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## A whole school approach to wellbeing: an investigation into staff wellbeing in post primary schools

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**A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing:  
An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in  
Post Primary schools**

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Submitted in fulfilment for the award of  
Master of Arts in Guidance Counselling and  
Lifespan Development.

Submitted to the University of Limerick,

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## **Declaration**

The author hereby declares that this thesis is her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Angela McLaughlin

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## Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures & Tables	vii
List of Appendices	viii
List of Abbreviations	ix
Abstract	x

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Research Topic: Overview and Justification	1
1.1.1 Research Aim	1
1.1.2 Research Methodology	2
1.1.3 Positionality and Reflexivity of the Researcher	2
1.2 Structure of Thesis	3
1.3 Conclusion	3

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

2.0 Introduction	4
2.1 Wellbeing Defined	4
2.2 Importance of Wellbeing	5
2.3 Teacher Focus	6
2.4 Relationships Matter	9
2.5 Staff Focus	10
2.6 Why Community: The Necessity of Connections and Belonging	11
2.7 Policy and Staff Involvement	13

2.8 Future of Wellbeing	14
2.9 Conclusion	15
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	
3.0 Introduction	16
3.1 Research Rationale and Questions	16
3.1.1 Research Rationale	16
3.1.2 Research Questions	16
3.2 Research Paradigm	17
3.3 Research Methodology	19
3.4 Participant Access and Sampling	20
3.5 Data Collection	21
3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews	21
3.6 Data Analysis	22
3.7 Validity and Reliability	23
3.8 Role of the Researcher	24
3.9 Ethical Considerations	25
3.10 Conclusion	26
<b>Chapter 4: Data Analysis &amp; Findings</b>	
4.0 Introduction	27
4.1 Fieldwork	27
4.2 Summary of Findings from Interviews	28
4.2.1 Understanding of Wellbeing	28
4.2.2 Experience of a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing	29
4.2.3 Support of Management and Peers	30
4.2.4 Support of Government and Department of Education agencies	31
4.3 Overarching Themes	32
4.3.1 Defining Wellbeing	33

4.3.2 WSA to Wellbeing	34
4.3.3 Culture of Wellbeing	34
4.3.4 Opportunities for Improvement	35
4.4 Conclusion	36
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion</b>	
5.0 Introduction	37
5.1 Outcomes	37
5.2 Overview of Themes	37
5.2.1 Defining Wellbeing	37
5.2.2 WSA to Wellbeing	38
5.2.3 Culture of Wellbeing	38
5.3.4 Opportunities for Improvement	39
5.3 Answering the Research Questions	40
5.4 Implications	45
5.5 Conclusion	46
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion</b>	
6.0 Introduction	47
6.1 Overview of Findings	47
6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study	50
6.2.1 Strengths	50
6.2.2 Limitations	51
6.3 Recommendations	52
6.4 Personal Learning and Reflexivity	54
6.5 Conclusion	55
<b>Reference List</b>	56
<b>Appendices</b>	72

## **List of Figures & Tables**

### **Figures**

Fig. 3.1	Section of Codes table	Pg. 23
Fig. 4.1	Section of Thematic Analysis	Pg. 32
Fig. 4.2	Thematic Map	Pg. 33

### **Table:**

Table 4.1	Participant Profiles	Pg. 27
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## **List of Appendices**

	<b>Pg.</b>
<b>Appendix A:</b> Subject Information and Permission letter (Principal)	72
<b>Appendix B:</b> Subject Information letter and Consent Form (Participants)	73
<b>Appendix C:</b> Research Privacy Notice	79
<b>Appendix D:</b> Interview Structure	83
<b>Appendix E:</b> Data Analysis: Excerpt of Transcript Coding and Initial Theme Investigation	84
<b>Appendix F:</b> Excerpt of Coding tables	87
<b>Appendix G:</b> Thematic Mapping of Overarching Themes	89
<b>Appendix H:</b> EHS Email of Approval	90

## **List of Abbreviations**

CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DOH	Department of Health
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HPS	Health Promoting Schools
HSE	Health Service Executive
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
JCPA	Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement
JCT	Junior Cycle for Teachers
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSE	School Self Evaluation
UL	University of Limerick
UNCRC	United Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSA	Whole School Approach
WTL	Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners

## Abstract

The promotion of Wellbeing through Education in Ireland has been established by introducing a preventative, whole school approach which was “informed by international research and practice” (DES, 2018, p.1). This study intended to focus on the gap in research pertaining to the Whole School Approach to Wellbeing in Ireland, specifically focusing on the staff wellbeing element of this collaborative approach. The aim of the research was to examine whether there is solely a support for staff wellbeing, rather than a provision in the Department of Education and Skills Wellbeing Framework.

The research design involved an interpretivist approach, with a single-case design employing semi-structured interviews to gather data. Six participants were interviewed from the case school and consisted of two teachers, two Special Needs Assistants and two members of management to gain staff perspective.

Thematic analysis was used to determine the key findings from this study. As a result, four themes emerged; defining wellbeing, experience of the Whole School Approach to wellbeing, determining a culture of wellbeing and areas of opportunity for the approach in schools. Analysis has shown that an emphasis upon student wellbeing has a direct impact upon the wellbeing of staff. The results indicated that while there has been extensive ‘information giving’ from policy makers, there has not been sufficient provision for staff wellbeing set out within the parameters of the Wellbeing Framework.

While the focus on wellbeing has indeed created more awareness of wellbeing for staff, the evidence of practices which provide for their wellbeing is lacking. The researcher concludes that staff perceives the promotion of wellbeing as a worthwhile endeavour on a whole school level but the data suggests that there is more work required at a policy level for this to be effective. This research may inform policy and practice about how best to collaborate on policy implementation and addresses suggestions for improvements to meet the Department of Education and Skills vision for a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Through providing an overview of the research area and the justification for this study, the researcher aims to give adequate context and structure to introduce this research. This chapter will outline the rationale behind this study, its aims and objectives and the research questions which form the foundation of this research.

### **1.1 Research Topic: Overview and Justification**

As outlined by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Chief Inspector of Education at the Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners (WTL) Conference 2019, wellbeing “is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life” (Teaching Council, 2019). The area of wellbeing in education has seen an increasing amount of research in recent years globally (Hargreaves, Shirley, Wangia, Bacon & D’Angela, 2018; Thorburn, 2018; OECD, 2017; CASEL, 2015; Shonkoff, Levitt, Bunge, Cameron, Duncan, Fisher & Fox, 2015), and has begun to gain traction in an Irish context, increasingly so with the formal introduction of the Wellbeing Framework in Post Primary schools (McHugh & McGowan, 2019; Burke & Minton, 2019, DES, 2018; NCCA, 2017). It has emerged as an area of importance for all and, during the current pandemic, has been an area which many have noted that needs to be prioritised (DES, 2020; Duffield & O’Hare, 2020, WHO, 2020). However, there is limited research in an Irish context on Wellbeing in schools and none at present which focuses specifically on staff wellbeing, as distinct from teacher wellbeing. With the introduction of a Whole School Approach (WSA) to Wellbeing in 2018, there is no evidence of the impact on staff wellbeing and the way in which staff wellbeing is catered to within this framework.

#### ***1.1.1 Research Aim***

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which the current focus on student wellbeing relates to the wellbeing of staff. The focus is on examining whether there is solely a support for staff wellbeing, rather than a provision, in the WSA to Wellbeing set out by the Wellbeing Framework. In order to address this, the primary and secondary research questions seek to delve into the aspects of the WSA to Wellbeing which impacts most on staff wellbeing. Critical analysis of the discourse of wellbeing in schools and an examination of the practices currently in place in schools is required to cater to these aims. The purpose is to

expose, through the narratives of staff (teachers, SNAs, management), the way in which staff wellbeing is perceived and catered to in the Wellbeing Framework set out by the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

### ***1.1.2 Research Methodology***

The study utilises an interpretivist paradigm and a single-case design was deemed most suitable following critical analysis of research methodology. Participants of semi structured interviews provided detailed, rich data on their perception of the research area. The Primary research question examines the staff element of the WSA to Wellbeing: *How is staff wellbeing supported within the context of the Wellbeing plan in Post Primary schools?*

The secondary research questions were created to identify the specific elements of the Wellbeing framework which focus on staff wellbeing and to examine the discourse of wellbeing in schools. They have been used to examine the wellbeing practices currently in place in schools in adherence to the Wellbeing Framework. The secondary research questions are as follows:

- 1. To what extent does staff recognise the association between focusing on their own wellbeing and promoting wellbeing amongst students?*
- 2. How effective is the wellbeing policy currently in place in promoting staff wellbeing?*
- 3. What are the elements of a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing that create a community focus on wellbeing in the hope of benefitting all stakeholders involved?*

### ***1.1.3 Positionality and Reflexivity of the Researcher***

When an interpretivist approach is employed in research, it is essential that the researcher state their position (Thomas, 2013). As a practitioner-researcher in the field of Guidance Counselling, the researcher is passionate about the area of wellbeing and has been educated on the importance of practitioner care to properly facilitate clients. Previous and current employment in mainstream Post Primary education, both in the UK and Ireland, along with seeing the work of a youth counsellor in the US, has instilled a thirst for knowledge in the area of practitioner and staff wellbeing, while promoting the positive health of clients and students. The researcher has witnessed the challenges which students face firsthand and the lengths that staff will go to, hoping to best cater to the wellbeing of students. The strain which this put on the wellbeing of staff had been noted and current employment in a school which has fully complied with the Wellbeing Framework set out by the DES (2018a) has further enhanced the researcher's desire to conduct a study in this area.

As the researcher is familiar with the staff involved in the semi-structured interviews, strict protocol was followed to ensure the data collected was valid and bias was acknowledged through reflexivity (Thomas, 2013). While the data is important as a staff member in a Post Primary school in Ireland, it is also valuable in the context of Guidance Counsellor to aid professional practice.

## **1.2 Structure of Thesis**

The planned outline of the thesis will now be briefly summarised.

### ***Chapter 2 Literature Review***

The literature review has been divided into thematic sections, critically examining existing literature relevant to the topic. This begins with using a broad lens to analyse the topic and condensing this to indicate the specific area of study.

### ***Chapter 3 Methodology***

This chapter outlines the researcher's choice of methodology and design through critical analysis considering the best fit for this study. The method used to gather and analyse the data is outlined and the measures taken to ensure validity, reliability, reflexivity and an ethical approach are discussed.

### ***Chapter 4 Data Analysis & Findings***

The findings chapter discusses the main findings which emerged during data analysis. These were structured into themes and subsequent overarching themes which added further depth to the research.

### ***Chapter 5 Discussion***

This chapter combined the findings of the study with relevant literature, additionally considering what has already been presented in chapter two. A critical interpretation of the findings in light of this is presented, noting correlation and divergences.

### ***Chapter 6 Conclusion***

The conclusion provides an overview of the key findings in light of the aims and objectives of the study and considering the theory, policy and practical implications. The strengths and weaknesses of the research are outlined and recommendations addressed. To close, the personal learning and reflexivity of the researcher are discussed.

## **1.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an outline of the research topic and produced an overview of the way in which the thesis is structured. Through presenting the key components of the study in this manner, the researcher hopes to provide clarity and give context to the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

Researchers can learn a lot from other researchers during a literature review process (Bell & Waters, 2018). Therefore, as Creswell and Creswell (2017) outline, this chapter will review the relevant literature to contextualise the research topic. This chapter aims to provide a better understanding of wellbeing in a Post Primary context and the role which staff play in the development of a culture of wellbeing. This chapter is divided into thematic sections. The first section will examine the definition of wellbeing. The next section addresses the importance of wellbeing in a Post Primary setting before moving onto the relevance of teachers to student wellbeing. The following section will outline the relational nature of wellbeing and how community and policy affect this. The final section will outline the way in which staff wellbeing is addressed within the WSA to Wellbeing.

### **2.1 Wellbeing Defined**

The question of what contributes to wellbeing is an area which has seen much research recently (Thorburn, 2018; O'Brien & O'Shea, 2017; Maggino, 2016; ESRC, 2014; Huppert & So, 2013; Dodge *et al.* 2012; Split, Koomen & Thijs, 2011; Seligman, 2011; Thomas, 2009). However, in both historic and current literature, the authors agree on the complexity in offering a succinct definition of the term. O'Brien and O'Shea (2017) specify that there are numerous definitions of wellbeing, many of which are multidimensional in nature, but which have foundations in sociology, psychology and philosophy. Aelterman *et al.* (2007, p.286) outline wellbeing as a positive state which balances the environmental factors which one faces, with the needs and expectations of an individual in a given situation. Thorburn (2018) places importance on what wellbeing means to whom, and the consequences of this meaning for those involved, "the newness of wellbeing coupled with varied approaches taken towards understanding wellbeing can lead to wellbeing meaning different things to different people" (p.17). Tiberius and Plakias (2010, p. 402) shared this view and further reinforced the gap which can exist when importance is placed on one aspect of wellbeing over viewing it as a holistic, inclusive term. Similarly, Bradshaw *et al.* (2013) indicate the considerable differences between a student's perception of wellbeing and what an adult determines wellbeing to be. Fattore, Mason and Watson (2007) specify the importance of involving children in defining and measuring wellbeing. Therefore, in reference to Thorburn's earlier

point, the meaning of the term must be explicitly stated to allow for consequential discussion to begin.

The literature reviewed acknowledges some commonalities in defining wellbeing. While it has been coined a 'new' term, the foundations are historically linked to terms such as welfare, utility and happiness, civic values and virtues (Thorburn, 2015). Cassidy (2018) refers to children's perception of the term and outlines that there is agreement that wellbeing encompasses one's "social, emotional, intellectual, mental and physical wellness, linking wellbeing to health" (p.17). Important factors mentioned relating to this are satisfaction, respect, being valued, autonomy, relationships and community.

Globally, there has been an increased focus on Positive Psychology in recent years. Wellington College, New Zealand, utilises the 'Happiness and Wellbeing' approach to education, which was established to teach pupils how to flourish. Wellbeing has been a compulsory subject in this school since 2006. Similarly, Seligman's (2010) position on the ability to flourish focuses on wellbeing, rather than on what makes us unwell. Wellbeing is a keyword in the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of health: "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (2012, p.2). It is also defined as having a multidimensional nature in their earlier publication, with more of a focus on wellbeing being present when an individual realises their potential, has a sense of connection to their community and resilience to deal with normal stresses in their life (WHO, 2001). In Australia, student wellbeing is defined as a state of positive psychological functioning, enabling learners to thrive, flourish and connect positively with others (ACT, 2016). The DES and NCCA (2017) have similarly discussed wellbeing as being comprised of interrelated factors such as being responsible, connected, aware, active, resilient and appreciated. Taking the literature reviewed into consideration, a common facet in the definitions of wellbeing deals with *being* well, in other words, how one *is* in the world in terms of one's engagement with it and with those who inhabit it.

