The Health and Wellbeing Area within the Curriculum is an anchor around which the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing can be built to ensure that mental health and wellbeing is given parity with physical health and attainment.

02 Leadership:

Embedding self-evaluation requires strong leadership to implement a structured approach. We found leadership to be important for setting review cycles and monitoring schedules, having clear mechanisms for reaching consensus and embedding the priority actions identified into existing school development and improvement plans.

03 Involvement & Engagement:

Strengthening approaches to involvement and engagement with all of the school community supports self-evaluation as part of embedding the Framework, particularly when all views are equitably considered in determining priorities for improvement.

It is important that schools develop engagement activities that meet the needs of different groups within the school community. In particular learners and parents need to have an appropriate platform to articulate their views.

When an obvious priority is identified it is beneficial to work through the entire relevant domain of the whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing self-evaluation tool and supporting guidance as a school community, before agreeing on any intervention activity and seeking to draw in external agency support.

04 Continuous improvement:

Exchanging learning and experience with other schools helps to develop a shared understanding of self-evaluation as an approach and enables improvements to practice.