School Business Leaders Wellbeing Index 2026
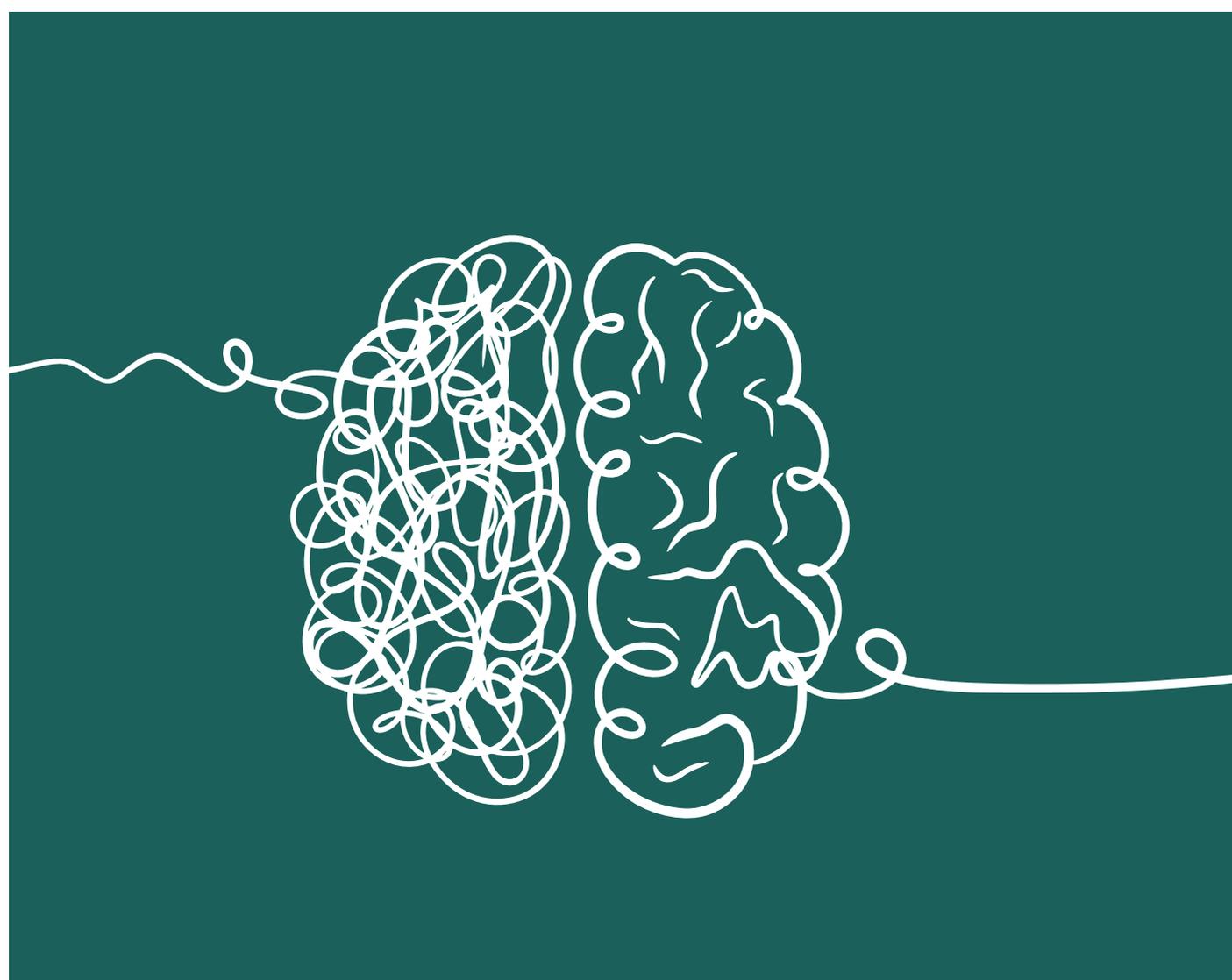
Working in schools in England and Wales

March 2026

Contents

Acknowledgements

Foreword

I am delighted to have been invited to write this foreword as the annual survey continues to be a vital source of insight for our profession, one that recognises both the immense value School Business Leaders (SBL) bring to their communities and the significant pressures they navigate every day.

This report reflects both continuity and change: many themes remain familiar, yet the landscape in which we operate is shifting once again. With the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023, Employment Act 2025, evolving expectations around Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) funding, and renewed drives for collaboration through groups of schools, 2026 brings another period of adaptation and challenge.

SBLs are often at the centre of this change. Responding to cultural shifts within their own schools while simultaneously leading the transition. The emotional toll of holding this dual role cannot be ignored. The heaviest pressures are often the ones that come from within, carried quietly in relationships with colleagues we work beside every single day. This report makes it clear that many SBLs are carrying that weight, often silently and crucially, it reminds us that these feelings are shared. None of us are facing this alone.

That is why the work of the SBL Support Hub is so important. Our purpose is simple: a practitioner-led support service drawing on strength from within the system. Whether you are facing organisational change, navigating complex relationships, or simply needing reassurance from someone who has already walked your path, we are here to help you move forward with confidence.

What we do matters. You make a difference every single day and if you need support to continue making that difference, please reach out. And finally, when next year's survey arrives, share it widely. You never know who might need that encouragement, that connection, or that reminder to be kind to each other but more importantly, to ourselves.

Sally Boaden

Chief Finance and Operating Officer - Raleigh Education Trust
Team Leader of SBL Support Hub

Section 1
Introduction

Introduction

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Index of School Business Leaders in England and Wales

Education Mutual is delighted to continue supporting the School Business Leader (SBL) community with the launch of this year's 'School Business Leader Wellbeing Index 2026'.

Seeing a clear gap in sector insight, Education Mutual set out to better understand the wellbeing needs of SBLs in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England and Wales. Initial research was undertaken in 2022 (in partnership with Education Support), with follow-up research conducted each year to provide the 'SBL Wellbeing Index'. This research continues the exploration of wellbeing needs and where possible, comparisons have been made to the findings of previous years results.

Who is this report for?

Our annual research is not only conducted for those working in SBL roles, but for everyone connected to them, such as colleagues, senior leaders, governors, policymakers, and organisations across the wider education sector. The findings aim to spark meaningful change that benefits whole school communities.

School Business Leaders

For School Business Leaders (SBLs), we hope this research not only validates your experiences but also provides a practical tool to help you navigate the ongoing changes within the education sector. We hope the data empowers you through supporting discussions with senior leaders, and informing your professional decisions. Your wellbeing matters, and this research exists to amplify your voice.

Senior School Leaders

Our aspiration for senior school leaders is that this report encourages increased recognition of the pressures facing your School Business Leaders, School Business Managers, Operations Managers, or HR leads. We collate the findings into this format for you to utilise for the purpose of fostering open conversations about workload, boundaries, and organisational demands.

Colleagues of School Business Leaders

If you are a colleague of a School Business Leader, we hope this report not only builds your understanding of the complexity and intensity of their role, but also encourages meaningful reflection on how you can work together to support their wellbeing. Schools are communities, and many colleagues spend more hours with each other than with their own family. This makes it essential that workplaces are built on empathy, collaboration, and positive culture.

Executive summary

As the operational and financial responsibilities of schools continue to grow in scale and complexity, SBLs increasingly find themselves managing high-stakes pressures that can significantly impact their emotional resilience, job satisfaction, and long-term wellbeing. The findings reveal clear patterns around the types of support that make a meaningful difference At the same time, the research highlights areas where systemic change is needed to create healthier, more sustainable working conditions for SBLs.

The project is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the work-related factors which have an impact on your mental health and/or wellbeing?

- Which types of mental health and wellbeing support are currently accessible through your school?

- Which services would be/are of most benefit in tackling these work-related issues?

- Overall, how well do SBLs perceive the mental health and wellbeing support provided by their workplace?

Previous versions of the research
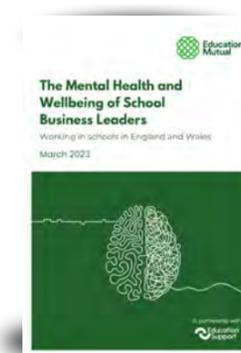
2023 edition:
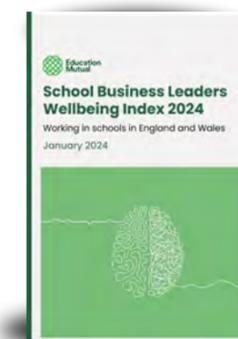
2024 edition:
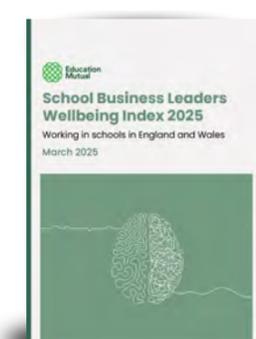
2025 edition:

All editions of these reports are available to download, prints and share via https://www.educationmutual.co.uk/school-business-leader-wellbeing-index-2025/

Summarised methodology

We continue to deliver a mixed-method design for the research, collating the results of 472 online survey responses, alongside a selection of telephone or online in-depth interviews with respondents to further explore issues raised in the survey.

This feedback gives us real insight into the pressures facing School Business Leaders today, helping us spot emerging patterns and understand where the sector is struggling most. By sharing your experiences, you help Education Mutual to design more responsive, targeted support that tackles the issues identified.

Some key participant figures to take from this years findings:

The full appendix and methodology for the 'School Business Leader Wellbeing Index 2026' is available to browse towards the back of the report.

Respondents by job title: Base: all respondents (n=472)

65%
of respondents were School Business Managers/ Directors/Leaders

11%
of respondents were Office Managers/Directors

5%
of respondents were Finance Managers/Directors

Respondents by tenure: Base: all respondents (n=472)

The top 3 most popular tenure brackets for respondents are featured below:
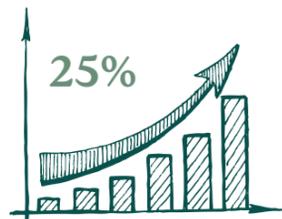
25%
of respondents have been working within their role for 6 – 10 years

29%
of respondents have been working within their role for 3 – 5 years
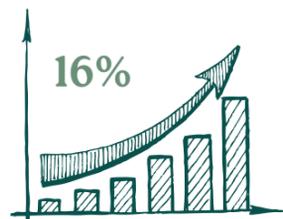
16%
of respondents have been working within their role for 0 – 2 years

Respondents by age: Base: all respondents (n=472)

The top 3 age brackets for respondents are featured below:

18%
of respondents were aged between 45 – 49 years old

23%
of respondents were aged between 50-54 years old

25%
of respondents were aged between 55-59 years old

Respondents by region: Base: all respondents (n=472)

