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WELL Evaluation Baseline Survey: Executive Summary Report

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Executive Summary

The survey was completed between November 2021-January 2022. It was designed to provide a baseline picture for the three-year evaluation, with follow up surveys planned for summer 2023 and summer 2024.

This survey received a good response rate, with 81 completed surveys out of a possible total of 120 (68%). Over three quarters of respondents were head teachers/principals (77%)¹, with 10% executive heads and small proportions of acting heads, heads of school, or deputy/assistant head teachers. A majority of respondents (85%) have worked in education for 16 years or more, although two thirds (65%) have worked in their current school for 10 years or less. Almost three quarters (72%) were in their first headship.

Respondents see Allerdale and Copeland's distinctive context as an important factor for school improvement. For example, nine in ten (90%) agree or strongly agree that its remoteness can make school improvement challenging. Almost two thirds (64%) agree that schools in the area collaborate together well, while a similar proportion (60%) disagree that a lack of trust between schools hinders meaningful collaboration. That said, almost one in five respondents (19%) (particularly secondaries) agree that a lack of trust hinders collaboration, while a third (34%) agree that 'there is a clear local hierarchy of schools in my area, in terms of their status and popularity with parents', potentially indicating competitive pressures.²

Not surprisingly, national accountability measures are an important consideration for school leaders in Allerdale and Copeland. Three quarters (75%) agree or strongly agree with the statement 'Making sure my school does well in Ofsted inspections is one of my top priorities as a leader'.

Most school leaders agree (85%) that their school has the capacity it needs to improve over the next few years, but only a quarter (24%) agree (and 45% disagree) that their school will have sufficient funding to employ the staff it needs.

Respondents highlighted four top priorities for their school this academic year: Mental health, wellbeing and pastoral care of pupils, improving teaching and learning, improving outcomes in specific subject areas (particularly English), and Covid recovery and 'catch up'. Despite the national focus on attendance post-pandemic, only a quarter (27%) of respondents saw this as a priority.

A strong majority of leaders (85%) agree that their school draws on research evidence to inform practice. However, until now, engagement in Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) initiatives in the area has been limited: three quarters of schools (77%) have not engaged with or been part of any EEF research projects.

Schools have engaged in a wide variety of WELL elements already, with strongly positive feedback so far. Schools have accessed the following programmes most often: Making the Most for Disadvantaged

¹ Percentages are rounded. Please note that all percentages should be interpreted with caution given the small sample size (n=81).

² This figure is much lower than when the same question was asked nationally – 57% agree (Greany and Higham, 2018).

Students (65%), Emotionally Literate Support Assistants (54%), I CAN Talkboost (51%), and Youth Mental Health First Aid/Wellbeing (46%). Feedback from those participating is mostly positive, with only 7 schools indicating more negative or constructive feedback. Open text responses indicate that some schools are drawing on this support to make significant changes in how they work, for example:

“The disadvantaged student programme has allowed us to completely overhaul our approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils and given us a renewed drive towards ensuring they are supported.”

Almost all schools (95%) have identified their priority area(s) for WELL funding this academic year, with English, additional needs and pastoral care, CPD, speech and language, and Maths the most popular.

Overall, school leaders are strongly positive about the WELL project. Almost all (99%) respondents say they are excited about the project. The following open text response captures some of the excitement and positive expectations for the project:

“WELL is a wonderful initiative, supporting schools to get to the heart of what we do best - enabling our children to thrive. This funding is proving vital in our drive to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, which would not have otherwise been possible.”

We asked respondents to re-order the WELL project’s priorities, according to which they see as the most/least important. Caution needs to be applied in interpreting these responses: for example, if a respondent has classified a particular priority as less important, this does not necessarily mean they see it as ‘unimportant’. Overall, leaders appear to see the following as the most critical priority: ‘To provide high quality, research led professional development and proven intervention programmes in order to improve the quality of teaching, especially of vulnerable pupils, impacting on pupil attainment and progress’.

Almost all (96%) leaders are somewhat or very confident that the WELL project aims will be met, while a similar proportion (99%) is confident that their own school will benefit from the programme and that disadvantaged children in their school will benefit (96%). However, a significant proportion of leaders (44%) say they do foresee challenges engaging with WELL, for reasons that centre on (lack of) time, pressures of the school system, and the Covid pandemic as well as, for a minority, practical barriers (e.g. paperwork).