## **2.2 Importance of Wellbeing**

While there is much research on the factors that contribute to wellbeing, the origin of a focus on wellbeing in a school setting is derived from the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The Convention places emphasis on the right for children to participate in decisions which affect them and to allow them to reach their full potential. Under Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Union (2016), the emphasis upon care and protection for the wellbeing of the child is specified. This reflects

Article 3.2 of the UNCRC (2010) which focuses on the care necessary for a child's wellbeing with reference to legislation. In 2009, the EU Youth Strategy prompted the EU Council to renew their framework, concluding that eight fields of action should be taken, one of which is wellbeing. This was to be implemented by "promoting opportunities for young people to develop autonomy and key competencies" (DES, 2018a, p.10).

Ireland signed up to the UNCRC in 1992. The Children's Rights Alliance highlights the Convention as a framework to ensure children's rights are adequately adhered to in Government policy. This is evident in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Framework for Junior Cycle 2015. The framework states that "it will enable students to build life skills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and the community" (p.7). Research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), on Irish adolescents, concluded that academic achievement was influenced positively by higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing, therefore making the link between learning and wellbeing (Smyth, 2015). More recently, the DES (2018a) aim for wellbeing to be at the core of the ethos of every school and educational institute by 2023. The connection between wellbeing and academic performance and the development of skills for lifelong benefit are evidenced as ample reason for a focus on wellbeing in secondary schools, however the right of the student to feel cared for is at the core of this.

### **2.3 Teacher Focus**

For wellbeing to be implemented as an explicit area of learning in schools there is a need to review the role of the teacher in this regard. McCallum *et al.* (2017, p.3), noted that "long ago Confucius identified that all teachers contribute to the education of the whole child". The 'My World Survey 2012' similarly found the value of 'one good adult' to a student's wellbeing. Split, Koomen and Thijs (2011) further emphasised that more than teachers being important to student's scholastic lives, the evidence suggests that teacher *wellbeing* has effects on learner's socio-economic adjustment and academic performance. The literature reviewed concedes that if the teacher is 'well' then there is more likelihood that the conditions for learning within the school environment are better equipped to promote a community of wellbeing. Virtanen, Vaaland and Ertesvag (2019) reinforced this as a symbiotic relationship, with evidence suggesting that improving teacher wellbeing has the potential to improve rapport with students and vice versa. This contributes to the school as an environment for wellbeing to flourish. Harding *et al.* (2019, p.180) referred to this as school

connectedness, establishing “an environment in which students believe that adults in the school care about them as individuals”.

Many authors agree that once the emphasis is placed upon the wellbeing of the teacher, then the wellbeing of the student is more effectively addressed. Awartani and Looney (2015) note that childhood is when individuals develop values, skills and knowledge in a process of ‘well-becoming’ that will shape their lives. These aspects are developed in relation to those with whom the student interacts with daily; in a school setting the teacher has a large part to play in this. McCallum *et al.* (2017, p.13) state that “if teachers can model positive strategies, this will have a positive influence on student wellbeing”. O’Brien (2012) further acknowledged that this requires the teacher to have not only awareness but control of their own wellbeing, as the way in which the teacher presents impacts their class and the school community itself. Findings from the Nuffield Health UK Student survey, as outlined by Hawkins (2017), proved this further. When data emerged from students on what impacts on their sense of wellbeing in school, it revealed ‘how stressed my teacher is today’, to be the most common answer. This, in addition to the literature aforementioned, suggests that the wellbeing of the teacher is an aspect that needs to be closely considered. Further to this, in research noted by Roffey (2013, p.15), it clearly advised that the care of the teacher needs to be at the fore, as teachers are a pivotal force in providing an environment conducive to learning. Soini, Phylto and Pietarinen (2010) built the foundation for this with their evidence that the occupational wellbeing and learning of teachers attribute to the ability to achieve educational goals at a school community level.

In order to ascertain if the school environment is conducive to wellbeing, the aspects which contribute to teacher wellbeing must be considered. Morgan *et al.* (2010) suggest that the conditions within the school environment need to support teacher collaboration and a professional community mentality in order for wellbeing to flourish. However, McCallum *et al.* (2017) pose a different view, advising that the wellbeing of teachers is impacted by a myriad of factors, not all of which are within the teachers’ control. The consequences of this can be seen in a number of ways. Ingersoll and Stuckey (2014) found that the attrition rate of teachers is affected, with approximately forty percent of teachers in the USA leaving the teaching profession during the first five years. It seems as though the knock-on effect for students from this lack of continuity with teachers would inadvertently lead to a disjointed school community and ability to model wellbeing. On a UK Level, research concluded that eighty-two per cent of teachers are dealing with lack of sleep and over three quarters from anxiety. Almost half of those surveyed sought medical advice, with three quarters of teachers

reporting that the job has affected their mental health and wellbeing (NASUWT, 2016). From more historic literature, Kyriacou (2001) noted that teacher burnout is most commonly caused by stress brought on from repeatedly dealing with difficult situation and students. On a national level, the Teaching Council (2016, p.18) emphasised “the importance of care of self so as to be able to care for others and, in that context, teachers’ well-being is vital if they are to effectively lead learning, and support and facilitate students in this endeavour”. Weare (2015, p.6) concurred, noting that “wellbeing in school starts with the staff. They are in the front line of the work and it is hard for them to be genuinely motivated to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of others if they feel uncared for and burnt out themselves”. This reflects what is central to the work of the Guidance Counsellor; without knowledge of oneself and what contributes to one’s own health and wellbeing, it is difficult to model the tools for students which would enable them to realise their full potential. The ability of the teacher to know themselves leads to being mentally ‘well.’ In the classroom, the teacher should be a role model in this respect for students. Teacher identity is central to this.

Teachers are members of ‘the caring professions’ (Hawkins, 2017). On a typical day, while acting in a duty of care for the students in each class, there is a need to be ‘on’ all day; teaching, making numerous decisions, preparing lessons, extracurricular responsibilities, assessment, reporting, dealing with parents, colleagues and so on. The necessity for teachers to be able to sustain themselves and focus on what contributes to their wellbeing is evident in the literature and from professional experience. Siegel (2013) stated that “keeping your own wellbeing in mind is essential to create the experiential conditions to inspire students to learn” (p. xii). How we teach is as important as what we teach, for ourselves and the students in our care.

Nevertheless, some criticism of wellbeing as a responsibility of educators has emerged. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) have referred to various concerns about wellbeing as an endeavour in a school setting. Firstly, they question whether a focus on wellbeing detracts from the level of engagement with subject knowledge and teachers’ instrumental function of imparting specialist knowledge to students, which they state is the reason parents send their children to school. The authors are also highly critical of the hypothesis that focusing on the emotional wellbeing of learners will lead to more successful educational practices and finally deduce that learners may become more dependent upon educators for their wellbeing with such therapeutic style practices appearing. Indeed, they are not the only critics of a focus on wellbeing in schools. O’Brien (2008) specifies that a good life will involve struggles and that meaning and lessons can be found through these difficult experiences. They believe that

students should be allowed to experience these struggles, rather than focus on techniques to overcome them or prevent them completely. Hawkins (2017) prompts a different criticism, noting that education today is overflowing with initiatives and compulsory practices that bring about added pressure to all involved. He makes the point that there is a need to come back to basics and discover what really matters.

The way in which one learns, and research proving that teaching is just one of these ways, focuses on the foundation of education itself (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008). Learning happens every day, for students and teachers both; across a range of areas not constricted to the formal curricular focus of timetabled classes. It is a relational activity, individuals learn in a number of ways but the common aspect of each learning style is connection to another individual or piece of work produced by another. If teaching and learning have relationships at its foundation, then wellbeing is the bridge that supports learning (O’Ruairc, 2015). This is not confined to children but a lifelong endeavour which provides opportunities for self-reflection and growth for adults also; reflective practice beyond just subject knowledge, “it is a lifelong enterprise, and it is a process enhanced by an environment that supports, or more precisely ‘nourishes’...people throughout their lives” (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008, p. xiv). The ability of teachers in secondary schools to provide opportunities for students to develop skills and understanding to promote positive wellbeing depends on the opportunity which teachers have had to undertake this work themselves.

## **2.4 Relationships Matter**

Acton and Glasgow (2015) are clear that a focus on teacher wellbeing is difficult in the current professional climate of performativity and competition. They conclude that simply seeking to manage stress and burnout is not enough, that what is required is a positive working environment where happiness is promoted. The importance of collaboration has been noted in the literature reviewed already, but it is important to note that teachers might not always find themselves in a collegiate atmosphere. Thorburn (2018, p.23) emphasised that “in such an atmosphere, relationships with colleagues and children may not be as rich as they might otherwise be were there a focus on *being well*”. In an Irish context, it has been agreed that when supportive relationships and safe communities exist, there are more opportunities to support the development of wellbeing and resilience in the face of adversity (DES, HSE & DOH, 2013; DES, DCYA, DOH & HSE, 2015). This has foundations in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development (1979). This model provides a systems-based view of wellbeing and acknowledges the importance of the individual and the

relationships which exist in their wider community. It demonstrates the relational aspect of human nature and supports the view that wellbeing is a community endeavour.

Rogers (1961) referred to 'the good life', a process of being. Nussbaum (2011) suggests that this supports children and their teachers to recognise that they are part of a wider whole, encouraging the promotion of conditions that allow for others to have a good life, to have well *being*. Thorburn (2018) supports this and determines that the promotion of practical philosophy in classrooms would foster a sense of community which would benefit all members.

## **2.5 Staff Focus**

The role of community in the development of a culture of wellbeing is beginning to emerge globally. In New Zealand, The Wellbeing Budget has been developed as a measure of the country's success as opposed to GDP. This has a specific emphasis upon supporting wellbeing for New Zealanders, with a special focus on under 24-year-olds (New Zealand Treasury, 2019). The Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2018) state that wellbeing is a responsibility shared by the whole community, which not only equips students with a capacity for emotional intelligence which will allow them to perform better academically, but will have a lifelong focus contributing to their ability to create social bonds and maintain healthy relationships. Following the National Mental Health Commission review in 2014, the Child and Youth Mental Health programme was developed leading to the MindMatters approach used in Secondary Schools since 2017. At a national level, the DES (2018a, p.12) state in the Wellbeing Framework for Practice 2018-23 that "promoting the wellbeing of our children and young people is a shared community responsibility and is everybody's business" and they further refer to wellbeing protective factors which include the wellbeing of school personnel. This policy builds upon the Looking at Our Schools 2016 model, encouraging evaluation and collaboration within schools.

Already the evidence present in literature has highlighted the importance of teacher wellbeing to the wellbeing of students. However, the focus on staff wellbeing and the importance of a community focused approach to wellbeing is emerging as having significantly more benefit to all involved. Baric (1993), as quoted by Harding *et al.* (2019), outlined that there needs to be a focus on the interactions within an organisation, such as a school, in order to promote the overall health of the school itself. McCallum *et al.* (2017) concurred, outlining that the evidence indicates that when employers invest in their school workforce, committing to the health and wellbeing of the staff, then productivity and student achievement are significantly

improved. Rivers *et al.* (2018, p.24) further noted that there is “association between good ethical leadership and increased employees’ work engagement”, all which contribute to the wellbeing of the entire school community.

Taking the aforementioned factor of stress as a barrier to wellbeing into consideration, Howard and Johnson (2004) outlined the benefit of a supportive school culture in reducing the risk of stress in schools. Hawkins (2017) elaborated on this, stating that when leaders recognise the value of teachers knowing how to manage their stress, it can have a profound impact on all stakeholders in the community, leaders included. Enhanced self awareness and presence in the school community can have as much benefit as more complex strategies. The author made explicit, however, that this does not mean that wellbeing is the responsibility of the leader in the school but that the atmosphere of the school must be conducive to a wellbeing approach to working and learning, “it’s more that we need to be explicit and proactive in creating conditions in schools that encourage and promote teacher self-care” (Hawkins, 2017, p. 9). Involving all parties in the discussion of creating a flourishing community is necessary for it to be authentically ingrained in the ethos of the school. Tough (2016) stated that the first step is to accept that we can all do better when we work collectively as a community.

## **2.6 Why Community- The Necessity of Connections and Belonging**

The evidence in the literature presents the benefits of working collaboratively towards a community of wellbeing and in Ireland; a WSA to Wellbeing has been constructed as the means to establish wellbeing as a curriculum area. Guidance Counselling is just one part of this but the WSA has been adopted within Guidance Counselling itself also. As Hearne *et al.* (2018) noted, this approach allows schools to maximise resources but the awareness of school management can influence the success of this model and positively influence the school culture and norms.

The whole school guidance plan overlaps with many of the sentiments associated with wellbeing. Circular 0009/2012 states a school guidance plan should support the needs of its students (DES, 2012). The DES (2018a) also emphasise the importance of coherent policy and planning at a whole school level for the successful delivery of a wellbeing programme. The NCCA (2017) outlines four areas of wellbeing in schools: the curriculum, policy and planning, relationships and culture. A whole school community approach is necessary to contribute to the building of this culture and therefore all stakeholders should be present during each stage of the process.

The ways in which people perceive and relate to each other provide evidence of how wellbeing is embedded in social structures (Noble & McGrath, 2012). Social capital is a term which many authors have used in relation to the need for an attitude of collaboration and community in this respect. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which is comprised of thirty nations, noted that social capital is defined as networking together with “shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation with or among groups” (OECD, 2001, p.41). In 2009, the OECD issued its first report on indicators of child wellbeing, quality of school life being one of these. The Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) stated that social capital denotes whether members of the school community have a shared understanding of how they should behave toward, and care for, one another (2007). Roffey (2013) noted that the active promotion of positive feelings, such as a sense of belonging, facilitate an environment where flourishing and learning exist. She emphasised the quality of the interactions which build mutual trust and reciprocity as being central to social capital in schools. The need to feel a sense of belonging within this is critical for resilience and wellbeing, the author states.