15% – North West

9% – West Midlands

15% – South West + Wales

23% – North East + Yorkshire and the Humber

16% – East Midlands + East of England

19% – London + South East
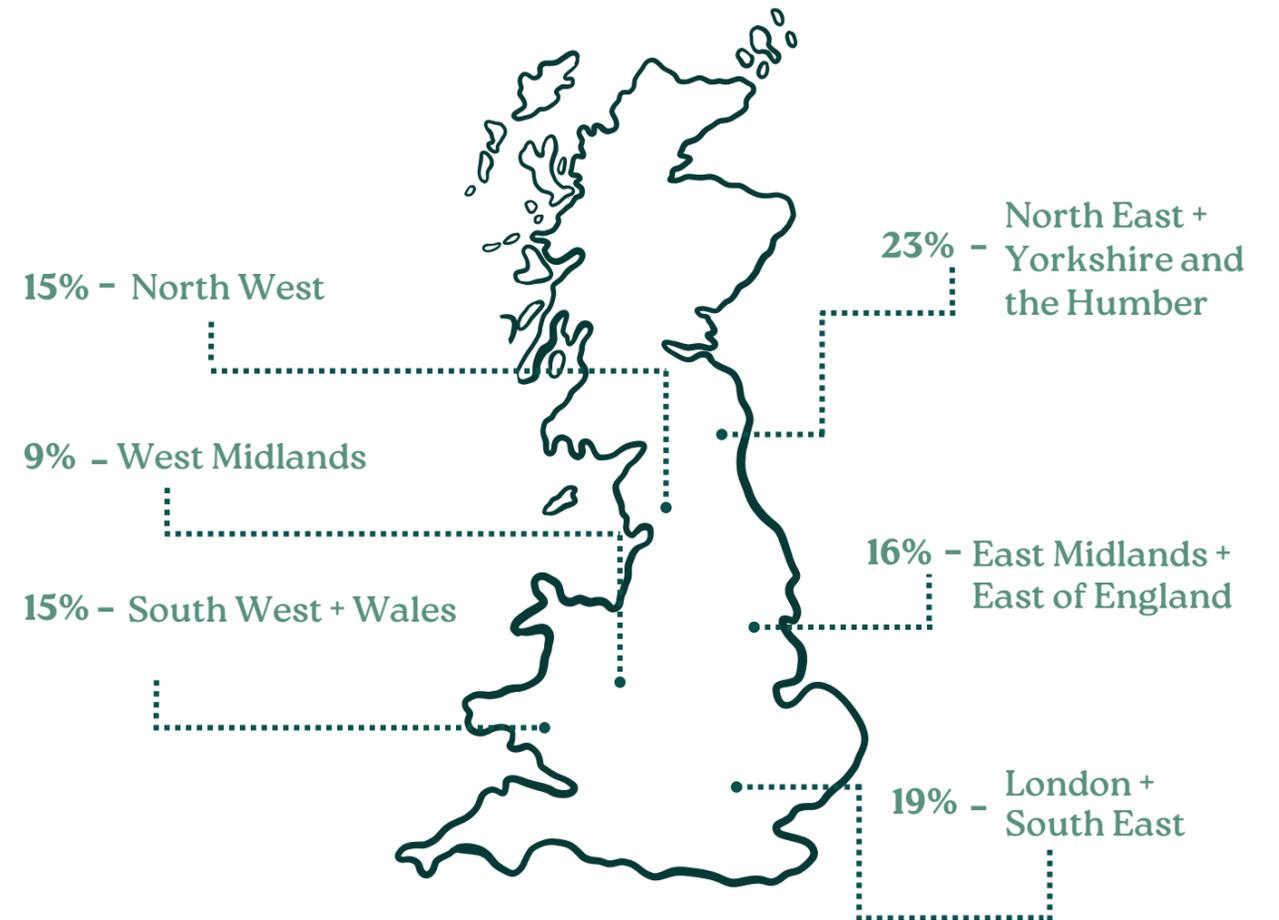
Section 2

Key findings

Key findings

A) What affects SBLs' mental health and wellbeing at work?

We asked School Business Leaders about the work-related factors influencing their mental health and wellbeing.

The top five challenges were:

Newly introduced in 2025, this challenge has escalated by a further 5% this year*

65%

Excessive workload

59%

Funding issues

58%

A lack of understanding of their role (by colleagues)

41%

Working long, unpaid hours

40%

Problems with staffing

There has been a notable 7% reduction in this challenge*

These issues were examined in more detail throughout the interview phase of the project which can be found in Section 3 of the report.

You can read the full breakdown in appendix 1

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

A) What affects SBLs' mental health and wellbeing at work? (continued)

The remaining challenges ranked in the top ten:

Challenge	%	Change
Lack of work life/balance	35%	Risen by 4%*
Inequitable pay	35%	Risen by 1%*
Financial reporting/accountability	30%	Decreased by 1%*
Government legislation/compliance	25%	Decreased by 2%*
Low income	25%	Risen by 3%*

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

New challenges raised for 2026:

23% of respondents reported that their mental health and wellbeing had been impacted by **problems with pupils' parents**

21% of respondents reported that their mental health and wellbeing had been impacted by **inspections**

19% of respondents reported that their mental health and wellbeing had been impacted by **their inability to take annual leave**

You can read the full breakdown in appendix 1

B) Perception of school employee mental health and wellbeing support

We asked School Business Leaders how well they thought their school supports all their staff who experience problems with their mental health and wellbeing.

The survey found that:

77% of SBLs told us their schools supported their employees well (very well or fairly well)

How well schools support their employees who experience problems with their mental health and wellbeing   Base: all respondents (n=472)

	%	Change
Not well at all	2%	Decreased by 1%*
Don't know	6%	Increased by 4%*
Not very well	15%	Increased by 3%*
Fairly well	49%	Decreased by 3%*
Very well	28%	Decreased by 3%*
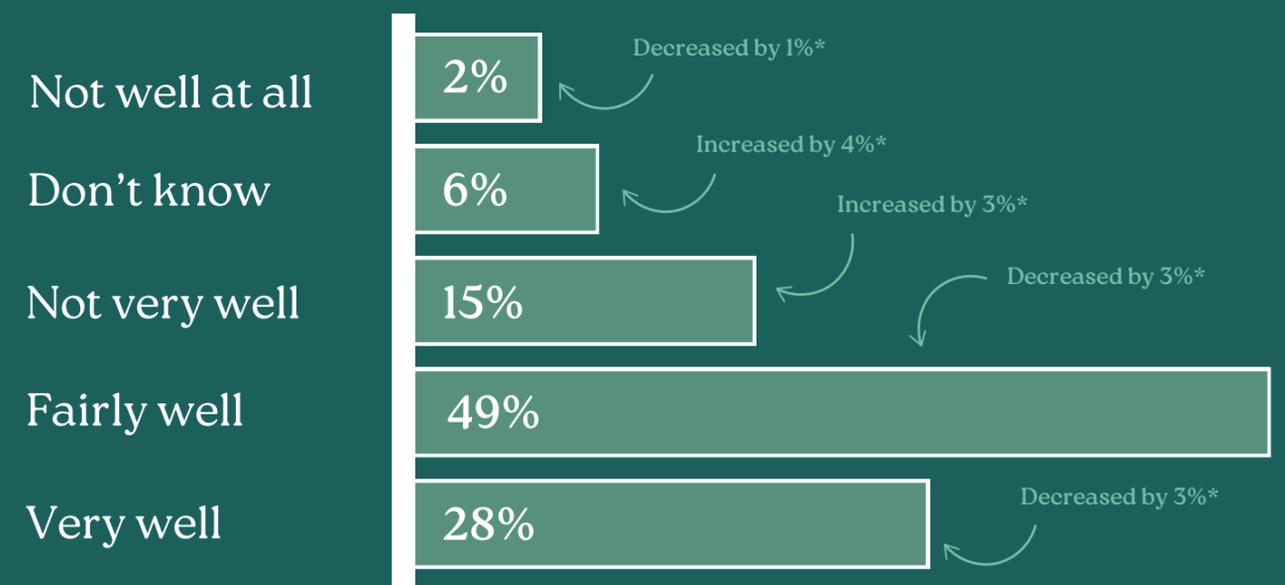
The chart above illustrates the overall perception of support provided by respondents' workplaces. There has been an slight increase in this years data, of those who felt that their workplace did not support staff well. Even small percentage shifts in this area are significant, as they highlight that more colleagues feel unsupported or lack clarity about what help exists.

You can read the full breakdown in appendix 2

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

C) The wellbeing services being provided by schools and used by SBLs

We asked School Business Leaders which mental health and wellbeing services their school currently provides for their staff.

The survey found that:

This year reflects another 3% uplift, consistent with the 3% growth seen in the previous year*

94%

of schools provided mental health and wellbeing services for their staff

The top five most commonly reported sources of support were:

63% — Access to a confidential helpline

50% — Counselling or psychotherapy

39% — Mental health first aid training

36% — Human resources (HR) staff to talk to

31% — Union people to talk to
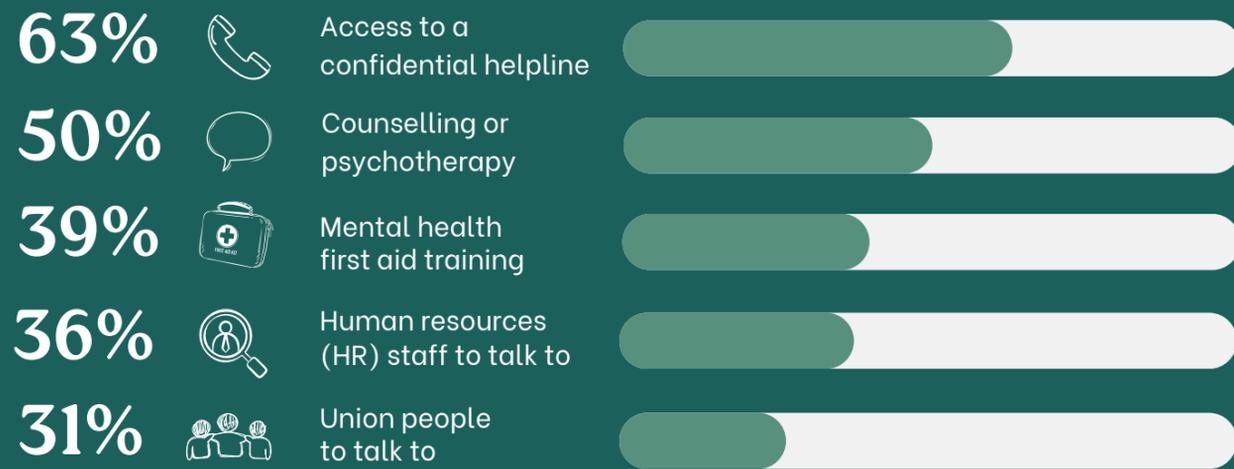
You can read the full breakdown in appendix 3

Base: all respondents (n=472)

First choice services for dealing with work-related factors:

SBLs were asked to indicate which service would be their first choice for dealing with the work-related factors that impacted their wellbeing. The order goes as follows:

#1 - EAP/helpline
#2 - HR staff to talk to
#3 - Wellbeing sessions

#4 - Counselling/psychotherapy
#5 - Management/colleague support
#6 - Facilitated peer support group

Mental health and wellbeing services provided and used:

We asked School Business Leaders which wellbeing services they had accessed, and for the fourth consecutive year the findings show that Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) or confidential helplines, alongside counselling or psychotherapy services, remain the most frequently used support options.

Services offered which fell out of the top 10 were mentioned by 15% or fewer respondents and were used by 5% or fewer. The chart below details the top five mental health and wellbeing services provided by schools to SBLs, alongside the actual usage rate of each service.