The psychological need to belong is an area which has reappeared in literature, and in social chatter, recently. The feeling that you are accepted within your social group is a basic psychological need. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that it is so vital to our survival that it counts as one of our basic human needs along with sustenance and shelter. So why has this come to the fore in literature recently and is this connected to why wellbeing is such an area of focus? Hawkins (2017, p. 171) states that “we seem to be increasingly living in isolated pockets”. He refers to this age of ‘super-connectivity’, when we have virtual connections to so many others all over the world, but also delves into the erosion of the more traditional, face-to-face connections as the cost of this. He poses the question of whether the current interest in emotional awareness, finding balance and self-development are seeking to counteract this; “can we, through understanding ourselves and each other better, learn how to cope, thrive and flourish?” (Hawkins, 2017, p.173). Taking into consideration the literature reviewed, could this be why a focus on wellbeing is appearing at this time, in this form? Is it a remodelling of the African proverb of ‘taking a village to raise a child’, whereby the community has become somewhat disconnected due to being so connected globally, and there is a need to refocus through an official policy on wellbeing to benefit all involved?

## **2.7 Policy and Staff Involvement**

Social capital and the community approach to wellbeing have highlighted the benefit of a culture of collaboration. Recent policy has also noted the benefit of working together towards wellbeing for all. The DES (2018a, p.20) outlines that “all schools and centres for education will provide evidence-informed approaches and support, appropriate to need, to enhance the wellbeing of all”. Slightly contradicting this, however, is research conducted in the UK via the Teacher Wellbeing Index (2018). The findings specified that there needs to be an explicit focus on ensuring the wellbeing needs of the staff are met, not just at surface level but throughout the policy itself. Following on from this, the Education Support Partnership (2018) advised that staff wellbeing must be a priority, being assessed and measured against evidence based framework.

In secondary schools, the measures being taken to promote student wellbeing are being assessed, providing invaluable feedback on the areas which are progressing well and also in which areas there may need to be action taken. Indeed, in Post Primary Schools in Ireland, 2020 is the first year of Wellbeing reported in the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. The six indicators of wellbeing- active, responsible, connected, resilient, respected and aware (NCCA, 2017), are used by students as an ongoing reflection of their progress and teachers focus on gathering evidence about what students have learned about wellbeing, rather than individually scrutinising how ‘well’ each student is. The policy outlines that the formal report at the end of third year should be the culmination of various discussions throughout the three years between students-parents-teachers about their wellbeing and their learning around this. The measurement of adult wellbeing, in holistic terms, has appeared in more historic literature. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (2006), which measures mental wellbeing, Seligman’s PERMA model (2011) outlining the building blocks of happiness and flourishing and Huppert & So’s (2013) European Social Study, which measured and compared the various elements of what it is that makes a healthy nation, are just some examples of evidence based methods to assess and measure wellbeing in a work setting. Helliwell and Barrington-Leigh (2015) further outlined the support of global institutions such the OECD, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations (UN) for developing wellbeing indicators as a means to measure and guide policy. The NCCA (2017) outline in Section 3.2 of the Wellbeing Guidelines that wellbeing in schools “starts with the staff” (2017, p.29), is both an individual and community endeavour and will require professional development as staff “understanding and values influence how they care for their own wellbeing and that of their students”. In the Wellbeing Framework for

Practice (DES, 2019), the indicators of success are outlined which inform the School-Self Evaluation (SSE) of Wellbeing promotion to take place in all schools by 2023. The document further outlines the need for a Whole School Approach that promotes “wellbeing for all members of the school community and includes preventative approaches” (DES, 2019, p.34). Under Key Area four, Relationships and Partnerships, there is reference made to providing individualised support from leaders and management for staff in times of difficulty and giving contact details for the Employee Assistance Service. The policies clearly outline the elements of wellbeing which relate to staff and the SSE model of reporting on the WSA to Wellbeing. However, to consider the literature presented previously by the Education Support Partnership, it seems as though there is no evidence of the measurement of staff wellbeing present in the most recent literature in an Irish Post Primary context.

## **2.8 Future of Wellbeing**

“Wellbeing is a process, a way of being, not a project” (Teaching Council, 2019). Taking the literature into consideration, there is agreement that wellbeing is a community endeavour, one which will take time, reflection and collaboration. However, there seems to be a gap concerning the way in which staff wellbeing is catered to within the school community. McCallum *et al.* (2017) noted that enhancing staff awareness of wellbeing through providing high quality training and support for the adults working in the school environment is necessary. The Wellbeing for Teachers and Learners (WTL) group set out to focus on a culture in school communities, seeing it as something which underpins everything that a school does, rather than another initiative to be implemented. To reach to goal of wellbeing embedded in school ethos across Ireland by 2023, as outlined by the DES (2018a), it seems as though there is a need to go deeper than the ‘surface level’ focus on staff wellbeing that the findings of the Teacher Wellbeing Index indicated.

Thorburn (2018) stated that there is an over-reliance on one-off events with little chance for follow up and that secondary teachers have reported that they have not received guidelines on preparation to deal with wellbeing themselves. The author notes that there is a disconnection between the policy and the ability of staff to deliver these aims, when working under increasingly performative cultures that take little account of their wellbeing. Cassidy (2018) poses the question of why wellbeing has become more prominent in school curricula at all. In Post Primary schools in Ireland, Wellbeing has been created as a Post of Responsibility in many schools (DES, 2018b).

The focus of this thesis is therefore is on whether measures are being taken to adequately address staff wellbeing, or if these are simply being alluded to in policy as a necessity. The literature reviewed raises the question of whether staff wellbeing is supported within the context of the wellbeing plan in Post Primary schools or if the main focus is directed towards student wellbeing.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This literature review has revealed the complicated nature of Wellbeing in Post Primary schools. It has addressed the meaning of wellbeing in such a setting, the origins of this focus in policy, the benefits of a community approach to wellbeing and the barriers to achieving this. This review gave an international and Irish perspective on wellbeing from a policy, research and practice viewpoint. The key issues that emerged are the elusiveness of the wellbeing term, the need for a focus on wellbeing in an educational setting and the issues surrounding a focus on staff wellbeing within a WSA to wellbeing.

This has informed the researcher's study as it is apparent that the issue of staff wellbeing is complex and one which has not been explored in an Irish context. It is unclear as to whether there is a provision towards staff wellbeing in Post Primary schools in Ireland or merely a support of this endeavour and therefore research is necessary in this area. Taking the literature presented into consideration, the aim of this research is to outline if there are any gaps in the current Wellbeing Policy in Ireland, specifically in relation to staff wellbeing.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to outline if there are any gaps in the current Wellbeing Policy specifically in relation to staff wellbeing. Consequently, it aimed to investigate the extent to which the current focus on student wellbeing related to the wellbeing of staff. It further examined whether there is solely a support for staff wellbeing rather than a provision in the WSA to Wellbeing set out by the DES Wellbeing Framework (2018a).

In this chapter the methods used to gather and analyse data were outlined. A discussion of qualitative and quantitative methods takes place to justify the selection of the chosen paradigm as the most suitable method of research to meet the research aims and objectives. The rationale for the chosen data collection and analysis methods were explained in this chapter and issues of validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical concerns were explored.

### **3.1 Research Rationale & Questions**

#### ***3.1.1 Research Rationale***

Wellbeing is an area which has been of interest to the researcher both professionally and personally for some time. The introduction of Wellbeing as a Curriculum area in 2018 (DES, 2018a), further reinforced this, leading to the decision to focus on staff wellbeing specifically as an area for further research.

The aims of this research fed into the current Wellbeing policy. This further study intended to outline any gaps in this policy with regards to staff wellbeing in particular, with interested centred around whether staff wellbeing is merely alluded to, rather than catered to, in Post Primary schools currently. The benefits of completing this research included to outline if there are gaps in the current Wellbeing policy in terms of staff wellbeing, to examine if the focus on wellbeing as a curricular and policy area is impacting upon the wellbeing of staff and to develop new insights into what has a positive impact upon staff wellbeing.

#### ***3.1.2 Research Questions***

“Research questions force you to consider the issue of what it is you want to find out about more precisely and rigorously” (Bryman, 2012, p.10). Clarity can be gained through careful planning and introspection on the rationale behind conducting research on a specific topic. Mason (2009) stated that research questions form the backbone of research design and require careful formulation in order to be researchable and intellectually worthwhile.

Therefore clarity can be gained on the exact nature of the study, ensuring precise and rigorous research by the thorough design of the research questions themselves. The research questions represent the areas of enquiry which a researcher wishes to explore and as such are a device for guiding and focusing that enquiry (Mason, 2009; Miles *et al.* 2013).

The Primary research question examined the staff element of the WSA to Wellbeing: *How is staff wellbeing supported within the context of the Wellbeing plan in Post Primary schools?* This required an investigation of staffs' understanding of wellbeing, in addition to exploration of their experience of a WSA to wellbeing while implementing the wellbeing policy in their place of employment. For the purpose of this study staff refers to teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and Management but considered all stakeholders invested in the running of schools additionally.

A number of secondary research questions were also established. These were created to identify the specific elements of the Wellbeing framework which focus on staff wellbeing and to examine the discourse of wellbeing in schools. They were also used to examine the wellbeing practices currently in place in schools in adherence to the Wellbeing Framework. The secondary research questions were:

1. *To what extent does staff recognise the association between focusing on their own wellbeing and promoting wellbeing amongst students?*
2. *How effective is the wellbeing policy currently in place in promoting staff wellbeing?*
3. *What are the elements of a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing that create a community focus on wellbeing in the hope of benefitting all stakeholders involved?*

The research aim and questions specify the area of study, which will inform the way in which data is gathered and therefore the outcome of the research. "If one cannot relate the outcomes of a research project to the initial research questions, it is impossible to evaluate the research project itself" (Swanborn, 2010, p.25). Fluid connections between all aspects allows for greater consistency and an empirically valid trajectory for research. Therefore articulation of the research rationale and questions was necessary prior to establishing the research paradigm.

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

A paradigm determines the questions researchers ask which consequently influence the methods researchers choose to seek their answers (Punch, 2009). The paradigm is a belief system that influences one's perception of a specific topic or research area; it describes the

individual's worldview (Thomas, 2013). Critical analysis of the way in which the researcher looks at things, the specific area which the researcher is considering and the method planned to obtain knowledge should be considered; thus the epistemological, ontological and methodology considerations (Thomas, 2013).

To determine the correct paradigm for this study, the researcher critiqued the merits and limitations of the positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Thomas (2013) evidenced the positivist paradigm as a scientific method which focuses on examining the validity of hypothesis. Researchers who hold a positivist paradigm seek to produce quantifiable results and hold an objective ontology and epistemology. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggested that insights provided by positivist researchers may have a high quality of reliability and validity that can be generalised to the wider population. However, it was also found that this rational method of data collection has limitations as it does not consider the complexity of human nature (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Utilising a positivist paradigm for educational research negates the human element central to this area. Providing the opportunity for opinion and rich data is necessary for this research and therefore a positivist paradigm would be unsuitable taking this into consideration.

Punch (2009) noted that while positivist research is quantifiable, interpretivist research is qualitative, focusing on the importance of words. The interpretivist paradigm examines the rich data of human nature; how ideas are formed and individual interests developed, seeking to understand the reason for behaviour and to consider individual outlooks on life (Thomas, 2013). The Interpretivist paradigm investigates the social world and is built on the foundation of a life-world ontology, which as Pontelis' (2015) research suggests, argues that theory and values are both integral parts of all observation. The paradigm is characterised by a need to understand the world subjectively, from the viewpoint of the participant's frame of reference, rather than a scientific measurement. The ability to explore, analyse and describe the way in which individuals create meaning is acknowledge as a key aim of this paradigm (McLeod, 2014) and therefore is the optimal lens through which to begin this study. Further, interpretivism is "interested in people and the way they relate" (Thomas, 2013, p.108) which is central to conducting research which aims to explore staffs' perceptions of their wellbeing in a school setting, focusing on retaining rich meaning. The meaningful insight which the data provided through this lens uncovered new ideas and data for future consideration.

While qualitative data has limitations in its subjective nature; there is little opportunity to replicate the study due to the results written from the researcher's perspective, this is

outweighed by its ability to produce subjective, rich data with thick description. This provides the opportunity to generate reflection-on-action, producing descriptive evidence of current professional practice. Evidence from Hammersley (2013) and Creswell (2009) suggested that gathering detailed evidence of the intricate and complex experience of individuals allows for better understanding of the effectiveness of policy in practice. In this research the aim was to generate data in relation to a WSA to Wellbeing which has not previously been undertaken in an Irish context, when focusing specifically on the staff wellbeing element. Hence, the researcher identified a gap in the research and critical analysis determined an interpretivist paradigm to be most suited to seeking evidence on this area.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

The research design links the research aim and questions to the processes for empirical data collection and data analysis in order to make viable conclusions from the data produced (Yin, 2009). Qualitative research generates holistic understanding of data which is contextual, non-numeric and generally unstructured in nature (Mason, 2002). This is produced through conversations with research participants in a natural setting (Creswell, 2009), and focuses primarily on ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions useful for exploratory and descriptive studies (Mouton, 2001). In educational, and indeed guidance counselling research, case study design assists in the construction of knowledge and allows illustration of qualitative data on a specific topic (DePoy & Gilson, 2008).

Yin (2009, p.4) stated that “the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events”. As this research focused on answering questions specific to ‘how’ and ‘why’ staff are catered to and impacted through wellbeing policy, the use of a case study was most suited. The strength of the case study design to this research is the ability to interview those directly impacted by the policy in addition to considering evidence provided in the previous literature and research, as presented in Chapter 2, as well as the current DES Wellbeing Framework. A single-case study can confirm, challenge or extend theory (Yin, 2009).

Qualitative case studies support the building and testing of theory. Merriam (2009) outlined the importance of these insights as they can be used as propositions for further research, playing an important role in advancing a field’s body of knowledge. In the case of the Wellbeing Framework for practice (DES, 2018a), such data can provide support for theory and reflective evidence towards evaluating, and creating, the most effective model possible. The Looking at Our Schools framework (DES, 2016), on which the Wellbeing Framework

was modelled, made explicit the need for reflection on practice, at all levels, to enable progress benefitting all involved. It also stated the need for “transparency, accountability and improvement” (DES, 2016, p.11), with a focus on what happens when professional practice is working well; collaboration being the key focus here. In professional practice, Schon (1991) evidenced reflective practice as the way in which professionals become aware of their knowledge base and learn from their experience. In this manner, evaluating what works well and what needs improvement is a constant practice, with action being taken consistently in line with this invaluable feedback to create the best model possible, adapting with changing environmental needs. Therefore, the data gathered through a qualitative case study approach will enable further reflection and potentially lead to more effective practice.

Case study research includes both single and multiple-case studies (Yin, 2009). The author noted four types of case study, however in this research a single, holistic case was chosen on the basis that the research focuses on a representative case where the objective is to “capture the circumstances and conditions...assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average institution” (p.48). Additionally, the use of the single-case study design is a benefit as there has been no research in an Irish context of this research matter and the descriptive data alone would be revelatory (Yin, 2009). While a multiple case study design would be more robust, as a novice researcher one’s limitations must be considered, in addition to the time and resources available at the time of research.