EAP/confidential helpline — 12% / 63%

Counselling/psychotherapy — 13% / 50%

Mental health first aid training — 6% / 40%

Provision of this service has decreased 2% since 2025*

HR staff to talk to — 13% / 36%

Union people to talk to — 4% / 31%

☐ Services used
■ Services provided

Base: all respondents (n=472)
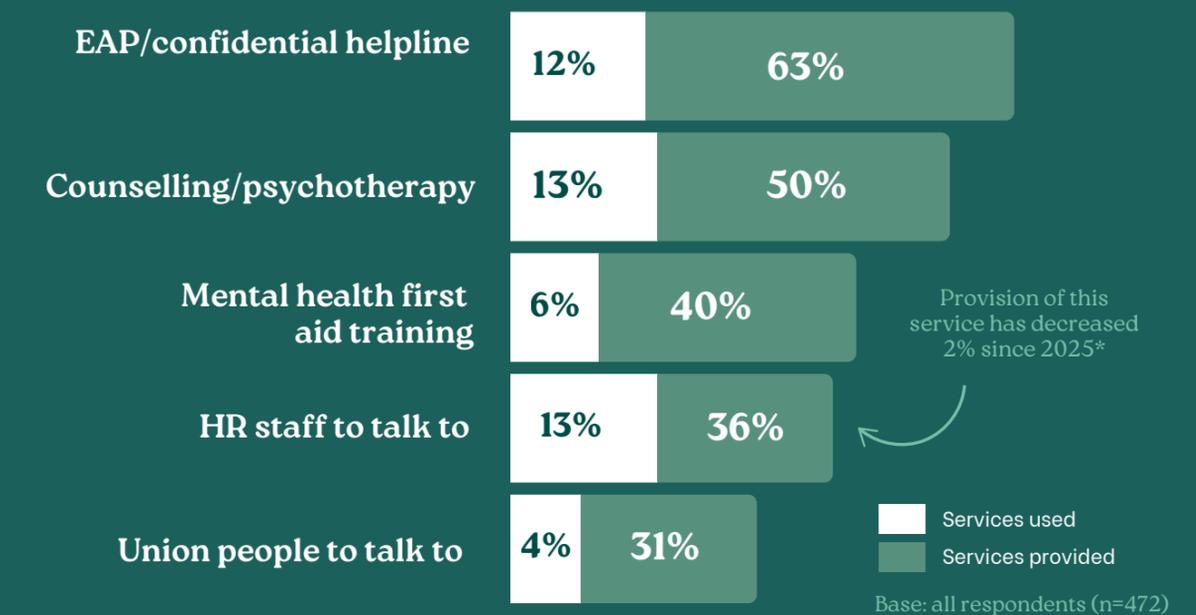
Access to services by phase:

Primary phase

SBLs working in the primary phase had access to the fewest services on average and were the least likely to say that their school provided the following services: An EAP/ confidential helpline, mentoring/co-worker support schemes, and professional coaching.

Secondary/mixed phases

SBLs working in secondary/mixed phases were most likely to mention that they had used exercise classes, groups, or programmes (18%) or mindfulness classes or programmes (13%).

You can read the full breakdown of reported services and usage in appendix 3

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

D) The most beneficial mental health and wellbeing services

We asked School Business Leaders about the services provided by their setting that prove most beneficial in assisting them in managing the work-related factors impacting their overall wellbeing.

SBLs reported their top three services for dealing with their own mental health at work were:

An Employee assistance programme /confidential helpline

Counselling/ psychotherapy

HR staff we can talk to

This service is most beneficial to those who work in **nursey/infant schools**
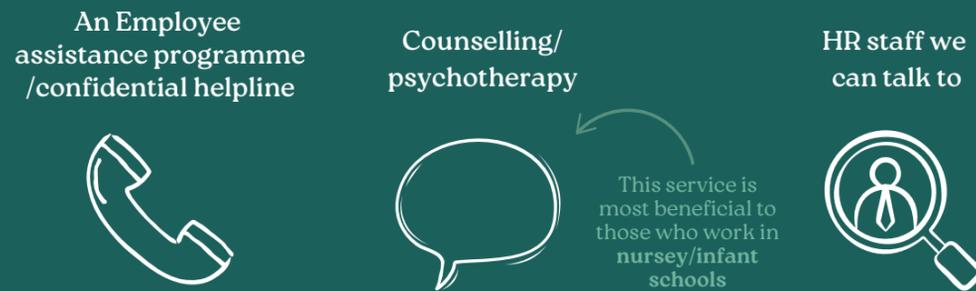
Mental health services of most benefit to SBLs when dealing with work-related factors impacting on their wellbeing

The chart below shows the top 10 services of benefit. Their first choice overall was to use an Employee Assistance Programme confidential helpline.

Service	%
* EAP/confidential helpline	34%
* Counselling/psychotherapy	22%
HR staff we can talk to	18%
* Wellbeing sessions	16%
* Mental health first aid training	13%
* Mentoring/co-worker support schemes	10%
Individual supervision	9%
Health-related support staff we can talk to	9%
* Professional coaching	7%
Animals in the workplace	6%

Services marked with an *asterisk are included as part of an Education Mutual membership at no additional cost.

Base: all respondents (n=472)

You can read the full breakdown in appendix 4

E) Barriers for not using workplace mental health and wellbeing services

The survey found that:

Unfortunately, there has been a 7% increase in this percentage since 2025*

74%
of SBLs had not used the mental health and wellbeing services provided by their school

The concerns for not using services provided by their school were:

Decreased by 2%*

31%
said they preferred to seek support from people outside of work

11%
said they were worried that it would negatively affect others' perceptions of them

10%
said it would be seen as a sign of weakness

Increased by 2%*

7%
said they believed there was a stigma associated with seeking help

6%
said they were worried about losing their job

5%
said they were worried their school would not be supportive

4%
said there was a culture of no-one talking about their problems at work

Base: all respondents (n=472)

You can read the full breakdown of reported services and usage in appendix 5

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

The funding gap for SBLs

All interviewees thought that additional help was 'out there', but the barrier to accessing it was a **lack of finance**.

A few thought the cost of accessing support or training for a SBL was not justified when funds are insufficient to support students and teachers.

Further findings

We asked School Business Leaders whether there are any additional health and wellbeing services beyond those currently available, that they feel would be useful. We also asked them to consider this from another perspective: based on their experience, what services do they believe would benefit other staff members and help alleviate some of the challenges they face?

The percentages below reflect a 'dual need,' where certain services would help SBLs manage their personal stress while also reducing the emotional labour they absorb when staff members seek support that often extends beyond the SBLs' formal responsibilities.

Insights from our further interviews:

Do you find supporting the wellbeing of other staff members 'exhausting?'

Several respondents reflected that, without formal training or dedicated support structures, they can easily become the default point of contact for staff in distress, leading to compassion fatigue.

Further insight from SBL Support Hub:

An area we increasingly see affecting School Business Leaders is the growing digital and cyber responsibility that now sits within the role. Yet many have not had formal training or opportunities to build digital confidence in these areas.

Responsibilities that often now fall to the SBL:

- Oversight of IT infrastructure
- Data protection
- Cyber security
- Major system resilience

"Because these risks are preventative in nature, the work involved can be largely invisible when things are running smoothly. However, when systems fail or a cyber incident occurs, the impact can be immediate and significant. This combination of high accountability and limited specialist confidence can create a quiet but persistent source of stress."

- Neil Limbrick, *SBL Support Hub*

The top ten services currently not provided

Rank	Service	For SBL wellbeing	For staff wellbeing
#1	Mindfulness classes/programmes	22%	26%
#2	Massage or relaxation classes/programmes	22%	25%
#3	Resilience, energy or stress management classes/programmes	21%	28%
#4	Wellbeing sessions	21%	29%
#5	Training on common mental health conditions	21%	25%
#6	Facilitated peer support group	8%	17%
#7	Union people we can talk to	3%	5%
#8	More time	1%	1%
#9	More staff	<1%	1%
#10	Improved funding/budgets	<1%	<1%

For SBL wellbeing
For staff wellbeing

Base: all respondents (n=472)

Section 3

Current issues faced
by SBLs working
in schools

Current issues

Our goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the various challenges currently faced by School Business Leaders (SBLs) working in schools.
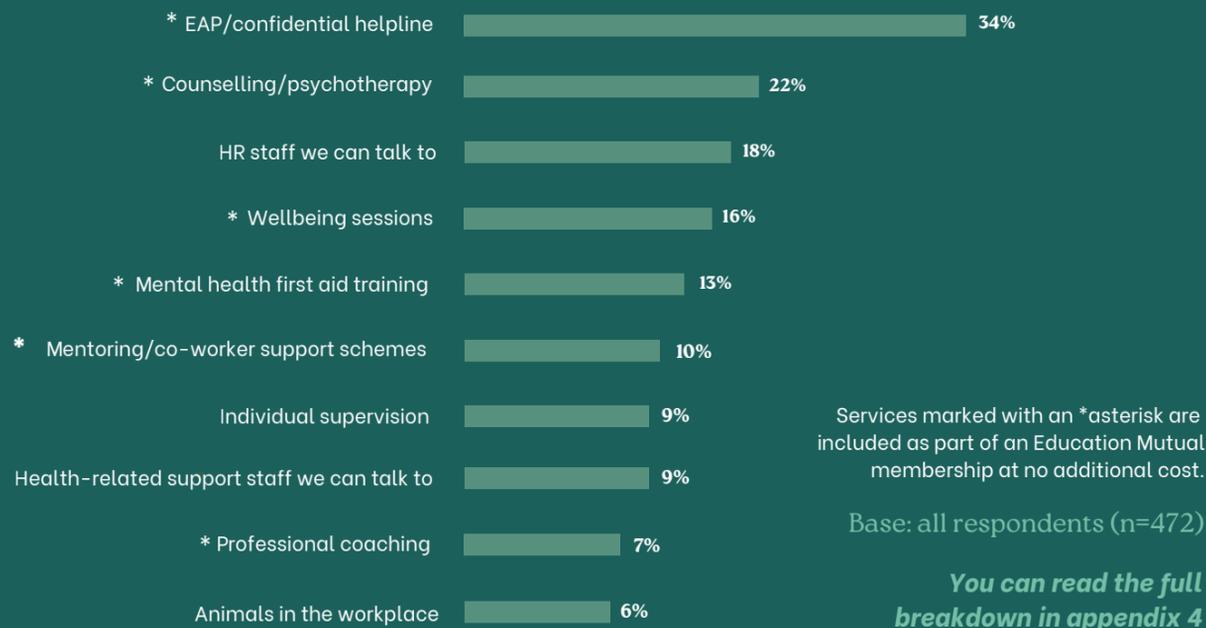
We asked School Business Leaders about the services provided by their setting that prove most beneficial in assisting them in managing the work-related factors impacting their overall wellbeing.

Interviews were held with survey respondents which explored the following factors identified in the survey as affecting SBLs' mental health and wellbeing:

Excessive workload	Funding issues	A lack of understanding of their role	Long work hours	Problems with staffing
64%	59%	58%	41%	40%
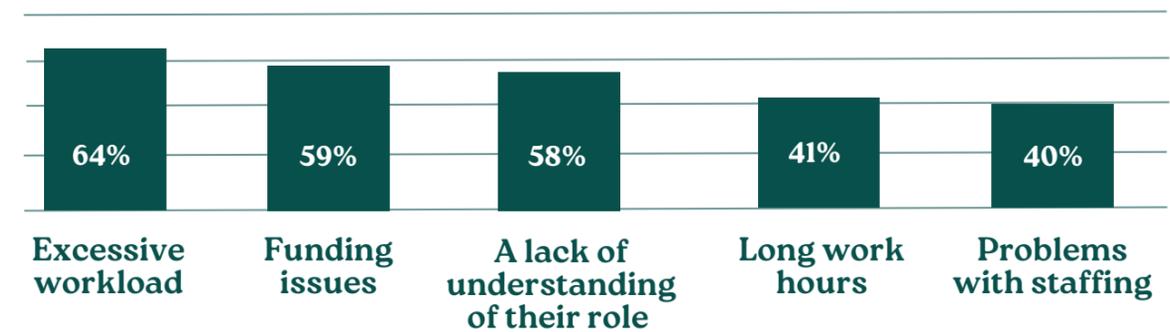
Throughout each interview that took place, a set of recurring themes surfaced, which we outline in this year's findings. We appreciate the contributions of those who volunteered to participate, as their interviews not only shed light on individual experiences but also play a crucial role in broadening an understanding of the common patterns and perspectives currently occurring.

A) Excessive workload

The survey found that:

65%

of SBLs considered their workload to be excessive, either all or part of the time, due to the demanding nature of the role

This has risen by 1%*

In 2024, that figure reached a concerning 82% of SBLs who felt overwhelmed by the demands of their role. However, this year's slight 1% rise compared to 2025's results raises an important question: *Is this the early indication of another upward spike to come?*

Here are the results from the previous years, highlighting that this factor has consistently remained the number one challenge faced by the SBL community:

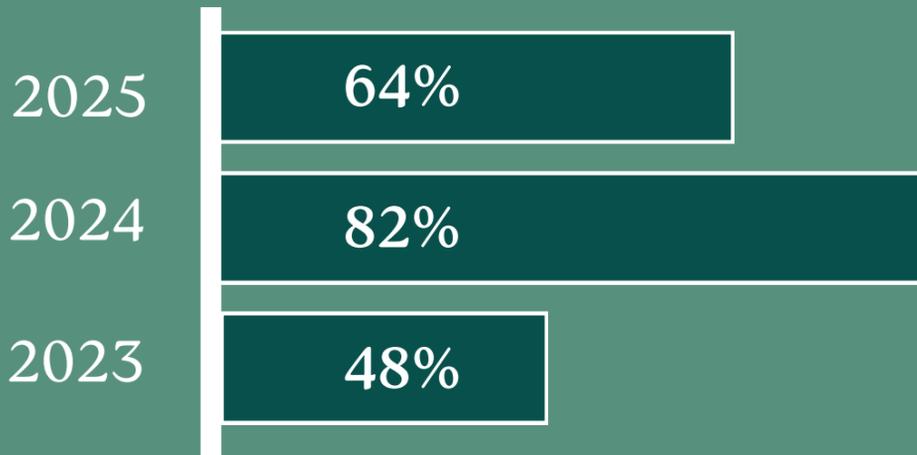| Year	Percentage
2025	**64%**
2024	**82%**
2023	**48%**

Excessive workload was driven by the diversity and breadth of the role

This includes 'core' responsibilities, for example finance and facilities, with an increase in responsibility for areas such as SEND, cyber security, sustainability, marketing, and other daily duties.

School Business Leaders thought the shear breadth of the role forced operational rather than strategic practice, which perpetuated the problem.

"Everything is added to the top of the list, and nothing is dropped off the bottom. The list gets longer. We as a profession are not very good at saying 'that is not needed anymore' it is a duplication or no longer relevant'. If you had the time for strategic thinking, then you might be able to do this."
- Mixed Phase School Business Leader

Other factors influencing workload and wellbeing included:

Department for Education (DfE) demands
For example, the number of duplicated data returns and the format and length of time to complete these were time consuming.

Unexpected/unplanned issues
Emergencies arising due to lack of planning by other staff, that the SBL must respond to immediately, removed their focus from core functions and added to their workload.

Supporting staff with poor wellbeing
Due to several factors (such as poor parental behaviour towards staff), SBLs wanted to support staff, but carrying the weight of their emotions was described as 'overwhelming' and 'exhausting'.

"Because we are a team and I genuinely care, I find myself worrying about other people at home, it just builds and builds. So yeah, it's hard to manage at times." - Mixed Phase School Business Leader

Recruitment and retention
This has been described as a continual problem. One respondent commented that applicants for non-teaching and teaching assistant posts were often unqualified or inexperienced. Where possible, applicants were attracted by reorganising part time roles to be full time, or agency staff were used.

All interviewees said that they have covered for other roles/staff such as:

Caretaker	Lunch duties	Catering	Cleaner

Insights from our further interviews:

Have you ever found yourself 'mentally parking' a feeling or issue just to get through the workload?

All participants interviewed felt that workload directly influenced their wellbeing. Three noted that the level of workload had become so normalised over the years that they had developed a kind of resilience by mentally parking issues rather than continuing to reflect on them.

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

B) Funding issues

Funding was the greatest contributing factor to workload and wellbeing identified in the interviews. It underpinned all other elements of the role and was felt to be largely outside of an SBL's control.

A secondary SBL described balancing the budget as a 'constant juggling act'.

> *"It is a worry, just having this constant awareness about spending. Ultimately, it all comes down to funding."*
> - Primary Maintained School SBL

The most common issues related to funding were:

⮞ **Staff costs:**

With no efficiency savings to make, the only significant saving remaining for respondents was typically staff restructuring and redundancies. This could negatively impact the whole school environment, for example, backend and administrative staff cuts could lead to insufficient support structures for the SBL and teachers. Taking on additional responsibilities was a frequent occurrence, with one SBL sharing that covering for absent caretakers and cooks became a 'slow burn' on their overall wellbeing.

> *"Extra tasks build up and you don't necessarily realise that an occasional lunch time cover has turned into a daily event for a term. You know that to other staff are working hard and trying to do their best. You want to play your part, putting children and other staff first, and you would have to be a brave person to say 'no i'm going home now, I have done my hours'. It doesn't reflect the team spirit that is in schools."*
> - All Phase School Business Leader

⮞ **Lack of funding for estates**

This has required most of the respondents to find what they refer to as 'sticking plaster' funds within the main budget to manage the estate.

⮞ **Long term underfunding of schools**

This increased both workload and stress for SBLs through having to identify solutions and alternative sources of funding (e.g. sale of land, increased rental opportunities, grants, etc).

New issue for 2026
Provision for pupils with special needs

The survey found that:

32% of SBLs detailed that the lack of provision for pupils with special needs has become an increasingly common problem within the education sector

Increased SEND numbers and the level of support required was a significant issue for all the SBLs interviewed. Some mentioned wellbeing being affected due to staff feeling underqualified or unable to adequately and safely manage this in class.

One reported that in their affluent area, 30% of reception children were on the SEND register and needs were so severe that 2 children in a single form entry school required 2:1 staffing.

Specific factors related to SEND reported by SBLs included:

⮞ **SEND funding shortfall**

This is specifically aimed at experiences where funding for one-to-one support does not meet staffing costs. Two interviewee's schools have been forced into deficit. SBLs reported that differing costs associated with significantly different levels of need were not met by the flat rate of funding.

⮞ **Misunderstanding by staff and parents regarding SEND funding rules**

This was detrimental to SBL wellbeing as they had no control over local authority or government funding rules or financial decisions, often made by the head, yet the SBL had to manage the fall out. SBLs felt isolated by this, with staff and parents angry about a lack of funding for interventions and support and not understanding the necessity.

> *"Dealing with staff who feel emotional and upset is time consuming and tiring. It can be overwhelming, the expectations of support that we must give them is high."* - Primary Maintained School Business Leader

⮞ **Lack of clear SEND funding advice and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) guidance**

This includes from, or access to, local authority SEND teams, exacerbated by local authority funding cuts.

C) A lack of understanding of the School Business Leader role

All interviewees agreed that the role of SBL is not well understood by school staff. Misconceptions regarding the scope and boundaries of the role could contribute to an excessive workload.

What drives misconceptions about the SBL role?

▶ **Many of their functions are unseen**

▶ **Numerous variations of the role in different schools, trust and contexts**

▶ **Non-teaching roles are often overlooked within the education sector**

Those respondents who are a member of their Senior Leadership Team (SLT) mentioned that a lack of understanding of the working role of an SBL was most common with:

Parents of school pupils
It was report that parents mislabel SBLs as 'just the school secretary,' reflecting a widespread misunderstanding of the role.

Teaching staff
Teachers were not taught about the SBL remit during their training.

> *"I think it's just the culture in every school; if you need something, the answer is always to ask the SBM in the office. I think people sometimes think I sit there and twiddle my thumbs until one of them pops up wanting something."* - Primary Maintained School SBL

Senior leadership teams

All of the School Business Leaders who participated in our follow-up interviews were members of their SLT, and they reported that internal understanding of their role had gradually improved as a result.

They felt empowered by their position of the SLT and by supportive Heads and Governors to redirect inappropriate work requests and queries.

58% of respondents were a member of their senior leadership team

This is consistent with the previous years results at 62%*

Impact on SBL workload was greater for one interviewee who shared where SLT were unsupportive of boundaries around the role. It was easier for their head to instruct them to take on work requests outside their remit, rather than spend the time and energy educating others on the role. It was mentioned that some SLTs need to learn what the role entailed.

> *"[SLT] wouldn't expect a specialist in, for example, phonics, to have to answer the phone and manage multiple interruptions."*
> - Secondary Maintained School SBL

All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

While increased understanding of the SBL role often develops internally through involvement in the senior leadership team, external support networks also play a significant part. SBL networks were highly praised for the strong sense of community they offer.

In addition, several organisations were commended—both during interviews and in the open-text responses of the initial survey. The Institute of School Business Leadership, Education Mutual, and the Department for Education were all recognised for their efforts in raising the profile and professional recognition of the role.

In response to this recognition, the Department for Education provided the following statement:

> **"School business professionals lead the financial and operational management of schools and academy trusts and play a vital role in ensuring every child achieves and thrives. One of our key aims is to continue to raise awareness, understanding and highlight the importance of the profession both within the sector and within the Department."**
>
> **– The Department for Education, 2026**

D) Working long, unpaid hours

This challenge has been gradually shifting since the launch of this annual research project in 2022. The proportion of SBLs highlighting it as a concern has fluctuated over time—rising from 35% in 2023, to 47% in 2024, before easing slightly to 43% in 2025. Below, you'll find a breakdown of the overall 41% of respondents by phase, showing which groups report the greatest struggle with working long, unpaid hours.

39%
of respondents work within a nursery/infant setting

42%
of respondents work within a primary/junior setting

36%
of respondents work within a secondary/middle/mixed setting

39%
of respondents work within a special school/pupil referral unit/other setting
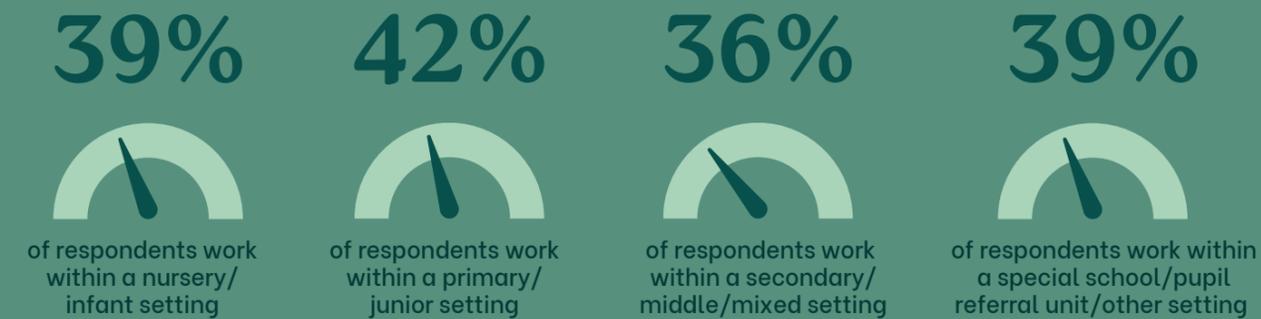
The growing burden on School Business Leaders

▶ **Department for Education (DfE) and other external deadlines**

The diversity and breadth of SBL responsibilities, meant that they routinely work over their contracted hours, and this was felt to have become 'the norm' over recent years. DfE or other dictated time frames either compete or do not align with contracted hours, making it challenging to keep up with requirements.