### **3.4 Participant Access and Sampling**

The source of data collection was a sample of Post Primary staff in a case school whose knowledge and experience of the topic would generate valuable insights. The researcher used convenience sampling to decide on the school which was most accessible to the researcher in the given timeframe. The researcher contacted the Principal (Gatekeeper) of the school seeking permission to conduct research with staff (Appendix A). Permission was granted, however, owing to the closure of schools, the decision was made not to contact potential participants until the end of March 2020. The staff were provided with the Informed Consent form and Research Privacy Notice, in addition to the Participant Information letter, at this time (Appendices B & C). For the research, two Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), two teachers and two members of management were required for interview to allow for the appropriate staff sample. Fourteen staff members responded by the deadline and a random sample of these, according to role, were interviewed.

Prior to the interview, the participants were briefed on the confidentiality aspect of the method, further reinforcing the information provided on the documentation supplied during recruitment. Due to the social distancing restrictions, all interviews were via online platform or audio-recorded over phone. Informed Consent forms were gathered prior to beginning the interview process, which took place mid April. The date and time were convenient to the participant and the choice of online platform or audio-recorded phone call was the participant's prerogative also. The researcher followed a framework of core questions with additional follow up or probe questions noted for use as necessary (Appendix D). This framework gave a structure which not only ensured consistent questioning but allowed for flexibility to respond to the narrative of the participant (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The framework consisted of thematic areas: understanding of wellbeing, experience of a WSA to wellbeing, support of management and peers and support of Government and Department of Education agencies. All interviews were approximately thirty minutes in length. Ethical sensitivity was at the fore of the researcher's mind and preparation for this was in the form of identifying ethical issues that may arise in advance (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The interviews were transcribed by the researcher after each interview and a copy was sent to each participant for respondent validation, ensuring accuracy of content (Bell, 2005). All participants responded, confirming the transcripts' accurateness.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The data collection for this research was preceded by Ethical Approval received from the University of Limerick Ethics committee on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The data collection took place in April 2020 and involved semi-structured interviews with six staff members in one school. A test interview was conducted prior to beginning the fieldwork.

#### ***3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews***

Flick (2015) noted that semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to lead the discussion in greater depth. This can open new pathways, which were not originally considered, which Gray (2014, p.386) notes can help "towards meeting the research objectives". It allows the interviewer to probe further, should additional detail be required. The predominant limitation of semi-structured interviews is the desire to 'please' the interviewer (Patton, 2002). The importance of building trust and power relations in this situation need to be addressed at the onset. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) further reinforced the need for a meaning-making partnership between the interviewee and

interviewer. Additional considerations include the time consuming and subjective nature of such a method (Bell, 2005; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). However, Braun and Clarke (2013) evidence that it is the best method in allowing for detailed, rich and often unanticipated accounts. It is important to bear in mind that interviewing does not, however, automatically guarantee the collection of rich data and the production of meaningful insights (Schultze & Avital, 2011). The onus is on the researcher, as the instrument and analyst, to conscientiously conduct the interview and scrutinize the data generated. Flick (2015) stipulated that if the aims of the research are linked to the interview construction, it will gather more salient data.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

When analysing data, the qualitative researcher attempts to make sense and interpret the phenomena in terms of the meaning the participants place on them (Creswell, 2009). The objective of data analysis is to uncover solutions to one's research questions (Merriam, 2009). While Maguire and Delahunt (2017) state that the qualitative researcher is often described as a research instrument itself, thematic analysis was decided upon due to the flexible nature of this analysis method. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) stated that "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data". This analysis method organises and describes the data set in detail, allowing for clarification and focused findings.

While the semi-structured interviews were categorised in four thematic areas, the data which emerged under each section required careful analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013) cautioned against the pitfall of using the individual questions themselves as themes; this would only summarise and organise the data, rather than analyse. Therefore Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis was utilised as it provided a systematic procedure to decipher codes and themes from the qualitative data (2017). The benefit of thematic analysis lies in producing "rigorous and high-quality analysis" (2017, p.297), identifying patterns intrinsic to experiential research focused on views, perspectives and behaviours.

To begin examination of the data generated, the interview was transcribed immediately to ensure full analysis. The data was anonymised to ensure confidentiality by allocating numbers to each participant and changing or deleting any identifying or unnecessary information. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was then followed rigorously. This involved coding all the data before identifying and reviewing the four main themes which emerged (Appendix E). Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions and motivations.

Step one required familiarisation with data. This consisted of listening to the interviews and readings the transcripts multiple times to seek clarity in tone and meaning. Step two sought to generate initial codes. This began on a semantic level, “not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84), however while moving towards step three’s search for themes, this progressed to a latent level, beginning to “examine the underlying ideas” (p.84). Once established, step four served the refine and review these themes before establishing the defined themes in step five (Appendix F). Tabular format was used to provide clarity on the initial codes which produced emergent themes (Fig. 3.1). Thematic analysis concluded with step six, producing the findings report.

Code	Interview 1:	Interview 2:	Interview 3:	Interview 4:	Interview 5:	Interview 6:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Togetherness/team/Support</li> <li>• Content in work</li> <li>• Working with others</li> <li>• More conscious of wellbeing (personally and socially)</li> <li>• Speaking about wellbeing openly</li> <li>• Changing/evolving society/seeking help seen as a strength now</li> <li>• Help for students available</li> <li>• Quarter students may not seek help</li> <li>• Effect of students on staff</li> <li>• Focus on what’s important during work</li> <li>• Love of work/Happy workplace/Fulfilling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content/Values/Belonging</li> <li>• Capable/skill set</li> <li>• Wellbeing for all Inclusive</li> <li>• Importance of relationships with colleagues</li> <li>• Holistic approach to education emerging/addressing needs of students more</li> <li>• Collegiality/working together build positive relationships</li> <li>• Information communicated via staff email</li> <li>• Support of management</li> <li>• Wellbeing ingrained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic nature of wellbeing</li> <li>• Not all wellbeing activities are known</li> <li>• Teacher wellbeing forgotten/added workload from policy change</li> <li>• Policy created with no strategy to implement/lack of framework too much too soon</li> <li>• Support of wellbeing rather than a provision for wellbeing</li> <li>• Give wellbeing a status/place value/importance on wellbeing</li> <li>• Emotional and physical wellbeing needs emphasis</li> <li>• Need to embed wellbeing in school culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy/Content/stress management/valued</li> <li>• Holistic nature of wellbeing</li> <li>• Importance of relationships</li> <li>• More focus on wellbeing now/awareness of others/self-awareness</li> <li>• Value placed upon wellbeing</li> <li>• Common goal</li> <li>• Prominence of anxiety in recent years</li> <li>• School as sanctuary</li> <li>• Wellbeing leading to awareness of the cause behind behaviours/awareness of others-empathy?</li> <li>• Move from academic focus to holistic</li> <li>• Wellbeing leading to awareness of individual needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplicity needed</li> <li>• Content/safe</li> <li>• Wellbeing of self and others</li> <li>• Balance/awareness of wellbeing/changing perspectives</li> <li>• DES information given on wellbeing</li> <li>• Investment in wellbeing</li> <li>• Increased importance of wellbeing/giving wellbeing an identity/status</li> <li>• Making wellbeing visible/Recognition/speaking about wellbeing</li> <li>• Culture of wellbeing- implications for future of individuals/society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community focus of wellbeing</li> <li>• Support/Resilience/knowledge to deal with wellbeing</li> <li>• Increased awareness of wellbeing</li> <li>• Support structure students</li> <li>• Support of management/approachable</li> <li>• Staff wellbeing/need for support recognised</li> <li>• Online support for all</li> <li>• Giving wellbeing a status/making the link to life-long learning/skills and wellbeing prominent</li> <li>• Wellbeing promotion should be visible/evident in culture of the school</li> </ul>

Fig. 3.1 Section of Codes table (overall themes)

Thematic mapping was also applied to the case study as an additional means to reinforce the findings. This involved using a theoretical lens to analyse the data, establishing themes (Thomas, 2013). The data which emerged served to add further depth to the findings and increased insight into the research area (Appendix G).

### 3.7 Validity & Reliability

Validity and Reliability are key considerations for any research; however it required an increased level of clarity when related to a novice researcher. “Validity is an important key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless” (Cohen *et al.* 2003, p.105). Qualitative research must be conducted in a rigorous and methodical manner to be accepted as trustworthy. This method of analysis requires enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible (Nowell *et al.* 2017, p.1). It is a complex concept however an essential element of the research process (Cohen *et al.* 2011). It can be classified as follows:

1. Internal validity: research findings are representative of the study

2. Concept validity: measure of a phenomenon in relation to theoretical explanation
3. External validity: a phenomenon is generalised to the conditions presented (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Bias and reflexivity were carefully considered to ensure this research was valid. In order for this research to be valid, measures had to be taken to ensure that bias was prevented. In carrying out research and analysing the data, the researcher took measures to ensure the credibility of the research was protected; member checks preceding data analysis catered to this as participants were asked to check and confirm the interpretation of their transcribed data, allowing them to check the contents for accuracy through respondent validation (Silverman, 2014). The researcher adhered to additional procedures such as ensuring coding was accurate and inherent bias was clarified. “As you collect case study evidence, you must quickly review the evidence and continually ask yourself why events or facts appear as they do” (Yin, 2009, p.69).

Thomas (2013) stated that reliability in qualitative research requires constant comparison to ensure that consistency is achieved. Reliability in qualitative research needs to be thought of in terms of dependability and trustworthiness of data collection and data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013) reinforce that multiple realities often exist in qualitative work; however trustworthiness allows a version of reliability to be applied to this research. Dependability in qualitative research can be defined as the stability of data over time and over conditions (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Pilot testing of the interview was conducted prior to beginning data collection and ensured that the interview questions themselves were impartial and unbiased.

### **3.8 Role of the Researcher**

Reflexive researchers reflect about their biases, values and personal background and how these may affect their interpretation during research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The way in which the role of the researcher, as the instrument and analyst in this study, impacts the research required self reflection and reflexivity over the research process. Yin (2009, p. 106) outlined that “you have two jobs: (a) follow your own line of inquiry and (b) to ask your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner”.

One’s past experiences may cause a researcher to search for evidence to support their world view which could colour the themes they seek in the data presented (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To counter this, rigorous reflexivity, reflection during data collection and consultation

with the research supervisor is necessary. Berger (2015, p.220) refers to “critical self-evaluation of the researcher’s positionality” in this instance. Thomas (2013) alludes to the researcher as an insider acting with participants. Therefore, as the researcher interviewing participants, it is important to identify how one’s own positionality is likely to affect the interpretation of data and to monitor this throughout the data collection and analysis phases (Merriam, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). “Each qualitative research approach has specific techniques for conducting, documenting, and evaluating data analysis processes, but it is the individual researcher’s responsibility to assure rigor and trustworthiness” (Nowell *et al.* 2017, p.2). To safe guard against this, the researcher kept a diary to record thoughts before and after each interview. Discussions on positionality with my supervisor and reflection upon this in a reflexive manner was necessary, particularly during the initial stages of research design.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

In conducting social research, the respect and safety of participants is an important consideration (Thomas, 2017). The researcher is bound by the ethical principles and stipulations of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors’ Code of Ethics (IGC, 2012), the National Centre for Guidance in Education Research Code of Ethics (NCGE, 2008) and the University of Limerick Research Ethics committee. The main ethical principles underpinning all research is outlined as “respect for rights and the dignity of the person, competence, responsibility and integrity” (NCGE, 2008, p.2). This requires careful analysis across all aspects of the research process, from planning through to the final report.

Undertaking research requires professional responsibility and consideration of those volunteering to contribute to the study. At all times, the potential for harm must be minimal to nil and the rationale behind choosing to conduct research at all be carefully considered. As Hearne (2013, p.3) noted “the over-riding principle involved is the professional responsibility we have as practitioner-researchers to protect the dignity and wellbeing of our research participants at all times”. Thomas (2013) further noted that the rights of the participants and their stake in the research process must be well thought-out.

Before beginning the research, Ethical Approval was required from the University of Limerick Research Ethics committee. Once approved (Appendix H), permission had to be sought from the Gatekeeper to access permission to contact potential participants. The potential participants had to be informed of the GDPR, confidentiality and ethical aspects of

choosing to participate in the study which was provided in the form of the Informed Consent form, Research Privacy notice and Participant information letter. Those who chose to participate were made aware of the cost to them of participating in the research; approximately thirty minutes of their time, and were made aware that they are protected by anonymising the data gathered and storing this data in a secure, UL approved location. The benefit to volunteers of participating in the research was outlined as their ability to contribute their opinion and expertise on the WSA to Wellbeing which in turn may benefit their wider school community.

While interviews could not take place face-to-face, the decision was made to use Microsoft Teams or audio-recorded phone calls to protect the data produced fully. To address my duty of care as researcher to the participants, volunteers were referred to relevant agencies that are available should anything be triggered for them (Employee Assistance Programme, Supervision). Details of this were emailed upon the completion of the interview as appropriate.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The ability to determine a solid foundation prior to beginning research allows for consideration of methodological aspects which reinforce the research aim. This chapter outlined the research rationale and questions which led to the choice of interpretivist paradigm and a single-case design. Critical analysis of the choices made by the researcher highlighted both benefits and limitations to overcome, which have been presented. Measures were taken to ensure that the welfare of participants was protected at all times, as well as ensuring that the data itself was collected and analysed in a reliable and rigorous manner to produce credible findings.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the main findings which emerged during primary data collection. This involved interviewing six members of staff from the case study school. This included two teachers, two Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and two members of management, as outlined in Table 4.1. The qualitative data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) six phase framework for thematic analysis.

### 4.1 Fieldwork

The primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The interview data was analysed using thematic mapping implementing Braun and Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis method. The research aimed to provide a deeper understanding of a WSA to Wellbeing from the staff's perspective. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the staff involved, however, to give perspective to the research, their staff role is outlined in Table 4.1.

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Staff Position</b>
Participant #1	SNA
Participant #2	Teacher
Participant #3	Teacher
Participant #4	SNA
Participant #5	Management
Participant #6	Management

Table 4.1 Participant profiles

As semi-structured interviews were the primary data source, analysis of the data required listening to the recorded interviews a number of times, noting not only the accuracy of the transcripts but tone and meaning. Following this, member checking was conducted ensuring that the participants were happy that their meaning was understood and the data accurate. This concluded the familiarisation stage of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The semi-structured interview was prearranged into four areas; participants' understanding of wellbeing, their experience of a WSA to wellbeing, their impression of support from peers and management for wellbeing and evidence of support from the government and department of education agencies for staff implementing the wellbeing framework. In order to outline the

findings which emerged, these four key areas will be used to structure the qualitative research outcomes.