▶ **The impact of wellbeing pressures on sleep quality**

For two of those interviewed, the increase in tasks paired with the complexity and challenge they faced in their role, caused them real tension with high levels of stress. This impacts their mental health and described the physical symptoms such as sleep loss.

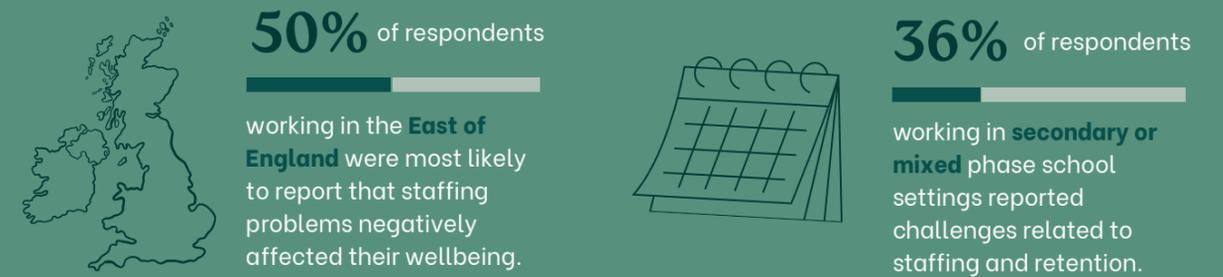In 2025, Education Mutual introduced a dedicated sleep therapy service across all memberships at no additional cost, directly responding to the feedback gathered through this annual research project.
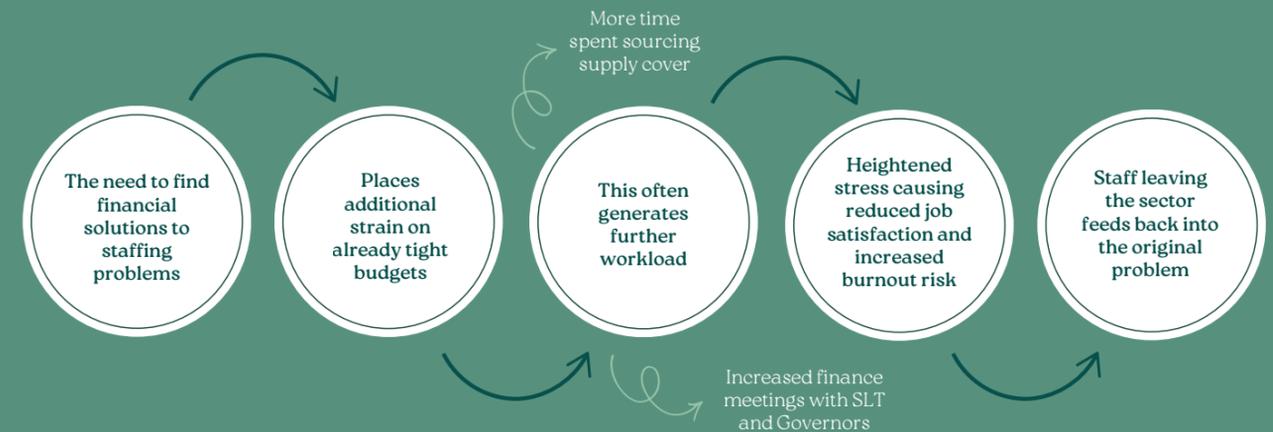
> *"I genuinely don't think I have ever been so stressed after a first half term. There's too much to do and I have no mental bandwidth left to do anything about it. My resilience is just gone, and I don't feel like I have the capacity to manage it."* - Primary Maintained School SBL

E) Problems with staffing

Staffing pressures continue to dominate the landscape for School Business Leaders, with many describing a cycle of challenges that increasingly feels difficult to break. Interview feedback also highlighted recurring concerns around insufficient SEND provision, which further intensifies these pressures. We explore this SEND issue in more detail on page 25 of the report.

50% of respondents

working in the **East of England** were most likely to report that staffing problems negatively affected their wellbeing.

36% of respondents

working in **secondary or mixed** phase school settings reported challenges related to staffing and retention.

Although the other top four challenges also feed into staffing pressures in a recurring cycle, interviews consistently highlighted funding as a particularly influential source of ongoing stress:

More time spent sourcing supply cover

The need to find financial solutions to staffing problems

Places additional strain on already tight budgets

This often generates further workload

Heightened stress causing reduced job satisfaction and increased burnout risk

Staff leaving the sector feeds back into the original problem

Increased finance meetings with SLT and Governors

External support for managing staff absence

▶ **The UK's largest member-owned provider of staff absence protection**

74% of respondents said that their school or trust has an Education Mutual membership

This marks a 1% uplift*

feefo
EXCEPTIONAL
★★★★★
4.9 OUT OF 5

With close to three-quarters of respondents reporting staff absence protection through Education Mutual, it's clear that many schools and trusts are proactively strengthening their resilience to staffing pressures. This protection not only safeguards settings financially when staff are absent, but also gives settings access to a whole-school wellbeing offering that supports all staff and pupils.

*All data references are calculated by comparing results from the 2026 edition of the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index with the corresponding findings from the 2025 edition.

Section 4

Conclusions and recommendations

Our Summary

The research shows that a broad range of work-related factors continue to influence the mental health and wellbeing of School Business Leaders. While some issues remain stable or shift within the top five each year, several long-standing pressures persist and continue to intensify over time with the most common focusing on:

Workload pressures - demand vs capacity

Workload pressures remain the most significant challenge affecting SBL wellbeing, **rising by a further 1% this year** and maintaining their position as the top concern since the report began in 2022. As the responsibilities of the SBL role continue to expand (often into areas beyond their core remit), many find themselves operating predominantly at an operational level rather than the strategic level their role requires. With persistent staffing shortages and ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties, **there is limited capacity to redistribute tasks**. As a result, the growing mismatch between demands and available capacity continues to intensify the strain on SBLs.

Funding shortfalls and constraints

Funding continues to be a significant challenge, with **this year's figures returning to the levels reported in the 2024 edition fo the School Business Leader Wellbeing Index**. Financial pressures underpin much of the SBL role, yet remain largely outside their control. **Those working in nursery, infant, or primary settings, and in Local Authority-maintained schools, were particularly likely to report funding issues affecting their wellbeing.** These constraints limit the ability to address priority gaps or invest in training for themselves and their teams, and are further compounded by ongoing difficulties in securing adequate SEND provision.

Obstacles to effective service use

While it is encouraging to see more schools expanding their wellbeing support, **rising by a further 7% this year to reach an impressive 94%**. A significant **74% of SBLs still report barriers preventing them from accessing the services available**. These challenges are not unique to SBLs; other staff may experience similar reluctance or constraints. As a result, many SBLs find themselves absorbing the emotional burdens of colleagues or feeling underqualified to provide the support others may seek. This highlights the need to focus on removing the barriers that prevent staff from using existing wellbeing services, rather than simply expanding an already extensive offer.

Our conclusions

Provision for pupils with special needs

This remains a significant challenge, with **32% of SBLs reporting it as a concern**. Limited funding continues to restrict staffing levels and specialist support, placing pressure on school budgets and the wellbeing of all staff. **The 2026 Schools White Paper outlines plans to address inconsistencies in SEND provision**, but concerns were raised in the interview phase of remain particularly around pupils transitioning without a clear Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP). When this happens, schools often absorb costs that should be funded externally, creating further financial strain for SBLs and reinforcing the ongoing impact of inadequate SEND provision.

The impact of evolving government legislation

SBLs feel this continues to create significant challenges for SBLs, **with 25% of interviewees reporting that these pressures directly affect their wellbeing**. A persistent **lack of timely, clear and complete information from the DfE** is a key driver of this issue, often resulting in substantial time being spent rebalancing and rewriting budgets. In addition, funding rules frequently create a **funding lag** that places further strain on already stretched staffing structures. With limited capacity and no budget available to recruit additional support, these legislative and regulatory demands significantly increase the workload of SBLs and contribute to ongoing operational pressure.

Managing parent-school relationships

Although challenges involving pupils' parents do not appear within the top ten issues overall, this theme—first identified last year—has risen again in the 2026 findings, signalling its growing impact on SBL wellbeing. The issue is particularly pronounced in primary settings, where 38% of SBLs reported being affected. Rising parental pressures are often linked to wider operational constraints, such as staffing shortages or situations where SBLs step in to cover roles without adequate training or support.

Confidentiality concerns limiting service engagement

There may be issues with how health and wellbeing services are distributed or communicated within schools, as many **staff continue to encounter barriers that prevent them from accessing the support available**. A significant proportion of these barriers stem from concerns about **confidentiality,** particularly where staff feel unsure about how their information will be handled or whether services are sufficiently independent from the school environment.

Our conclusions

The scope of the School Business Leader role continues to expand

The research reflects a consistent pattern reported by practitioners across the sector: the scope of the SBL role continues to broaden. Responsibilities frequently extend across finance, estates, HR, compliance, digital infrastructure and strategic planning. In many settings these responsibilities have grown without a corresponding increase in capacity or support, contributing to the workload pressures identified within the survey.

Many wellbeing pressures are structural rather than personal

Excessive workload remains the most frequently reported challenge affecting SBL wellbeing. Within the SBL Support Hub community, these pressures are rarely attributed to individual resilience or time management. Instead, they often arise from structural issues such as unclear role boundaries, accumulated responsibilities and outdated job descriptions, and organisational expectations.

Understanding of the SBL role remains inconsistent

Many respondents highlighted a continuing lack of understanding of the SBL role among colleagues, parents and sometimes within leadership teams. Where SBLs are embedded within senior leadership structures this understanding tends to improve. However, inconsistent recognition of the role can contribute to unrealistic expectations and additional workload pressures.

Professional networks play an important role in sustaining the profession

Peer networks remain one of the most valued sources of professional support for SBLs. Opportunities to share experiences, seek advice and learn from colleagues help reduce professional isolation and provide practical solutions to common challenges across the sector.

Our recommendations - For SBLs

To help navigate these challenges, we've outlined a range of strategies and suggestions below, all informed by this recent research and the experiences shared by SBLs across the sector. Our aim is not only to respond to the key issues you've highlighted but also to offer achievable actions that can protect your wellbeing, and empower you in your role.

Are you able to participate in local or national SBL networks that provide opportunities to share experiences and address key issues?

Does your Local Authority or Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) run any support groups? If not, you could consider setting one up yourself. Even creating a small WhatsApp or LinkedIn group with nearby SBLs can become an incredibly valuable source of support. If you're unsure what's currently available, use the links below to explore existing local and regional networks.

Can you utilise the benefits within an Education Mutual membership?

If your school is among the 74% of respondents with an Education Mutual staff absence protection membership, are you making full use of this? There's a range of services, training and professional development opportunities available to support both yourself and your team? - Browse via www.educationmutual.co.uk/service/mental-health-and-wellbeing-services/

If your school isn't currently part of that percentage, have you considered how a staff absence protection provider could help you implement a whole-school approach to wellbeing? You can request a quote via www.educationmutual.co.uk/contact-us/

Could you explore ways to work around any challenges that are stopping you from accessing your school's wellbeing support?

You might find it helpful to check whether the wellbeing services your school offers are delivered by an external provider, as this can give you added reassurance about confidentiality when accessing support. It may also be worth taking a moment to look around shared staff spaces – noticeboards, staff room walls, or internal newsletters often include signposting information about how to access these services.

Are you protecting time for strategic leadership within your SBL role?

The demands of the SBL role can easily become dominated by operational tasks and urgent issues. Where possible, leaders should protect time for strategic activities such as financial planning, estates development, digital infrastructure and organisational improvement. Without this protected space, the role risks becoming permanently reactive rather than strategic.

Is your role clearly defined and protected from unnecessary scope creep?

Workload pressures often develop gradually as additional responsibilities accumulate over time. Regular conversations within the senior leadership team about priorities, responsibilities and role boundaries can help prevent this drift. Clear role definition enables the SBL to focus on areas where their expertise delivers the greatest impact.

Are you making full use of professional networks, development opportunities and shared knowledge?

The breadth of the SBL role means no individual can be an expert in every area. Continuing professional development, combined with participation in professional networks and practitioner communities, provides access to shared experience, practical resources and collective knowledge. Many challenges faced by SBLs are common across the sector, and connecting with peers can provide both reassurance and effective problem-solving. Access to shared knowledge bases and practitioner-led communities can also help SBLs quickly find guidance on common operational and leadership challenges.

Are you treating wellbeing as a strategic risk within your organisation?

We know that wellbeing pressures directly affect recruitment, retention, absence, productivity and organisational stability, and unmanaged risk in this area can create significant financial and operational consequences. By incorporating wellbeing into risk registers and using workforce data such as absence, turnover, workload indicators and staff feedback, leaders can identify emerging pressures early and take preventative action. Embedding wellbeing within KPI dashboards and continuous improvement processes enables a shift from reactive pastoral support to proactive system-level risk management.

Education Mutual

Our recommendations - For Schools

Parity in role, pay and contracts

This includes universal annual contracts for SBLs so that workload could be spread across a full year and pay for the hours worked is received; role and pay commensurate with other senior leaders to give authority to refuse tasks outside their remit and the opportunity to be involved in steering policy and procedure.

Ongoing support from SLT and Governors

Open communication with supportive SLT with a willingness to champion staff understanding of the role and support to reduce workload/defend against extra requests; SLT acting as a sounding board; senior leaders modelling use of strategies supportive of workload and wellbeing.

Prioritise training and development

Line management training

Available for teachers during initial teacher training on how to line-manage their teams. This early de-escalation by teachers would reduce SBL workload and involvement at an HR level later.

Mental health training

Provide training to SBLs who support staff with their wellbeing and mental health issues, but feel anxious and unqualified to do this. Another suggestion would be to train all SLT in mental health first aid specifically, allowing immediate support to staff, at the point of initial discussion.

Training and coaching sessions available in an Education Mutual membership:

- Mentally healthy school community
- Mental health first aid training
- Financial wellbeing coaching
- Menopause - Supporting staff in the workplace
- Menopause - Navigating your personal journey
- Sleep therapy
- Voice care
- Menopause coaching
- Stress management
- Balancing parenthood

Education Mutual

Our recommendations - For the Wider Education Sector

Access to SBL networks

Joining a group and socialising with a community of those sharing the same challenges increases the likelihood of isolation. Greater opportunities for conversations and communication between SBLs is required to address this and for ease of access to information and resources.

Something to note is that many SBL networks have reportedly been removed in some areas. This is due to local authority cuts, or in MAT's where schools have become inward facing.

Media support

To support greater recognition and understanding of the School Business Leader profession, we hope for intentional media visibility for the SBL community. Greater public exposure could also address the persistent issue of role misunderstanding, which many SBLs experience not only among teaching staff but also from parents.

Coaching sessions for SBLs

Professional coaching emerged as one of the most valued services for supporting SBL mental health and wellbeing, and we recommend that the wider sector prioritises the development and promotion of further coaching opportunities. Someone experienced in the role and external to the school or trust would be helpful for those new to the role, or struggling.

Sector insight through wider SBL consultation

There is further encouragement for the Department for Education to consult more extensively with School Business Leaders when developing national policies and strategic documents, including white papers. SBLs hold a unique perspective on how proposals translate into day-to-day practice. Consulting the SBL community more widely would therefore strengthen an understanding of the challenges schools face, particularly those affecting workload, wellbeing, and the sustainability of support functions.

Resource directory

Each folder below represents a valuable contribution from our partners and collaborators. We hope these materials support your understanding, spark new ideas, and enrich your research journey.

Simply click a folder to access the resource they've provided:

Section 5

Useful resources

Education Mutual

SBL Support Hub for School Business Leaders

Department for Education

NAHT THE SCHOOL LEADERS' UNION

unbarrier me

Signposting to useful organisations and available support

Useful resources

Education Mutual

Staff Absence Protection

for Schools and Trusts

Since 2018, Education Mutual has been transforming staff absence protection with an innovative, non-profit making approach that prioritising flexibility of cover and wellbeing support.

We're the UK's largest member-owned provider of staff absence protection and are recommended for schools by the Department for Education through the Crescent Purchasing Consortium framework. Memberships are tailor-made to align with each school's unique needs, securing extensive coverage customised to fit your budget requirements.

Staff absence protection

Health & wellbeing services

Pupil wellbeing service

EXCEPTIONAL

4.9 OUT OF 5
Product Rating feefo

Feefo Gold Trusted Service award winners
2023 & 2024

CPC 'Customer Service Excellence of the Year' 2025 winner

Feefo Platinum Trusted Service award winners
2025 & 2026

We have published three resources which you may find helpful:

SCAN ME

#1 **Supporting each other with mental health and wellbeing:** A guide for School Business Managers

#2 **Getting the right work-life balance and protecting yourself:** A guide for School Business Managers

#3 **Ofsted inspections and wellbeing:** A guide for School Business Managers

The below services are included in all Education Mutual memberships at no additional cost:

- 24/7 GP service
- Flu vaccines
- Physiotherapy
- Balancing parenthood
- Nurse support service
- Voice care
- Surgical assistance

- Stress management
- Face-to-face counselling
- Mental health first aid training
- Grief & resilience
- Mentally healthy school community
- Financial wellbeing coaching
- Men's mental health
- Sleep therapy

- Supporting staff in the workplace
- Menopause counselling
- Menopause coaching
- Perfecting your personal journey
- Menopause blog
- Symptoms tracker
- Guidance for partners

- Neurodiversity training
- Occupational health assessments
- Staff reputation legal protection
- New employee assessments
- Leadership development
- Risk management protection
- Occupational health support line
- Occupational health hub

Useful resources

Help is here...
for School Business Leaders

The SBL Support Hub was created as a practitioner-led space where school business professionals can seek advice, share experience and access practical guidance from colleagues across the sector.

School Business Leaders frequently operate at the centre of complex operational challenges, balancing finance, estates, HR, compliance and organisational change. While many #of these responsibilities are shared across the profession, SBLs often work in relatively small teams and may have limited opportunities to discuss challenges with peers in similar roles.

School Business Leaders are strong, resilient and adaptable but there are times when we all need support, direction, or just a shoulder to cry on. At SBL Support Hub, we've been there.

The SBL Support Hub aims to address this by bringing together experienced practitioners who understand the realities of the role and can offer practical insight and support. Through professional discussion, shared experience and peer advice, colleagues are able to explore practical approaches to common challenges such as workload pressures, operational priorities and leadership responsibilities.

📞 **0330 223 7302**

✉️ **help@sblsupporthub.com**

🌐 **www.sblsupporthub.com**

SBL Wiki

CLICK HERE

Alongside peer discussion, the Hub supports the development of the SBL Wiki, a practitioner-driven knowledge resource designed to capture and share practical guidance across the profession.

In many schools, knowledge about how systems, processes and responsibilities operate is held by individuals rather than documented in one place. The SBL Wiki aims to act as a shared professional reference point, capturing the collective experience of School Business Leaders and making

that knowledge more accessible to others across the sector.

By making this shared knowledge easier to access, the resource aims to support colleagues navigating the complexity of the role and reduce the professional isolation that can arise in smaller teams.

The Wiki brings together practitioner insight across areas such as:

- Financial management
- Estates and compliance responsibilities

- Procurement
- Governance

- HR processes
- Digital infrastructure

Recommendations for further support:

Creating Value in Schools

Creating Value in Schools provides articles, discussion prompts and practical resources exploring leadership, sustainability and operational effectiveness in education settings.

www.createvalueschools.com

Digital Confidence for Education

Digital Confidence provides practical guidance and tools to help schools and trusts strengthen their approach to digital leadership and governance.

www.digitalconfidence.education

Department for Education

Maximising value for pupils: guidance for schools and trusts

Guidance, support and a policy document for schools and trusts to maximise value from resources, ensuring every pound delivers for children.

From: Department for Education

Published 4 December 2025

The guidance and policy document on this page:

- support schools and trusts to maximise value from resources
- describe the government's policy on helping schools and trusts plan and manage resources effectively through 4 key pillars:
  - commercial
  - assets
  - workforce
  - developing capability, including digital and technology

Contents

Maximising value for pupils: policy paper

Sets out how government will work with schools and trusts to maximise value from resources, ensuring every pounds delivers the best outcomes for pupils.

Maximising value for pupils

4 December 2025   Policy paper

Pillar 1: Commercial

Information about the range of support available to schools and trusts to buy goods and services, get better value and be compliant with procurement regulations.

Achieving better value when buying

4 December 2025   Guidance

Pillar 2: Assets

Information about the range of support available to schools and trusts to maintain, improve and use their financial and physical assets effectively.

Maximising school and trust resources: managing financial and physical assets

4 December 2025   Guidance

Pillar 3: Workforce

Support for schools and trusts to plan their workforce, recruit effectively and develop staff to meet pupils' needs.

Strategic workforce planning for schools and trusts

4 December 2025   Guidance

Pillar 4: Developing capability, including digital and commercial

Information about the range of support available to schools and trusts to build capability, improve commercial expertise and meet digital standards.

Improve your school's and trust's digital and financial planning

4 December 2025   Guidance

Useful resources

Education Mutual are the recommended provider of staff absence protection by NAHT.

We're proud to provide schools and trusts with staff absence protection with personalised whole school wellbeing and leadership support. NAHT members can design their staff absence protection to best suit your schools' priorities and financial requirements, enjoying the additional benefits below:

- ✓ Access to health, wellbeing and lifestyle advice
- ✓ Whole school wellbeing and leadership support
- ✓ One whole school wellbeing day for your school
- ✓ 5 days absence cover for NAHT CPD days when supply cover is engaged
- ✓ Staff absence protection for your school or full MAT/academy

Join NAHT

NAHT is the largest union for leaders in education.

Members hold leadership positions in:

- ➤ early years and primary schools
- ➤ independent schools
- ➤ secondary schools
- ➤ special schools and pupil referral units

NAHT welcomes into full membership all education leaders from both academic and managerial grades within educational professions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Scotland.

Join NAHT now

Current new member offers

Request a quote for staff absence protection

NAHT's priority campaigns

Following extensive consultation with NAHT members, including regional officials and national executive members, six key areas have been identified.

Click on each area to find out more.

Advice and support

NAHT's team of specialist advisers has created a series of guides for NAHT members on key topics and issues for school leaders. Below are some of the most popular titles at this time in the school year

Click on each category to find out more.

Funding

A guide to school funding and the pupil premium

Budget deficits and how to manage them (Wales)

Management

Artificial intelligence (AI) in education

A guide to running a small school

Model policies

A model dignity at work policy for school leaders

Menopause and a model menopause policy

Pay, pensions, and conditions

School business leader pay and grading

Calculating continuous service in schools

Pupil support and safeguarding

10 top tips for SENCos

Keeping children safe in education 2025

Structures, inspections and accountability

Forced academisation

NAHT's Ofsted inspection risk assessment framework

Useful resources

unbarrier me

supporting School Business Leaders with technology.

reducing cognitive load, protecting time, and making the day more manageable.