## **4.2 Summary of Findings from Interviews**

To determine the findings from the interviews, stages two to five of the thematic analysis process were closely followed. Coding and generating themes have been evidenced in the previous chapter (Fig 3.1), however while reviewing the themes under the thematic question areas, tabular format was utilised to clarify commonalities and diverging narratives under each questioning quarter, creating transparency prior to naming the findings and progressing to this final stage of writing up the data which emerged. A cross section of this is presented in Fig. 4.1 below; these findings will now be presented under the four thematic questioning areas.

### ***4.2.1 Understanding of Wellbeing***

During data collection, questions one to five dealt with the participant's understanding of wellbeing. There was a consensus among staff that wellbeing on a personal level meant being content in oneself and wellbeing on a work level included the same contentedness but a number of other factors in addition to this. While personal wellbeing appeared to be contextual and individual; "happiness and being content in one's life" (Participant #4) could mean different things to different individuals, there was a more definite and multi-faceted level to wellbeing in work presented. The participants' narratives presented a view of wellbeing in the workplace as holistic and which should include a number of key factors such as "positive mental, emotional and physical health" (Participant #6). While participants were asked specifically what wellbeing in the workplace meant to them, most related to positively promoting these factors across the school community, rather than on an individual staff level. Probing further on the component which staff felt contributed most to their own wellbeing in work revealed relationships, particularly those with whom the staff worked with directly in their own department, or on a daily basis, as the primary component. "The fact that I've got good relationships with other members of the department and to know that if you ever have a bad day you're with colleagues, with people who are in similar positions to you, who understand it" (Participant #3). Feeling supported in addition to feeling valued and respected emerged as aspects of relationships which staff felt that aided their own wellbeing positively on a consistent basis.

Contrasting opinions on the understanding of wellbeing appeared in two forms: having resilience and the need for simplicity. While there was mention of having the knowledge and skills to deal with the more difficult aspects of life, only one participant noted resilience specifically in relation to their understanding of wellbeing, “resilience to face what we all will inevitably face at some stage in life” (Participant #6). The need for simplicity and the way in which everyday tasks contribute to wellbeing was noted (Participant #5). While these are contrasting opinions, there is a common theme also. The commonality underlying these diverging opinions relates to the lifelong aspect of wellbeing and the view of these participants that consistency is the key to wellbeing. Having the resilience to deal with what arises in life and building simple practices into each day which bring joy allows for staff to “do their best to make sure that they not only contribute to their own wellbeing but to everybody else’s wellbeing” (Participant #5).

#### ***4.2.2 Experience of a Whole School Approach (WSA) to Wellbeing***

Throughout the interview process, it became evident that while there has been awareness created of wellbeing on a school community level through a WSA to wellbeing, there are also many practices that have been in place for a number of years which have now been formalised as ‘wellbeing’. Each participant noted that wellbeing is “much more spoken about” (Participant #1) and that there is a vocabulary around the topic which didn’t exist until recently. These factors were noted as positive aspects of a WSA to wellbeing. As this line of questioning developed, participants noted the change not only on an educational level but in society itself; a shift in personal and social consciousness related to wellbeing. Interviewees similarly noted that there is an increased awareness of students’ needs and the understanding that there is a cause behind behaviours which students present has moved beyond the Guidance Department into the entire school community. Participant #4 noted that “teachers and SNAs are realising that more now and connecting back to the fact that there’s a reason why that child’s acting out, there’s a reason we’re seeing that they’re stressed”.

Another impact of the WSA to wellbeing related to the productivity which a team approach to wellbeing allows. While the participants noted that collegiality and support within staff has always been present, this seemed to move to a larger scale through a WSA to wellbeing, with staff moving from working together in various teams or departments to working together collectively as an entire community. Interestingly, this area also presented the narrative that staff can be overlooked in the WSA to wellbeing and that the staff itself play a key role in

creating the environment in which wellbeing can thrive or decline. It was noted by two participants that they are beginning to become aware of their own limits and the demanding nature of staff roles are coming to the fore through this focus on wellbeing (Participants #1 and #5). Findings which emerged in relation to the way in which wellbeing is catered to everyday produced data which reflects the practices which staff have implemented prior to the introduction of wellbeing and which now have become formalised, “teachers always looked out for their pupils but I think it’s more of a coordinated approach now” (Participant #2).

#### ***4.2.3 Support of Management and Peers***

While seeking to determine the support for wellbeing from management and peers, all staff presented narratives which focused on the ripple effect of feeling valued. Staffs’ perceptions suggested that the focus on implementing the wellbeing framework has increased awareness of how wellbeing impacts performance. This was predominately focused on staff performance, with some reference made to student performance to a lesser extent, “when people are happy and content, they’re better able to meet the needs of the students. When the students are happy they’re better able to learn” (Participant #4).

All participants noted that there is an increase in collegiality through the WSA to wellbeing. There was also a consensus that management are both supportive and approachable which led to a greater feeling of inclusivity and feeling valued. However, what was less clear here was the impact which the wellbeing framework has had upon this perception; the narratives suggested that these views have been consistent for a number of years rather than an aspect which has changed since the implementation of the wellbeing policy; “I’ve always found our Principal to be very supportive” (Participant #2).

The majority of participants (four out of six) noted the egalitarian relationship amongst staff and the impact which this has upon their wellbeing. Participant #1 encompassed this aspect when stating that “I feel that there really is no boundaries like you’re an SNA, you’re a teacher, you’re a this, you’re a that, so I feel that the wellbeing is probably very good within the staff”. These participants also noted that this comes from a top-down approach and further alluded to the impact of management’s perception of wellbeing on creating a positive view of wellbeing as an essential aspect of education, “it’s not optional and it’s for the good of everybody” (Participant #3).

All participants noted that time is a resource which is essential for wellbeing but is something which is scarce at present. Each participant noted the necessity of time together regularly as a

staff and further reinforced the impact of communication and feedback on staff wellbeing. These appeared as areas which need attention in the case school; from a lack of two-way communication at times to the impact which having more than one staffroom has upon staff wellbeing. Each candidate noted the positive impact which having a wellbeing team and coordinator has upon staff wellbeing particularly, while two participants noted that this is just the beginning. These participants noted that not all wellbeing initiatives are ‘known’ about by all members of staff and that there is a need to make wellbeing more visible in the school (Participant#3, Participant#6). Both the wellbeing coordinator and team have been established only since September 2019. One aspect which emerged was that while there has been a support for staff wellbeing, it is also to a lesser extent than student wellbeing and often which is forgotten about completely at times. The view which was presented in all narratives was that there has been awareness of staff wellbeing created now and there is also scope for important practices to be put in place to provide for staff wellbeing.

#### ***4.2.4 Support of Government and Department of Education agencies***

The most prevalent aspects in relation to the support which staff receive to implement wellbeing were that time and a clear structure are required from the level of policy makers. The narratives indicated that there is a need for responsibility for wellbeing not to lie solely with staff in individual schools and that more work is necessary at a policy level to provide a clear structure for wellbeing which schools can implement on a phased basis, rather than the “information overload” (Participant #4) from a variety of sources (Participant #5) which was received.

Each member of staff was able to name the Employee Assistance Scheme as the agency which the DES has recommended should they face challenges to their wellbeing, however only two participants were able to outline additional online resources for wellbeing. These were consequently student wellbeing focused and the majority of participants noted the need for focused CPD to support staff wellbeing. Each school received a one-day workshop from the Junior Cycle for Teachers(JCT) organisation on wellbeing, however the impact which this had on the participants was insignificant at best and a cause for discomfort for two participants who found that it “was very geared to teachers and that day wasn’t actually geared for SNAs. I felt that we were completely out of our comfort zone...I didn’t feel like that was a whole school thing, it seemed very much like a teachers thing and we were kind of sitting there going oh my God please don’t ask me any questions” (Participant #1). The ironic

nature of a day which was meant to promote wellbeing for all but which actually caused some members of staff to feel excluded and ill at ease was not lost on the researcher and presents as a cause for concern.

Two participants outlined a slightly different view of the support which was necessary from the government and DES for a WSA to wellbeing; the need for a national community of wellbeing practitioners and a policy connection to be established between Primary and Post Primary level schools in relation to wellbeing. While all participants were able to present little evidence of the support which has been received from DES level, the participants noted these areas as vital aspects to work towards and which could impact the provision of wellbeing to all members of the school community in an efficient manner. These narratives raise the argument of the value which wellbeing holds at the level of DES and government when the data collected suggests that factors such as time and a clear structure for wellbeing implementation has not been provided.

	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6
<b>Understanding of wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content</li> <li>Working with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content</li> <li>Valued</li> <li>Place in society/belonging</li> <li>Capable</li> <li>Inclusive</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Holistic approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holistic: physical, mental, emotional and psychological</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Support</li> <li>Content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Happy/content</li> <li>Looked after</li> <li>Being well</li> <li>Appreciated</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Having information</li> <li>Feeling valued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simplicity</li> <li>Content</li> <li>Safe</li> <li>Work-life balance</li> <li>Togetherness/Relationships</li> <li>Respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holistic: mental, emotional, physical</li> <li>Support</li> <li>Resilience</li> <li>Knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>WSA to Wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Together/team/support</li> <li>Speaking about wellbeing</li> <li>More social and personal consciousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs of students addressed</li> <li>Collegiality</li> <li>Good communication vital for wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential to do so much good, however too much being required too soon</li> <li>Need for a detailed plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More focus on wellbeing</li> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Management see value in wellbeing</li> <li>Collective focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calm approach</li> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Recognition of complexity individuals face</li> <li>Catering to needs</li> <li>Value placed on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Importance of wellbeing having recognition</li> <li>Focus on more than academic success</li> </ul>
<b>Support: Management &amp; Peers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colleagues as equals</li> <li>Top down approach to wellbeing necessary</li> <li>Individual yet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive Principal</li> <li>Wellbeing Wednesday</li> <li>More staff initiatives</li> <li>Seeking feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not all wellbeing initiatives are known about</li> <li>Need to place value on wellbeing</li> <li>Wellbeing needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equality among staff</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Ingrain wellbeing in all school policies</li> <li>Need for focus on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collegiality</li> <li>Coming together in tough times</li> <li>Facilities for students and staff important</li> <li>CPD supported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open door/approachable management</li> <li>Recognising the need to support staff wellbeing</li> <li>Managing</li> </ul>
<b>Support: Government, DES &amp; associated support agencies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>JCT training: focused only on teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Led to feeling v. uncomfortable</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outside agencies</li> <li>Time needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sense of teacher wellbeing forgotten about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many changes</li> </ul> </li> <li>Policy level not taking staff into</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One agency needed to support wellbeing implementation</li> <li>Overload of information</li> <li>DES: need for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information overload</li> <li>DES support: online</li> <li>Time necessary</li> <li>Focused CPD necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online support</li> <li>Outside agencies available</li> </ul>

Fig. 4.1 Section of Thematic Analysis

### 4.3 Overarching themes which emerged from the findings

In addition to thematic analysis of the data, four overall themes emerged. These were predominant areas consistent across each of the interviews, which add further depth to the previous findings. This section aims to provide a deeper understanding of staff's perspective of implementing the wellbeing framework. Through thematic mapping, patterns emerged as outlined in the Thematic Map presented in Fig. 4.2.



Fig. 4.2 Thematic Map

The themes which emerged are clarified briefly below, to further reinforce the data which emerged.

### 4.3.1 Defining wellbeing

In addition to the data which outlined staffs' understanding of wellbeing, the theme of defining wellbeing noted additional aspects which impact the ability of staff to implement a wellbeing policy. While all participants relayed their understanding of wellbeing on a personal and work level, the emphasis on staffs' need for clarity on the term itself materialised. All participants noted that there is a need for one specific definition for wellbeing in education, catering to the needs of all members of the school as "wellbeing means different things to different people" (Participant #4).

While all interviewees agreed that contentedness was a key aspect of wellbeing, what further emerged was a feeling of fulfilment in their work and "being content in your personal and professional life" (Participant #3). Relationships were previously discussed as the main component which staff felt contributed to wellbeing. However, further analysis uncovered that relationships within the school community, between staff and students, also emerged as an important influence on staff wellbeing. Participant #1 spoke of the importance of rapport with students when stating "I know some days I've come out a better person because of who I work with."

Interestingly, having access to information about student needs arose also in terms of feeling equipped to deal with matters as they arose in the school day, with participants alluding to this as affecting both the students' and their own wellbeing equally, in a positive or negative manner. The need for contribution to wellbeing as a community endeavour, including not only staff and students but parents also was evident; "if we had more of a sense of what parents want...if you know that then that better helps you to support the child" (Participant #4).

#### ***4.3.2 WSA to Wellbeing***

The findings from thematic analysis outlined the ability to focus on the needs of students and that through working together as a staff, a more productive and coordinated approach to wellbeing was achieved. Thematic mapping further noted the productive nature of a community approach to wellbeing, referring to the opportunity to build a solid foundation to benefit all involved through a WSA, "this is the opportunity to look at things from everybody's perspective and for everybody to have a say in promoting wellbeing within the school and that nobody's working in isolation" (Participant #6).

Considerations emerged from all participants in relation to the WSA to wellbeing and the role staff play within this. Data analysis highlighted that there is an important distinction between staff and students, with staff as the 'leaders' of wellbeing, i.e. those who should present a model of best practice which students can learn from in a community setting, "if you're praising the kids and you're praising each other in front of the kids, they can see it's a positive place to be" (Participant #1). The school environment and curriculum was also noted as factors to consider within this.

All participants referred to the supports available for themselves and students regularly as being an important aspect of whole school wellbeing. From a staff perspective, support was highlighted mainly as an internal framework, either provided by management within the school or through their own colleagues. Participant #1 noted the strength within support from colleagues in providing a WSA to wellbeing in stating "I have had staff members that I could actually go to...with confidence and confidentiality and they were helpful and supportive...there's always someone that you could go to".

#### ***4.3.3 Culture of Wellbeing***

While thematic analysis outlined the perception of an evolving society and the impact which this has upon the implementation of wellbeing in schools, the necessity of a culture of

wellbeing was consistent across each narrative. This consisted of identifying Post Primary school as an important developmental stage, the value which is placed upon wellbeing and the need to make wellbeing visible.