School Business Leaders don't just manage workload — they manage constant switching, interruption, and responsibility.

the challenge isn't just time. it's the cognitive load of holding everything at once. the tools already exist in most school ecosystems. the shift is using them to reduce friction, not add more.

quick wins (start this week).

- block 30 minutes of focus time
- turn off non-essential notifications
- use AI to draft one task
- create one reusable template

- move one process into a form
- replace one meeting with an update
- capture tasks in one place

creating boundaries and protecting your time.

Digital
- turn off non-essential notifications
- use "Do Not Disturb"
- schedule emails

Personal
- label protected time clearly
- be unavailable when needed

cognitive load — why the day feels so full

this role requires you to:

- switch between finance, HR, and estates
- respond to issues as they arise
- hold multiple decisions in your head

what actually helps:

→ stop using your inbox as your to-do list

→ refine and organise using Copilot or Gemini

→ use Microsoft To Do or Google Tasks (taggable, shareable, collaborative)

→ build a simple bank of reusable emails, reports, and processes

reduce the load - use what you've got

most pressure isn't the task, it's the thinking behind it.

reduce cognitive load by:
- automating what repeats
- filtering what arrives
- standardising what you decide

automate → filter → standardise

Try (Power Automate / Apps Script)

email - the biggest hidden drain

most SBLs are managing their day through their inbox. that's where decision fatigue builds fastest.

what to change:

use built in AI to:
- summarise threads
- draft replies
- extract key actions

Use rules and filters to:
- auto-label (Finance / HR / Safeguarding)
- reduce noise
- prioritise what matters

Useful resources

a tool worth exploring:

NotebookLM - Google NotebookLM

there are a lot of AI tools. most add noise. this one is different.

what it actually does

NotebookLM helps you work with your own materials:

- ask questions
- summarise
- extract actions
- create usable outputs

what you can bring into it

- policies and internal documents
- meeting notes or transcripts
- webpages (DfE guidance, frameworks)
- YouTube videos (briefings, training

Studio

- Audio Overview
- Slide deck
- Video Overview
- Mind Map
- Reports
- Flashcards
- Quiz
- Infographic
- Data table
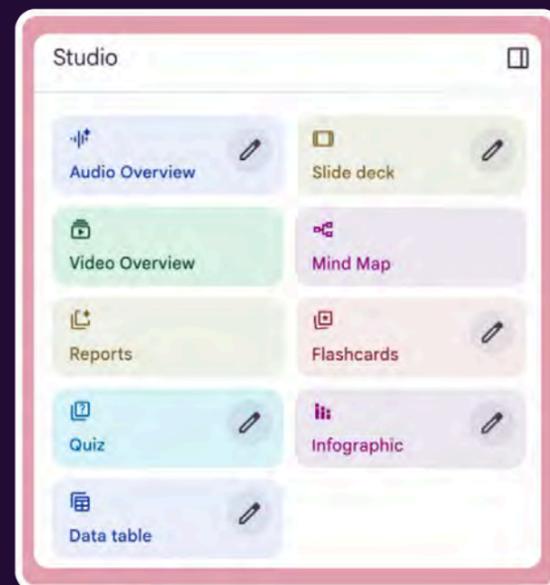
what this looks like in practice

meetings ⟶ upload notes or transcripts ⟶ extract decisions and actions

policy writing ⟶ upload policies + guidance ⟶ identify changes and rewrite

use safely in schools

use for:
- policies and general documents
- training
- non-sensitive materials

do not upload:
- EHCPs
- safeguarding records
- personal data

stay in your ecosystem

you don't need more tools — just better use of what you already have.

from one set of documents, you can generate summaries, reports, slide decks, and visual outputs — reducing the need to re-read and restructure information manually.

Microsoft 365

- focus time → protected, interruption-free work
- quiet time → no after-hours notifications
- Weekly insights → see where your time goes
- copilot → draft, summarise, capture actions

Google Workspace

- calendar focus time → protect key work
- gemini → draft, summarise, and question
- shared docs → collaborate without email chains
- Keep → quick capture linked to your workflow

"It's not just the workload — it's the constant switching, interruption, and responsibility. The real pressure is the mental load that builds throughout the day. The biggest shift comes from reducing that load and creating space to think."

Nicola Foote
Inclusion, Accessibility & Digital Strategy Specialist
nici@unbarrier.me

unbarrier me

Signposting to useful organisations and available support

Education Mutual

The UK's largest member-owned provider of staff absence protection for Schools and Trusts

https://www.educationmutual.co.uk/

Gold Trusted Service Award | Gold Trusted Service Award | Platinum Trusted Service Award 2025 | 2025 | Platinum Trusted Service Award 2026

For any enquiries about staff absence protection or to learn more about the wellbeing support included within an Education Mutual membership at no additional cost, please contact:

☎ **01623 287840**

✉ **learnmore@educationmutual.co.uk**

EXCEPTIONAL
⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐
4.9 OUT OF 5
Product Rating **feefo**

SBL Support Hub

The SBL Support Hub is a practitioner-led support service created to support school business leaders (or whatever your title maybe) through shared experience and practical guidance. Bringing together experienced practitioners, sector specialists and recognised professional leaders, the SBL Support Hub (SBLSH) provides a trusted space where colleagues can seek advice and navigate the complex challenges of school leadership.

https://sblsupporthub.com/

☎ **0330 223 7302**

✉ **help@sblsupporthub.com**

Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)

A professional association and trade union for all school, college and trust leaders.

https://www.ascl.org.uk/

Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

A national organisation and sector body for school trusts in England advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leadership.

https://cstuk.org.uk/

Department for Education (DfE)

The Department for Education is responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England.

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education

Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL)

A membership organisation offering sector-endorsed professional standards and development opportunities for its professional community and their institutions through a portfolio of quality-assured qualifications, training, resources, research and events.

https://isbl.org.uk/

Network for Education Excellence (nEdEx)

The Network for Education Excellence is a free to join education network. Launched only this academic year, nEdEx already represents over 150 trusts and 1,700 schools in the UK. nEdEx provides thought leadership, live webinars and in-person conferences that help education leaders in the challenges that matter most.

https://www.nedex.co.uk/

National Association for Head Teachers (NAHT)

NAHT is the UK's largest union for school leaders, democratically run to provide representation, protection, and a voice for members to help create a better education system.

https://www.naht.org.uk/

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Work-related factors impacting on mental health and wellbeing, by phase

Base: all respondents (n=472)

Challenge	Per cent	Nursey/Infant	Primary	Secondary	Other
Excessive workload	65%	47%	68%	56%	65%
Funding issues	59%	64%	63%	41%	44%
Lack of understanding from others about my role	58%	67%	59%	54%	56%
Long working hours (unpaid)	41%	39%	42%	36%	39%
Problems with staffing	40%	44%	39%	36%	47%
Lack of work/life balance	35%	31%	35%	31%	44%
Inequitable pay	35%	47%	35%	31%	28%
Provision for pupils with special needs	32%	33%	38%	13%	12%
Financial reporting/accountability	30%	47%	29%	28%	32%
Government legislation/compliance	25%	17%	25%	31%	25%
Low income	25%	31%	28%	18%	5%
Problems with pupils' parents	23%	14%	28%	5%	7%
Inspections	21%	19%	23%	15%	12%
Not able to take annual leave	19%	22%	19%	18%	19%
Poor pupil behaviour	12%	6%	13%	10%	11%
Safeguarding	10%	11%	11%	3%	9%
Unreasonable demands from manager	10%	11%	8%	18%	14%
Redundancy/restructure	9%	8%	10%	3%	9%
Addressing the educational disadvantage gap	8%	6%	8%	8%	7%
Lack of trust from manager	7%	6%	6%	8%	14%
Lack of opportunity to work independently	7%	6%	6%	8%	7%
Bullying by colleagues	5%	6%	4%	5%	11%
Teacher strikes	2%	3%	1%	8%	7%
Discrimination	1%	-	1%	-	5%
Poor communication	1%	-	1%	-	-
Board/Trust intervention	1%	-	1%	-	-
Other	2%	-	1%	-	4%
None of these	3%	6%	3%	3%	4%

Section 6

Appendices

Appendix 1 *(continued):*

Work-related factors impacting on mental health and wellbeing, by region

Base: all respondents (n=472)

Challenge	North	South	Midlands	East of England
Excessive workload	64%	64%	71%	60%
Funding issues	59%	69%	57%	52%
Lack of understanding from others about my role	61%	50%	61%	65%
Long working hours (unpaid)	35%	44%	49%	48%
Problems with staffing	39%	36%	48%	50%
Lack of work/life balance	30%	37%	43%	35%
Inequitable pay	35%	34%	33%	42%
Provision for pupils with special needs	31%	35%	33%	38%
Financial reporting/accountability	32%	27%	36%	31%
Government legislation/compliance	27%	29%	25%	13%
Low income	24%	29%	26%	23%
Problems with pupils' parents	24%	25%	19%	27%
Inspections	23%	24%	23%	10%
Not able to take annual leave	19%	19%	17%	23%
Poor pupil behaviour	13%	10%	9%	17%
Safeguarding	11%	10%	12%	6%
Unreasonable demands from manager	9%	10%	9%	10%
Redundancy/restructure	6%	13%	10%	8%
Addressing the educational disadvantage gap	9%	7%	6%	2%
Lack of trust from manager	5%	8%	7%	10%
Lack of opportunity to work independently	8%	6%	4%	6%
Bullying by colleagues	4%	3%	6%	8%
Teacher strikes	3%	1%	-	4%
Discrimination	1%	1%	-	-
Poor communication	-	1%	-	2%
Board/Trust intervention	1%	1%	-	2%
Other	-	2%	4%	-
None of these	4%	1%	4%	2%

Appendix 2:

Overall perception of support for employees who experience problems with mental health and wellbeing, total and phase