The skills developed in Post Primary education have a lasting impact on individuals outside of academic ability according to interviewees, “wellbeing is as important as probably getting an A in your honours Maths in terms of how your life will proceed from when you leave school”, (Participant #6). Participant #3 also emphasised that “failure isn’t an option here...it’s way too important...we all know that we remember things that happened in secondary school” and noted that this is a time of real opportunity to create positive change.

The credibility of wellbeing was outlined by participants as a key success factor for a culture of wellbeing. Many participants referred to the effort made in relation to wellbeing but a focus on making this explicit was necessary, “the minute you walk into our school, you should know that there is an emphasis on wellbeing and student support and that it’s not just all about academic success” (Participant #6).

#### ***4.3.4 Opportunities for Improvement***

While thematic analysis evidenced that implementing a wellbeing policy has increased awareness of wellbeing, some opportunities for development emerged across the narratives. These predominately focused on staff wellbeing provision, creating a structured approach and providing consistent support.

Two participants noted that while there has been a focus on staff wellbeing, it has not been equal to that of student wellbeing, “there wasn’t a balance between trying to meet students’ needs and meet your own needs” (Participant #4). All interviewees noted the opportunity for further support in school for staff specifically. Participant #5 outlined the demanding nature of this profession, referring to “the busyness, the frantic nature of the day”. The duty of care to others, while maintaining your own wellbeing seemed evident in this narrative.

There was also a focus on support from policy makers and DES in relation to a WSA to Wellbeing. A common thread emerged in relation to the amount of information provided and the fact that staff would be responsible for implementing a WSA, “I think they left out the wellbeing of teachers. I think they forgot about the workload and the amount of changes that been asked of teachers, without considering the impact that was going to have on teacher’s wellbeing, on their stress levels, their ability to keep up with things coming in” (Participant #3).

The participants also outlined that there has been much information about a WSA to wellbeing provided, but this has been in a large quantity, which participants found overwhelming and somewhat unhelpful. It was noted as having a lack of direction and being “too wordy, too aspirational” (Participant #4). The need for a simple but precise framework and accountability emerged as being of extreme importance to the success of a wellbeing policy. This related back to the credibility of wellbeing and the value it holds with the culture of the school previously mentioned. A framework for wellbeing was noted as a manageable yet tangible method to ensure that wellbeing is embedded within the school culture.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Data analysis from semi-structured interviews outlined the perceptions of staff in relation to implementation of a WSA to wellbeing. The case school implemented a wellbeing policy in accordance with the DES Wellbeing Framework (2018a). It is clear that staff support the focus on wellbeing as a whole school endeavour and see the benefit of implementing practices that increase awareness of wellbeing and provide skills which promote positive physical, emotional and mental health.

The findings also highlight the challenges which staff face in their endeavours to promote wellbeing and implement a WSA to wellbeing based on the information provided by DES. The barriers to an effective and inclusive wellbeing approach were noted by the participants as areas for opportunity rather than a permanent block to wellbeing in schools. However, action needs to be taken to overcome the hurdles presented should a truly WSA to wellbeing be achieved.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.0 Introduction**

The focus of this single-case study has been the examination of staff wellbeing within the Wellbeing plan in Post Primary schools. This chapter will discuss the overarching themes which emerged in the research findings, presenting a critical interpretation of the data in the context of previous research findings and in light of the research questions.

### **5.1 Outcomes**

The findings of this case study identify a number of issues central to a WSA to Wellbeing. The main findings which emerged related to the wellbeing policy provided by the DES, the way in which the policy is implemented in schools and the specific factors which contribute to staff wellbeing. The key findings will be briefly discussed under four themed subheadings in the following section.

### **5.2 Overview of Themes**

#### ***5.2.1 Defining ‘Wellbeing’***

Data analysis confirmed previous research that wellbeing is multi-faceted in nature and complex to define. While there were commonalities evident in the key components of a definition of wellbeing (physical, social, mental and being content), there was also a consensus that wellbeing is subjective and in order for a school to follow a Wellbeing policy, the need for a clear definition is imperative. This is in line with recent research noting that adverse consequences arise when individual perceptions of the term are not addressed, nor a common definition outlined ensuring that everyone is working towards a common goal (Thorburn, 2018).

Wellbeing has been described by the WHO and DES as a “a fluid way of being” which needs “nurturing throughout life” (DES, 2019, p.10). While the Wellbeing Framework alludes to the process of wellbeing, rather than as a target to be reached, it also places emphasis upon different elements of wellbeing throughout the framework and does not give one concise definition. This lack of clarity emerged through the narratives of the research participants who noted that “having the knowledge” was key to the wellbeing of staff. Feeling equipped to present a model of wellbeing for others to follow, while adequately tending to their own

wellbeing in the process, requires a clear definition of what it is that wellbeing should encompass in the school setting.

### ***5.2.2 WSA to Wellbeing***

Thematic analysis uncovered the importance of staff support from both their peers and management. This was noted as being highly beneficial in working towards a WSA to wellbeing, in addition to being a factor which contributed positively towards their own wellbeing. Hawkins (2017, p.9) similarly referred to the value of relating “more sensitively to colleagues” while Tough (2016) noted the ideal that in working as a community, there is the ability to flourish. Data analysis also outlined the multifaceted nature of staff roles today. Participants noted this as even more evident when implementing a wellbeing policy and the need for support now more than ever was emphasised. This corroborates evidence presented earlier this year that staff roles have now gone far beyond teaching and learning in the classroom (PDST, online, 2020).

While there was a consensus that working together towards wellbeing policy is the most effective approach, there were also some contradictory views presented by participants. Half of the participants noted the value of a unified approach and the ability to be more productive working in this manner; there’s “more of a coordinated approach now” (Participant #1). Previously, the DES noted that embedded within a WSA is the recognition that all members of the school community can have different needs at different times (2019, p.34). However, some variances emerged within the data analysis in relation to this. The focus upon student wellbeing over staff wellbeing emerged in the narratives of interviewees. While it is mentioned specifically in the Wellbeing framework that “wellbeing is as important for the staff as for the children and young people. Appropriate supports are available for staff wellbeing” (DES, 2019, p.40), the data suggested otherwise.

### ***5.2.3 Culture of Wellbeing***

The emerging needs of others and the change in the perceived notion of ‘help’ were highlighted by participants as evidence of the changes in society which the Wellbeing Framework conceptualises. Furthermore, participants noted the appearance of more empathetic views and actions throughout the school community since the Wellbeing policy was introduced. This ranged from awareness that the difficulties which students and staff face in their personal lives can impact upon the way they present in school, to moving towards non-judgemental, supportive discussions with others in the community; “even if we create a

culture where people don't rush to judgement about others when they're adults, that's not a bad way of managing" (Participant #5).

Data analysis highlighted adolescence as an important developmental stage and participants noted this as a great opportunity in terms of creating awareness of wellbeing and developing habits for positive lifelong development. Half of the participants noted this as a strength within the school, with staff providing support for students through the ability to "recognise that somebody isn't themselves" (Participant #6). It also posed an area of opportunity for others, who noted that all areas of wellbeing are not catered to within the wellbeing policy and which, in the case of the healthy eating policy, completely contradicts the good work being done through curriculum and other areas of the wellbeing plan; "they walk out of the SPHE classroom and straight into the canteen...what's the options? High fat, high sugar foods..." (Participant #3).

Finally, thematic analysis uncovered the mutually beneficial nature of wellbeing when driven through a top-down approach, with school management creating opportunities for success. This included making wellbeing 'visible' within the school environment as well as it's ethos and challenging the assumption that wellbeing activities are implicitly 'known' about by all in the school community. These aspects support the previous research that the ability to create a culture of wellbeing is the most effective way to consolidate the key areas of wellbeing curriculum, rather than a once-off activity (DES, HSE & DOH, 2013).

#### ***5.2.4 Opportunities for Improvement***

The findings indicated that while there has been a focus on wellbeing, it has not been equal to that of student wellbeing. Candidates recognised that in a school setting, students are the priority, "everyone has students' wellbeing at heart" (Participant #2) and this is in line with policy, which states that "the wellbeing needs and the best interests of our children and young people are a central focus of this policy" (DES, 2019, p.9). However, staff also noted that there needs to be more emphasis on the staff element should a WSA to wellbeing exist; "from a staff perspective- is there enough being done there? Not really no" (Participant #3). This is consistent with evidence that the ability to meet the broader challenges facing staff are taking a toll on health and wellbeing (Moynihan *et al.*, 2016).

The necessity of regular time together as a staff group and as a school community emerged from the case school. This was cited as potentially leading to better communication and relationships and a sense of connectedness. It was also noted as being difficult to achieve due to a lack of time created by trying to implement new policies while maintaining the previous

workload, “there’s so much we need time for” (Participant #2). Previous research noted that time is a limited resource in schools currently. Care of self and others, in addition to emotional wellbeing are compromised when there is an absence of resources (Thorburn, 2018).

A key area of concern which emerged in the findings was in relation to a clear structure and foundation on which to build Wellbeing policy. In relation to policies which should complement wellbeing, a disconnect between the policies in place in Primary schools and those in the Secondary schools which students transition to emerged. One participant noted that “success is built into primary schools” (Participant #3) and another referred to the value in starting small, “if they sent out a very simple framework, a very simple questionnaire and you could run with it, I think it would work” (Participant #4). The interviewees voiced the importance of wellbeing, particularly for students, and the disservice of only focusing on some aspects, “you’re either serious about wellbeing or you’re not” (Participant #3).

The factors which adversely contribute to staff wellbeing also need to be addressed at a school policy level according to the participants. Areas such as discipline and consistent reinforcement of the policies already in place were highlighted. The Wellbeing Framework specifies an approach to discipline resulting in issues resolved with “care, respect and consistency” (DES, 2019, p.40). Data analysis noted that one factor to reduce the risk of staff stress would be clearly communicating the student behaviour policy to pupils and parents and having this supported by school management, as well as teachers and SNAs, consistently.

The findings highlight that while there are many supports available from a variety of outside agencies online currently, there is a need for an approach similar to the previous Health Promoting School (HPS) structure. Participant #4 stated that “you had a link with every county...who could give them information, support, guidance and different kinds of in-service and that I think has really been lost”. Previous research notes that schools and staff cannot implement such a huge area of change alone as schools do not operate in isolation from the rest of their community (Schleicher, 2018).

### **5.3 Answering the Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to outline if there are any gaps in the current Wellbeing Policy specifically in relation to staff wellbeing. Thematic analysis indicated both strengths and weaknesses of the WSA to Wellbeing, in compliance with the DES Policy, in the case school. Important considerations for both policy and practice emerged from this data, which will now be discussed through addressing the research questions which underpinned this investigation.

***Research Question 1: How is staff wellbeing supported within the context of the Wellbeing plan in Post Primary schools?***

According to the data, wellbeing is supported through the work of the Wellbeing team and Wellbeing coordinator. Their work is informed by the DES Wellbeing Framework and the team itself was founded as a means to comply with the Wellbeing policy, presenting that the school is “serious about wellbeing” (Participant #5). However, merely complying with policy in the area of staff wellbeing seems to fail to address the needs of staff in the case school. Staff are becoming aware of what would aid their wellbeing but the time of the wellbeing team is being directed towards implementing the Wellbeing Framework, rather than addressing the needs of staff. Similar to the work of the OECD (2017), data analysis suggests that implementation of educational policies does not always lead to achievement of the intended outcomes of policy makers and in some cases the intended outcomes do not fully match the needs of the schools required to implement these policies. Previous research indicates that there can be a focus on formulating the policy with little to no follow-up on how to make the policy take effect in education (Hess, 2013). The distance between policy and practice is highlighted and the data from this study suggests not only the distance present but also the lack of consultation between policy makers and school stakeholders to determine the needs of those within the school itself. Both the lack of direction from policy makers and the inability to cater to the needs of those within schools are key factors which this research outlined; “I think that’s why we’re a bit lost at the minute because we have nothing to work towards, we have no set date where things have to be done” (Participant #4), “it has to be grounded in reality...there is such a body of materials for teachers to work around” (Participant #5) and “I think they left out the wellbeing of the teachers. I think they forgot about the workload and the amount of change that’s been asked of teachers, without actually considering the impact that that was going to have on teacher’s wellbeing, on their stress levels, their ability to keep up with all the new things coming in” (Participant #3). The wellbeing of staff is negated by this lack of direction and focus on their needs as presented in the Wellbeing Framework, therefore complying with this policy in itself is not supporting the wellbeing of staff.

Data analysis suggests that the main impact of the work of the Wellbeing team has been in increasing awareness of staff wellbeing. Collegiality and an increased focus on the staff working as a team was noted to have increased as a result of the introduction of the Wellbeing policy; “there’s a lot of collegiality within school, within the staff, and I think people look out for people” (Participant #6). However, the support of staff for one another

was also referred to as something which has been in place for a large number of years, therefore preceding the Wellbeing Plan; “well I think we’re a school who were always fairly good at it” (Participant #1).

The support of management for staff, which was referred to by participants, was not as a direct result of a focus on staff wellbeing led by the Wellbeing plan, but from the ethos of the school itself and the managerial style employed by the Principal and Vice Principals; “I’ve always found our Principal to be very supportive” (Participant #2). Taking this data into consideration, the Wellbeing Framework itself has increased awareness of the need for more of a focus on staff wellbeing; however, the very framework does not support the wellbeing of staff and in the areas aforementioned, it even adversely affects the wellbeing of staff to an extent.

***Research Question 2: To what extent does the current focus on a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing impact upon the wellbeing of staff?***

According to the participants, what has changed since the introduction of Wellbeing policy is the increased awareness of the wellbeing of all within the school community or at least the hope of increased compassion for others. It was noted that all stakeholders are “beginning to see how important it is in the overall scheme of things” (Participant #6). This is beginning to affect the way all involved in the school community relate to each other and is increasing the social capital as a result. As the literature review referred to, the benefits of social capital in a school setting is in developing connections and building upon the trust and reciprocity developed as part of those connections; the need to feel as though one belongs is “critical to resilience and wellbeing” (Roffey, 2013, p.39). The need to belong, feel content and the importance of relationships was cited by all participants as a key factor to their wellbeing. A WSA to Wellbeing has created awareness of the difficulties which all that enter the school could face on any given day. Data analysis suggests that there has been an increase in empathy since focusing on Wellbeing and consideration that while everyone may have different opinions, focusing on a common goal can bring everyone together; “personalities don’t always gel but I think in general most people generally really want the same thing. We all want our wellbeing to be good and we all want our students to be feeling well” (Participant #1). It also suggests that from a staff perspective, a WSA to Wellbeing is beginning to cater to the basic need of social and psychological support and the basic need to belong. Positively connecting to others provides alliance, support and emotional security and gives support in the face of adversity as well as self-validation (Majors, 2012).

Conversely, a WSA to Wellbeing has made apparent the many roles which the staff undertake on a daily basis and the toll this can have on their wellbeing. Previous research has noted that teacher wellbeing is impacted by a myriad of factors (McCallum *et al.* 2017) and that teachers are members of the caring professions (Hawkins, 2017). The research of these authors focuses specifically on teachers rather than staff. This study focused on the entire staff and has found that Post Primary staff face a range of tasks, outside their direct job description, on any given day. The increase in workload from implementing a new policy affects all members of the school staff, rather than just teachers. While it has created a focus on what positively impacts staff wellbeing, it also found and signified the need for staff CPD in relation to wellbeing. The importance of remembering that a WSA to wellbeing must include all stakeholders; students, teachers, SNAs, management, care takers, canteen staff, parents, in order to be a truly WSA was made explicit. While at a policy level, this makes sense and gives all involved the opportunity to voice their needs, at a practice level it is not only difficult to implement but takes time. In the literature review, it was established that enhanced self awareness and presence in the school community can have as much benefit as complex strategies and it is the atmosphere of the school which determines a wellbeing approach (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Tough, 2016; Hawkins, 2017). Similarly, thematic analysis uncovered the need for a culture of wellbeing and recognition that there are complexities facing all those within the school community. However, the issue of time and increasing responsibilities facing staff were only highlighted with the implementation of the Wellbeing Framework. Research from the case school outlined the way in which management provides time for meetings, CPD and welcomes and supports innovative ideas to benefit the school community. This is not as a result of the Wellbeing Framework but something that has been a part of the school ethos and managerial style and precedes the policy itself. Data which emerged directly relating to the wellbeing policy outlined an awareness of the diverse nature of staff roles and the “frantic nature of the day” (Participant #5). It also uncovered the need for time to come together as a staff regularly, which would in turn benefit staff relationships and communication which participants noted as being an important facet of wellbeing, “there’s so much that we need time for” (Participant #1) and “support for each other is so important” (Participant #4). The perception staff, and all stakeholders in the school community, have of each other and the way they relate to each other provides evidence of how wellbeing is embedded in the school culture (Noble & McGrath, 2012). This study suggests that this awareness has appeared in light of the

Wellbeing policy but further research is necessary on whether this is the case nationally or whether trying to implement another policy working within the same work day is the cause.

***Secondary Research Questions:***

***1. To what extent does staff recognise the association between focusing on their own wellbeing and promoting wellbeing amongst students?***

In the case school staff noted the wellbeing of students as being the most important factor. Staff mentioned the reciprocal nature of wellbeing, “happy staff, happy students, happy school” (Participant #1), yet focused predominately on student wellbeing, noting that incorporating wellbeing impacts upon other areas of their life outside of academics and that wellbeing is “as important as getting an A in your Honours Maths in terms of your future” (Participant #6). The participants referred to wellbeing initiatives, managerial support and collegiality as aiding their wellbeing in work but did not specifically note the link between the ability to focus on their own wellbeing and their productivity and ability to model wellbeing for students. Data analysis points to the lack of training which staff have had on their own Wellbeing as the result of this surface level awareness. It also signifies the impact which focusing on student wellbeing as a priority over staff wellbeing has; staff who are implementing a wellbeing policy without fully catering to their own wellbeing. The research presented in the literature review outlined the findings that once emphasis is placed upon the wellbeing of staff, then the wellbeing of students is more effectively addressed (Soini *et al.* 2010; O’Brien, 2012; Roffey, 2013; Awartani & Looney, 2015; Hawkins, 2017; McCallum *et al.* 2017). The Wellbeing Framework outlines the need to equally promote staff and student wellbeing and a range of online supports for staff. However, the CPD is limited as yet for staff wellbeing and is not compulsory. Data analysis pointed to the need to persevere in times of change and that all staff may not be immediately on board with policy changes; “of course you’re going to have people who are negative about what’s going on but that shouldn’t stop what’s happening in the school from taking place either” (Participant #6). It also uncovered the discomfort the one Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) Wellbeing CPD session caused some staff; “I felt that we were completely out of our comfort zone and it was very geared towards teachers that day” (Participant #1). These considerations should be priority areas at a policy level; the preparation of staff for a significant policy change and the need to be inclusive of all staff, particularly when asking them to implement a WSA to Wellbeing, is vital.

**2. *How effective is the wellbeing policy currently in place in promoting staff wellbeing?***

The participants refer to the importance of wellbeing; the awareness which the Wellbeing plan has raised and outline areas for improvement in the current wellbeing strategy. However, they were unable to provide evidence of the way in which the policy promotes staff wellbeing outside of creating awareness of it or that the policy states that staff wellbeing should be part of the WSA to Wellbeing. While the Wellbeing Framework outlines that it is to be assessed through the SSE model and that students can include wellbeing on the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA), there is no specific mention of tracking staff wellbeing. Assessing subjective perspectives of wellbeing and incorporating both student and staff perspectives changes the focus towards authentic wellbeing promotion (Kern *et al.* 2015). There is a need to delve further into this area and continue research into what exactly staff have done to contribute to their own wellbeing based on the Wellbeing Framework.

**3. *What are the elements of a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing that create a community focus on wellbeing in the hope of benefitting all stakeholders involved?***

Thematic analysis uncovered four key areas that staff believed were fundamental to a WSA to Wellbeing as previously discussed. Specific subthemes and key points emerged within these themes:

- 3.1 Defining wellbeing: having the knowledge, feeling valued, having a clear definition of wellbeing and a clear plan to follow with targets to meet
- 3.2 WSA: having support to implement wellbeing and the time to do so, in-person CPD rather than online resources, the perception of wellbeing when not all members are catered to in the community
- 3.3 Culture of wellbeing: the changing nature of society and increased vocabulary around wellbeing, the awareness of the importance of wellbeing
- 3.4 Opportunities for development: the need for clarity about what supports wellbeing in schools from the point of all members of the school community, a community of practitioners- locally and nationally to support the policy.

## **5.4 Implications**

The findings suggest that while staff are encouraged by the increased focus and awareness of Wellbeing which the Wellbeing Framework has created, there are opportunities for improvement within this. The Wellbeing Framework was introduced as a five year plan,

beginning in 2018 with the view to all schools having implemented the SSE of Wellbeing Promotion by 2023. This requires all schools to plan, introduce, implement, reflect on and evaluate their wellbeing policy within this time, making the changes which the evaluation reflects as necessary. There are two and a half years left for schools to do this and schools are still lacking clarity from policy makers as to what exactly is expected of them, according to data analysis; “as regards all that’s come out from the department, I just think it’s all too much” (Participant #4). Data analysis also indicated that participants are awaiting staff specific CPD for wellbeing.

These results matter because they highlight the key areas which require action should there be a hope of successfully meeting the target of Wellbeing Promotion by 2023. If these actions are tackled now, there is an increased chance of establishing a successful culture of wellbeing in all schools in this time. It is crucial to establish a positive perception of Wellbeing from the beginning; traditional values slow the process of change in education and it is difficult to change stakeholders’ negative perceptions once they have been held for a long period of time (Jonasson, 2016).

The findings also matter because they highlight the gaps within the policy and the need for collaboration between policy makers and schools when policies are being created. This has implications on a number of levels; the amount of capital wasted should a policy not succeed and citizens losing confidence in policy makers and others in the education system when policies fail and the impact this has on those engaging with the education system (OECD, 2017). In terms of the Wellbeing Framework, should the policy not succeed, an important aspect of wellness for the school community could be lost, severing the connection between wellbeing and developing skills for lifelong benefit (Smyth, 2015).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a critical analysis of the data through discussion of the four themes in light of previous research. Throughout this chapter, the researcher related the findings to current literature and examined whether the research questions were adequately addressed. Findings indicated that there are gaps in the current Wellbeing policy and that there is scope for immediate action to be taken in order to cater to all members of the school community in the WSA to Wellbeing which has been set out. The narratives of the participants indicated support for the policy as an area of importance in education; however, it also noted the limitations which have been created by the Wellbeing Framework.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This final chapter of the study provides an overview of the key findings in light of the aims and objectives of the research. The strengths and weaknesses of the case study are discussed and recommendations for future policy, practice and research are proposed. The researcher's reflexivity in the process is explored to conclude the study.

### **6.1 Overview of Findings in the Context of Study Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which the current focus on student wellbeing related to the wellbeing of staff. It also aimed to examine whether there is solely a support for staff wellbeing rather than a provision in the WSA to Wellbeing set out by the Wellbeing Framework. In order to address this, the primary and secondary research questions sought to delve into the aspects of the WSA to Wellbeing which impacted most on staff wellbeing. This required critical analysis on the discourse of wellbeing in schools and an examination of the practices currently in place in schools. This was achieved through a number of key objectives: examining staff's understanding of wellbeing, investigating their experience of a WSA to wellbeing, assessing the role of management and peers in supporting wellbeing and exploring the support of government and DES agencies for schools implementing the Wellbeing Framework.

The research indicated that the emphasis on student wellbeing has a direct impact on the wellbeing of staff. The responsibility to ensure that students are being cared for in terms of their wellbeing lies with the staff, as does providing a positive model of wellbeing throughout the school day, which reinforces the wellbeing curriculum taught in the classroom. This requires the staff to work together towards the common goal of wellbeing. The participants indicated that while the Wellbeing policy has created more awareness of the challenges students are facing across the school community; "shocked at just the level of exam anxiety, the level of stress, students that aren't maybe coming from great backgrounds and we're their only sanctuary" (Participant #4), it also noted that the practices which have been part of their everyday role (adapting lessons depending on how students present, taking time to engage and get to know students, checking in when students appear to be having difficulty) have now been formalised as contributing to 'wellbeing' under the Wellbeing Framework.

Ensuring that wellbeing is planned for, implemented and reviewed is led by the Wellbeing Coordinator and Wellbeing team and information is provided to all staff on the initiatives and

supports in place for student and staff wellbeing. The team has been set up to comply with the Wellbeing Framework and it was noted this has been followed stringently. Data findings outlined that reminding students of the supports in place for them was important, as well as having the knowledge to gauge whether a student needs specific intervention. Undoubtedly, the ability to be flexible in one's role; whether that is the role of teacher, SNA or management, increases the possibility for timely intervention when a student is presenting in a manner out of character. However, the impact which this has upon staff wellbeing also requires consideration.

Data analysis uncovered that some staff felt that there is a need for more formalised support for staff, particularly after an incident with a student or staff member takes place. The focus on clear, two-way communication across the board was emphasised, not just in the school environment but from policy makers also, particularly when feedback is sought.

The ability of staff to present a model of wellbeing and give examples of best practice within the school community presented an area of concern to some in the case school. The lack of clarity around what exactly wellbeing means within the school environment creates a disconnection between a cohesive model for staff to work from and the ability to cater to the wellbeing of all in the school community.

The wellbeing of staff in the case school is catered to by both the endeavours of management and the initiatives introduced by the Wellbeing team. Management-led staff wellbeing activities such as the Christmas and Summer lunches have been in place for a long number of years and are therefore not as a result of the DES Wellbeing Plan. Other aspects which were mentioned in relation to staff wellbeing such as the social committee and having support within departments are factors which are not as a direct result of the Wellbeing Plan but which are part of the culture of the school itself. Initiatives the staff mentioned which have been introduced in the last two years were either driven by the Wellbeing team or worked on by staff themselves. The need for staff to get together more regularly was noted, specifically in recent years as the 'busyness' of work in the school has increased. It is unclear whether these initiatives are a means to directly support staff wellbeing resulting from the Wellbeing Framework or if they are a means to counteract the increased workload which staff are facing.

From the data which emerged in relation to policy maker support for staff wellbeing, the participants referred to the information provided rather than actions taken by the DES for staff wellbeing. The information in itself was extensive, and from a number of different sources, to the point where this 'information overload' caused increased pressure and stress

on staff itself. The policy refers to CPD which will be provided in future, however it was noted by half of the participants that there was a lack of support from policy makers in terms of adequate training before and even during the introduction of the Wellbeing Plan in schools. The unknown nature of this new policy area was a cause for concern for staff and raised questions about the competence of staff to be a role model of wellbeing for students. Past research indicates the lack of clarity and time allocated to the entire staff to focus on their own wellbeing as serious implications for the success of a wellbeing policy in schools, as well as the attrition rate of staff. As seen in the literature review, recent research in the UK found that there needs to be an explicit focus on ensuring the wellbeing needs of the staff are met, not just at surface level but throughout the policy itself (Teacher Wellbeing Index, 2018). In response to this the Education Support Partnership (2018) advised that staff wellbeing must be a priority, being assessed and measured against evidence based framework. Data analysis indicated that being asked to promote wellbeing to students seemed daunting to some, with little to no CPD to clarify the plan to staff before it was rolled out. The allocation of time for staff to focus on wellbeing was noted. There are 400 hours allocated to wellbeing within the timetable for students. There is no allocation for staff to focus on their own wellbeing or implement the Wellbeing policy. While the findings of this study outline that there has been awareness created of staff wellbeing, it also suggests that this is currently merely at 'surface level'.

This research proposed to outline if there are any gaps in the current Wellbeing policy in relation to staff wellbeing. The research findings highlighted the fact that support for staff in the WSA to Wellbeing, and implementation of the Wellbeing policy itself, requires a greater commitment from the key stakeholders in education policy making. This would require more open communication and collaboration between policy makers and schools, including all voices that make up the school community to be involved. It also requires the commitment of time and training resources provided to schools to prepare, implement and evaluate the policy.

Data analysis found that the current wellbeing policy lacks clarity with regards to what exactly it requires schools to do in order to be successful in Wellbeing Promotion. It emphasised the large amount of literature and different key areas, high priority areas and structures for wellbeing but presented no concise plan for all schools to follow. This in itself was a cause for concern and stress for staff. The SSE model is to be used to evaluate wellbeing in schools. However, if there is no common plan for schools to follow, how

reliable is the data generated from the SSE? While it may give schools an opportunity to evaluate their adherence to the success criteria of the Wellbeing Policy, there is no evidence to suggest that this will create norms nationwide or a reliable or valid measurement to meet the aim of the DES for Ireland to be recognised as a leader of Wellbeing Promotion by 2023 (DES, 2019).