Base: all respondents (n=472)
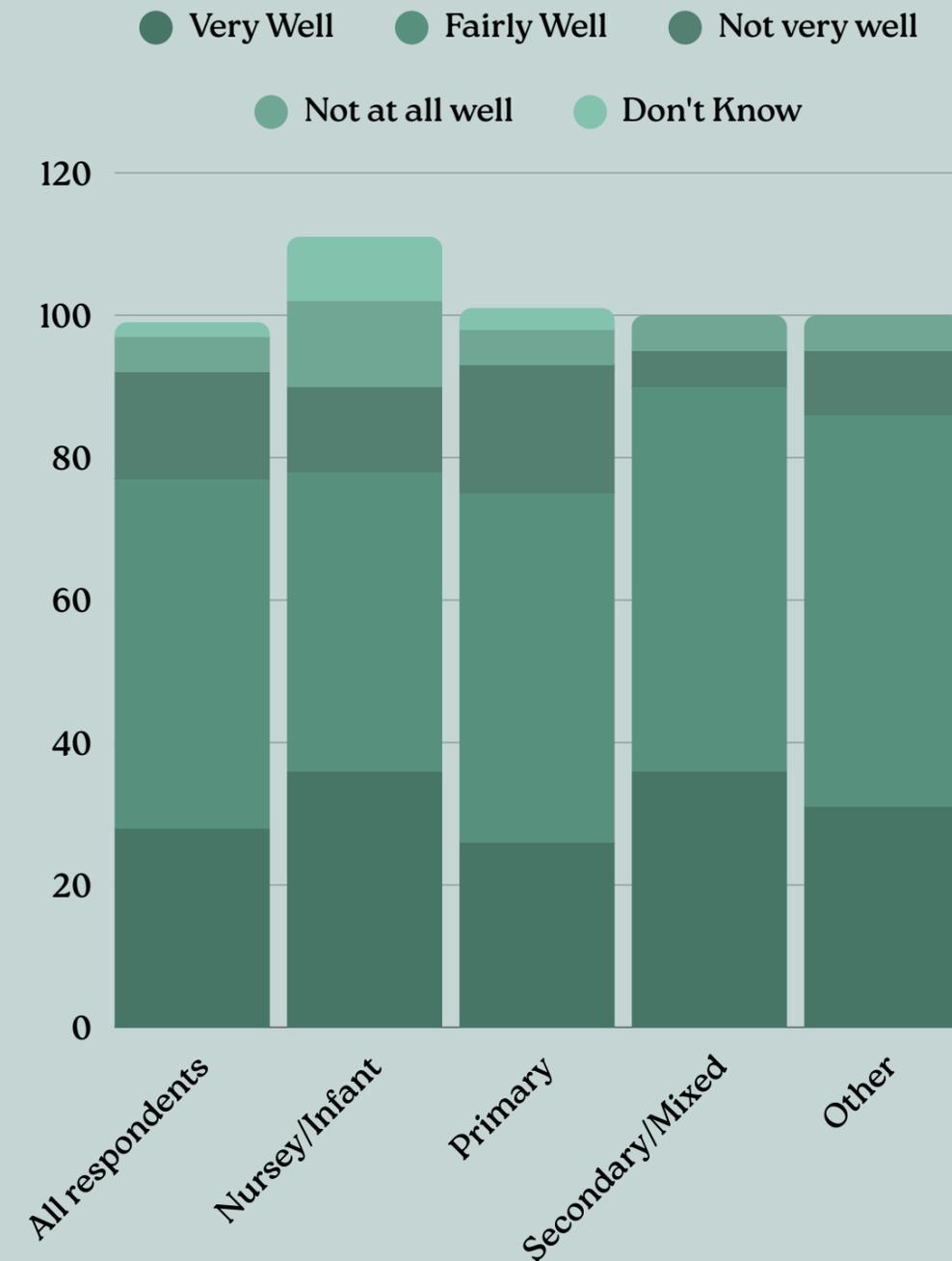
Appendix 3:

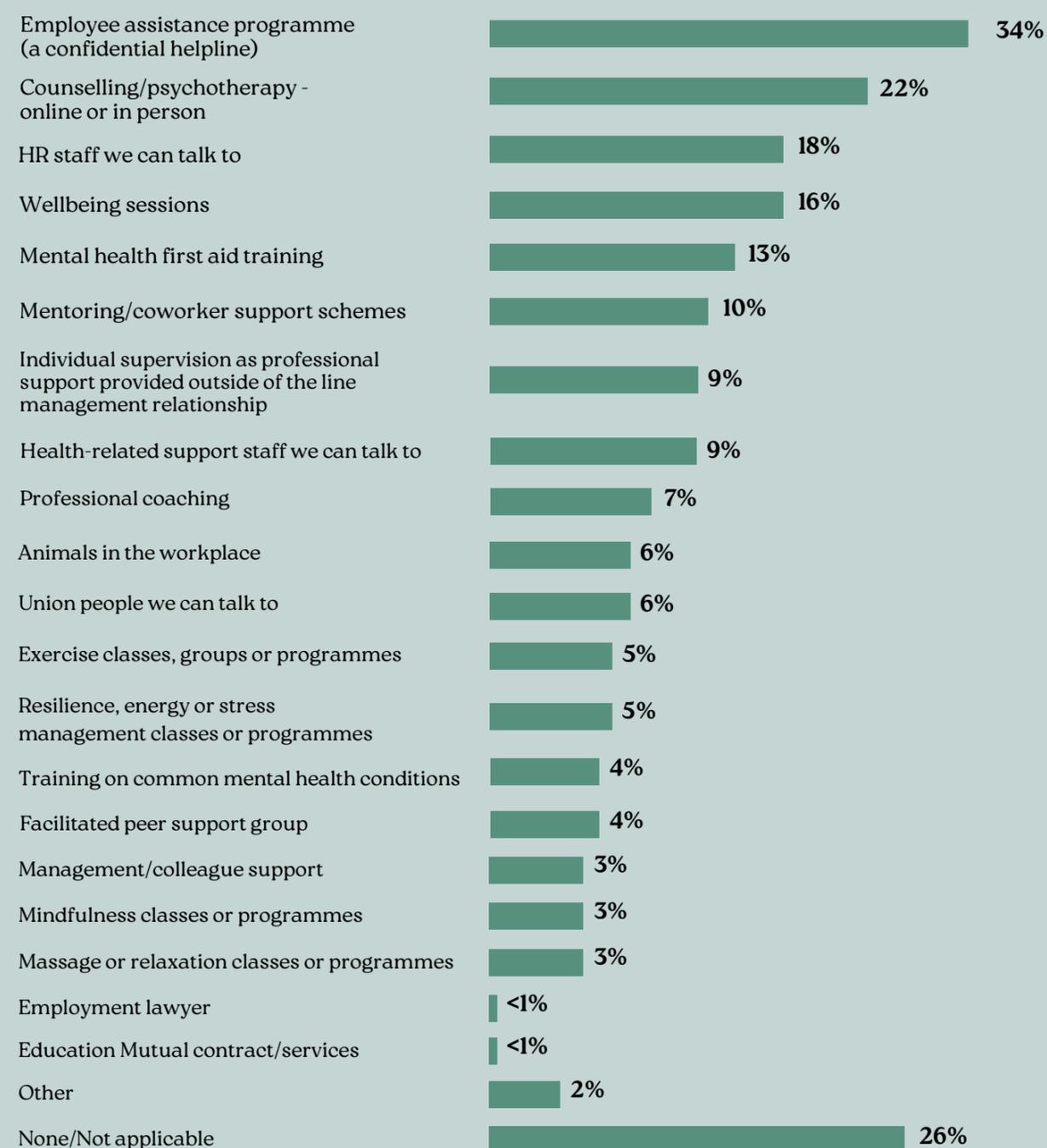### Mental health and wellbeing services provided and used

Base: all respondents (n=472)

Service	Provided	Used
Employee assistance programme (a confidential helpline)	63%	12%
Counselling/psychotherapy - online or in person	50%	13%
Mental health first aid training	39%	6%
HR staff we can talk to	36%	13%
Union people we can talk to	31%	4%
Wellbeing sessions	29%	11%
Health-related support staff we can talk to	21%	4%
Mentoring/coworker support schemes	20%	6%
Individual supervision as professional support provided outside of the line management relationship	18%	5%
Professional coaching	17%	7%
Animals in the workplace	15%	5%
Training on common mental health conditions	13%	3%
Exercise classes, groups or programmes	13%	5%
Resilience, energy or stress management classes/programmes	10%	1%
Mindfulness classes or programmes	9%	4%
Facilitated peer support group	9%	2%
Massage or relaxation classes or programmes	4%	1%
Education Mutual contract/services	3%	-
Management/colleague support	3%	1%
Employment lawyer	<1%	<1%
Other	3%	1%
None	6%	47%

Appendix 4:

Top 3 services of most benefit when dealing with work-related factors impacting upon wellbeing

Base: all respondents (n=472)

Service	Value
Employee assistance programme (a confidential helpline)	34%
Counselling/psychotherapy - online or in person	22%
HR staff we can talk to	18%
Wellbeing sessions	16%
Mental health first aid training	13%
Mentoring/coworker support schemes	10%
Individual supervision as professional support provided outside of the line management relationship	9%
Health-related support staff we can talk to	9%
Professional coaching	7%
Animals in the workplace	6%
Union people we can talk to	6%
Exercise classes, groups or programmes	5%
Resilience, energy or stress management classes or programmes	5%
Training on common mental health conditions	4%
Facilitated peer support group	4%
Management/colleague support	3%
Mindfulness classes or programmes	3%
Massage or relaxation classes or programmes	3%
Employment lawyer	<1%
Education Mutual contract/services	<1%
Other	2%
None/Not applicable	26%

Appendix 5:

Barriers to using or accessing services that were available

Base: all respondents (n=472)

Barrier	Percentage
I prefer to seek support from people outside of work	29%
It would negatively affect their perception of me	12%
Didn't know	11%
It would be seen as a sign of weakness	11%
There is a stigma (e.g. a feeling of shame) which stops me from talking to anyone at work	7%
I would be worried about losing my job	5%
The school wouldn't be supportive	4%
No one talks about their problems at work	3%
Lack of time	2%
These services are not available to me	2%
No barriers	1%
Services not included	1%
Lack of funding	1%
I prefer to seek support from colleagues	1%
Other	<1%
Not applicable	42%

Appendix 6:

Methodology

This research study investigated the wellbeing needs of School Business Leaders working in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England and Wales.

It aimed to understand:

➤ What are the work-related factors which have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of School Business Leaders?

➤ Which types of mental health and wellbeing support do School Business Leaders currently use? Which are of most benefit, in tackling these work-related factors?

➤ Overall, how well do SBLs perceive the mental health and wellbeing support provided by their workplace?

A mixed-methods design was used to answer the research questions.

This involved:

➤ 472 online survey responses from SBLs working in schools in England and Wales. The survey was open for completion during the period Wednesday 17th September until Sunday 19th October 2025. Incentives were offered to take part.

➤ 6 telephone, or online, depth interviews with SBLs or School Business Managers, to further explore some of the issues raised in the survey.

Details of the respondents who took part in the online survey and the interviews are shown below.

Online survey sample (all tables below based on 472 respondents)

Appendix 6 - Table 1 - Job Title

	Number of respondents	Proportion
School Business Leader/Manager/Director	306	65%
Office Manager/Director	50	11%
Finance Manager/Director	22	5%
Administration/PA/Secretary/Officer	19	4%
Bursar	16	3%
HR Manager/Director	15	3%
Headteacher/Principal, Deputy or Assistant Head Teacher/Principal	15	3%
Operations Manager/Director	14	3%
CEO, CFO	8	2%
Facilities Manager/Director	3	1%
Other	2	<1%
Not answered	2	<1%

Appendix 6 - Table 2 -Tenure

	Number of respondents	Proportion
0-2 years	76	16%
3-5 years	137	29%
6-10 years	117	25%
11-20 years	106	22%
21-30 years	26	6%
31+ years	6	1%
Not answered	4	1%

Appendix 6 - Table 3 - Gender

	Number of respondents	Proportion
Male	26	6%
Female	442	94%
Non-binary	-	-
Prefer not to say	1	<1%
Not answered	3	1%

Appendix 6 - Table 4 - Age

	Number of respondents	Proportion
Less than 25	-	-
25-29	5	1%
30-34	11	2%
35-39	30	6%
40-44	60	13%
45-49	84	18%
50-54	109	23%
55-59	117	25%
60-64	47	10%
65+	5	1%
Prefer not to say	1	<1%
Not answered	3	1%

Appendix 6 - Table 5 - Ethicity

	Number of respondents	Proportion
Any Asian background	4	1%
Any Black background	2	<1%
White - English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	411	87%
White - Irish	11	2%
White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller	2	<1%
White - Roma	4	1%
White - Any other White background	13	3%
Any other ethnic ground - (includes Arab, Mixed and other)	1	<1%
Prefer not to say	3	1%
Not answered	18	4%

Education Mutual

i2 Hamilton Way
Mansfield
NG18 5FB

01623 287 840

educationmutual.co.uk

learnmore@educationmutual.co.uk