## **6.2 Strengths and Limitation of the Study**

### ***6.2.1 Strengths***

Critical analysis of the strengths of this research also examines the opportunities which this study presents. A key strength of the study lies with previous research focusing predominately on teacher wellbeing rather than staff or the WSA to Wellbeing. This study focused on staff wellbeing and the school community and provided subjective, rich data that produced descriptive evidence of current professional practice. The variations in the participants' narratives illuminated contextual factors, the unpredictability of human behaviour and the insights which can be gained on what aids wellbeing on a daily basis in schools which could not be captured using a quantitative approach. Gathering detailed evidence of the intricate and complex experience of individuals allows for better understanding of the effectiveness of policy in practice (Creswell, 2009; Hammersley, 2013). Fundamentally, in support of previous research, this study has shown the difficulty of reaching a concise definition of wellbeing as it means different things to different individuals. However, it emphasised the need for one specific definition in relation to wellbeing in schools that is common to all schools in Ireland should the Wellbeing Framework hope to succeed. While the research findings noted that policy makers view Wellbeing as a constant work in progress for all, rather than a target to be reached, it also uncovered the obstacles to wellbeing which are experienced due to the limited resources which are given to address wellbeing fully. The obstacles which this research highlights provides an excellent opportunity for policy makers to understand the needs of staff and gives insight into what is necessary to implement new initiatives.

The contribution of staff in this research highlights the role which they play in establishing the policies which the DES sets out, however it also notes the impact which these policies have upon the lives of the staff themselves. At a strategic level, a greater understanding of the expectations and needs of stakeholders in the school community and awareness of the realities which they face daily can contribute to more effective policies. This is particularly

significant as the changing landscape of education and employment requires increased demand for progressive and effective policies.

Finally, the gap between the policy statements and the level of support provided to schools who must implement the policy ought to be addressed. While it is commendable, and necessary, to outline a policy to promote wellbeing at whole school level, the inability to provide a functional model, or even basic structure to implement the policy in schools, shows the disconnect between policy makers and school stakeholders. The findings from this research have implications for practice, policy and research.

### ***6.2.2 Limitations***

Critical analysis of the limitations of this research also uncovered the threats which the study faced. A threat to this single-case study related to the trustworthiness and credibility of the research and its findings. Particularly as a novice researcher, validity and reliability concerns were approached with careful consideration particularly during data collection, analysis and interpretation stages. As the study was dealing with individual perceptions through interview, measures were taken to address respondent and researcher bias and enhance the vigour of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking of the participant transcripts provided clarity of understanding and ensured an ethical stance was consistently present. The moral and ethical consideration of the study were addressed through reflexive self-awareness and rigorous adherence to ethical guidelines.

As a novice researcher, the findings may potentially face more scrutiny. The researcher methods employed would benefit from the refinement which experience gives and as an interviewer, skills would be developed through experience which may unearth richer data. However, the advantage of being a novice means that it requires further research and vigorous application of guidelines, therefore being more thorough and taking additional measures to ensure that the data is reliable, valid and used in an ethical manner.

With regards to the study itself, this single-case study is based on a small sample in one school. The researcher recognises that it is not applicable to all schools nationally, merely that there may be some commonalities. This research is limited to focus on the implementation stage of the Wellbeing policy, when there is an increased workload to set up and develop the policy. However, when the policy extends beyond this phase, research will be necessary to determine whether the initial pressure will subside and potentially lead to a

decrease in time and workload demands. Additional research is necessary into the exact amount of hours which the Wellbeing Policy adds to staff workload currently.

There is research needed into what exactly staff have done to contribute to their own wellbeing based on the policy. More research nationally would contribute to understanding the level of Wellbeing CPD that has been provided and engaged with nationally at this time. It may also lead into defining the indicators of success for staff wellbeing and making explicit how success is measured.

Finally, there is research necessary on the value which parents currently place on Wellbeing Promotion in schools. This study focused on the staff aspect of the WSA to Wellbeing, however further research into the contribution of parents would provide data significant to effective policy creation and implementation.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

In consideration of the findings of this study, recommendations have been identified that may be procured for policy, practice and future research.

#### ***Policy:***

1. The necessity of a structured plan for all schools to follow when implementing new policies rather than providing information only. This requires policy-makers to take responsibility for providing a cohesive plan of action, with specific targets to be met by all schools which can be measured nationally.
2. Clearly define wellbeing in school settings. This will ensure that all stakeholders in all schools have clarity on the exact nature of the policy and what this entails.
3. Compulsory CPD is needed to educate all staff on the role of wellbeing at a staff level as well as a Whole School level, prior to implementation of the policy and during the initial stage. This would ensure the proper implementation of a collaborative WSA to Wellbeing but would also allow staff to become aware of the impact which their wellbeing has on the wellbeing of students.
4. Provide regular meaningful CPD for staff wellbeing, giving time within the school day to implement the knowledge gained. These supports should be made available to all staff on a consistent basis, not just providing them with information but giving tools that equip them for professional practice and the time required to do the work to implement them.

5. Allocating time to plan and collaborate on wellbeing initiatives within school hours regularly. This requires the Department of Education to take full responsibility for the allocation of hours for the proper implementation of the policy and recognise that regular planning time is necessary to cover the minimum of what the Wellbeing Framework asks. In order to cater to staff wellbeing at the same level of student wellbeing, additional hours are required to focus solely on staff wellbeing.

***Practice:***

1. An evaluation of the key school policies that contribute to Wellbeing. This encourages awareness of the good practice already in place and ensures that all policies are contributing to the Wellbeing Framework, with all members of the school community being aware of this.
2. Establish a healthy eating policy in the school and provide at least the same level of healthy eating options as alternatives where food and beverages are sold. This would ensure that all members of the school community know that the school is serious about wellbeing, rather than just alluding to it. It would consolidate the curriculum and other wellbeing initiatives that are contributing to wellbeing currently.
3. Reinforce discipline and behavioural policies at regular intervals with students, staff and parents and display clearly structured behavioural ladders in each classroom. This creates the opportunity for all stakeholders in the school to consistently be reminded of the procedures in place for the safety of all and to ensure that the opportunity for teaching and learning is given to all within the school community.
4. Provide the opportunity for increased regular staff time together and ensure CPD at the beginning and end of the school year has a practical wellbeing focus. These aspects would ensure that staff communicate together in person regularly, improving relationships and morale. Equipping staff with the tools to cater to their own wellbeing at the beginning and end of the year would set the tone for the year ahead and then prepare staff for the transition from work to summer break, providing ample opportunity for staff to return the following year refreshed.

***Research:***

1. Exploration to ascertain how policy makers intend the Wellbeing Framework to be implemented and how they expect school staff to create an emphasis on wellbeing in an academically orientated environment would be beneficial. This would give insight

into the expectation from a policy level and open discussion on the realities which schools face.

2. Investigation into what policy makers are inadvertently saying about the Wellbeing of staff when they do not specifically give the time or a structured plan to implement Wellbeing promotion in schools before they expect it to be introduced. This would determine the rationale behind seemingly valuable policies failing at school level.
3. There is research necessary on why specific interventions for staff wellbeing are not part of the wellbeing policy and why CPD options are varied across different educational organisations. This would determine if there is more emphasis placed on wellbeing at a Primary level because it is an important developmental stage or whether less time is available at Secondary level as there is still more of a focus on preparation for the Leaving Certificate rather than developing lifelong skills.

#### **6.4 Personal Learning and Reflexivity**

During the course of the research, it was necessary to stay in the role of researcher, detaching from one's own values and assumptions in order to engage authentically with the interviewees. A reflexive approach being adopted throughout the study required the examination of my own position on the topic. Reflexivity requires recognition of the way in which a researcher's professional role may affect ethical practice (Havercamp, 2005). The research required a reflexive approach to prevent any researcher bias, along with constant questioning as to the rationale behind questions or viewpoints which emerged. As a novice researcher, discussion on positionality with my supervisor was invaluable in creating a mindset of reflexive reflection.

The research process has proven beneficial both in examining the advantages and barriers to a collaborative approach in school policy and in heightening the awareness of how wellbeing as a policy area affects all involved. This is consistent with the work of McLeod, who noted that research carried out by practitioners has the benefit of "advancing one's own practice" (1999, p.8). Certainly, this research has furthered the knowledge of the researcher in the area of wellbeing and policy implementation in particular. This study has helped the researcher to acquire knowledge on the perceived nature of wellbeing and the barriers and opportunities for wellbeing which a policy can create. It also highlighted the need for simplicity and 'starting small' when introducing policy and the crucial aspect of clarity and defining terms succinctly for those involved. Having acquired this knowledge, the researcher realises the relational

nature of wellbeing and the importance of communication in professional relationships to this. As a teacher and guidance counsellor, the importance of effective communication is at the fore of my professional practice. However, the knowledge gained from this research heightened this somewhat and gave additional insight into the importance of relationships, communication and belonging. Overall, the personal learning gained from this study will assist the researcher in future practice both as a guidance counsellor and staff member contributing to a WSA to Wellbeing.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The study has exposed, through the narratives of staff, the way in which staff wellbeing is perceived and catered to in the Wellbeing Framework. The participants identified the importance of wellbeing in Post Primary education, particularly for students, and the multifaceted nature of wellbeing. It identified the elements which contribute to staff wellbeing and the opportunities for development within this. In particular, it illuminated the need for collaboration between policy makers and school stakeholders and clarity when introducing new initiatives. The core emerging themes were discussed and critiqued in light of previous research and current policy and strengths and limitations have been acknowledged. Recommendations have been made by the researcher in relation to the findings which emerged as well as identifying areas that need further research.

How we teach is as important as what we teach, for ourselves and the students in our care (Siegel, 2013). The personal learning gained through the research process has left a lasting impression on the researcher, which will be beneficial in professional relationships and classroom practice but predominately in the researcher's future practice of guidance counselling.

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## Appendix A: Subject Information and Permission letter (Principal)



### Email seeking Permission to Conduct Research- (Gatekeeper)

**EHS Rec No:** 2020\_02\_33\_EHS

Dear Principal,

As the Principal and Gatekeeper of (school name), I'm emailing to ask permission to conduct research for my thesis with the school staff.

**Research Title:** A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing: An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in Post Primary schools.

In my research I aim to examine the factors which contribute to staff wellbeing in Post Primary schools and the way in which a Whole School approach to Wellbeing can impact this. This research feeds into the current Wellbeing Policy and will investigate the staff wellbeing aspect of this policy in particular. In order to gather adequate data for this, I would appreciate your consent for me to carry out the research with two members of management, two teachers and two SNAs from the total population of school Staff. Staff will be then invited to participate in an audio recorded interview via online platform. The interview should last approximately 30 minutes.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and the staff member's identities will not be disclosed. The data from the audio recording will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. The results from the research study will be reported in my thesis.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the school name and the names of individual participants will not be used in the study. This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Should you give consent for me to carry out this research then I will send a detailed email to all staff, with the Informed Consent Form attached. The Research Privacy Notice will be sent to participants who indicate their interest. This will be sent from my UL Student email, as the Ethics board requires.

Kind Regards,

Angela

## Appendix B: Subject Information letter and Consent Form (Participants)



### Participant Information Letter- (Interview- Volunteer)

**Date:** 30/03/20

**EHS Rec No:** 2020\_02\_33\_EHS

**Research Title:** A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing: An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in Post Primary schools.

Dear Participant,

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies, I must complete a research thesis on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to examine the factors which contribute to staff wellbeing in Post Primary schools and the way in which a Whole School approach to Wellbeing can impact this. This research feeds into the current Wellbeing Policy and will investigate the staff wellbeing aspect of this policy in particular. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in an audio-recorded interview via online platform. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. I wish to gather data from Teachers, SNAs and Management to allow for a full staff perspective.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and your identity will not be disclosed. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. The results from the research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences. The data from the audio recording will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines and the anonymised data will be stored in a secure location approved by University of Limerick for seven years. It is important to note that your name will not be used in the research.

If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

Researcher: Angela McLaughlin

Supervisor: Dr. Stephen Comiskey

Phone number: -----

Phone number: -----

UL email address: [12024724@studentmail.ul.ie](mailto:12024724@studentmail.ul.ie) UL email address: [Stephen.comiskey@ul.ie](mailto:Stephen.comiskey@ul.ie)

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you consent to participating in the study please email me and sign the consent form by Friday 10<sup>th</sup> April.

This research has received Ethical Approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences,  
Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office,  
University of Limerick.  
Tel: 061 23410**



## EHS RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT

**Title of Study:** A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing: An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools

**Should you agree to participate in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please sign the consent form.**

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that what the researchers find out in this study may be shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written material developed.
- I am fully aware of what I will have to do, and of any risks and benefits of the study.
- I know that I am choosing to take part in the study and that I can stop taking part in the study at any stage without giving any reason to the researchers.

**This study involves audio/video recording. Please tick the appropriate box**

- I am aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (video/audio) and I agree to this. However, if I feel uncomfortable at any time I can ask that the recording equipment be switched off. I understand that I can ask for a copy of my recording. I understand what will happen to the recordings once the study is finished.

- I do not agree to being audio/video recorded in this study.

After considering the above statements, I consent to my involvement in this research project.

Name: (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**EHS RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

**Data Protection Consent Section: Individual Interview/Questionnaire**

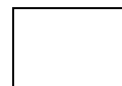
I, the undersigned, declare that I am freely giving specific, informed and an unambiguous consent to the University to process my Personal Data for the purposes of undertaking the research project entitled “A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing: An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools”.

- |  |   |            |           |                          |                          |            |           |                          |                          |
|--|---|------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I declare that I have read and fully understand the contents of the Research Privacy Notice, which is appended at Appendix 1 of this Consent form and I explicitly consent to my personal data being processed in line with this Research Privacy Notice.</li> <br/> <li>• I explicitly consent to the University contacting me as part of current or similar future research and holding my contact details on its database for the purpose of contacting me.</li> </ul> | <table border="0"> <tr> <td><b>Yes</b></td> <td><b>No</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Yes</b></td> <td><b>No</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>   |            |           |                          |                          |            |           |                          |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |            |           |                          |                          |            |           |                          |                          |
| <b>Yes</b>   | <b>No</b>   |            |           |                          |                          |            |           |                          |                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |            |           |                          |                          |            |           |                          |                          |

**Signatures**

1.

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]	Signature	Date



For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

**2. Note: The form only needs to be witnessed in very specific circumstances e.g. if the person giving consent is unable to sign their name. The witness section may be omitted if this does not apply.**

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of witness [IN CAPITALS]                      Signature                      Date

3.

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS]                      Signature                      Date

**EHS RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
**RAP Consent Form**  
**Agree to tell us what you think about RAP**

I have read or heard the letter about this study. I have read or heard the consent form. All my questions were answered and I agree to be part of this study. I know that I can stop being part of this study at any time. I can ask for copies of my recorded talks.



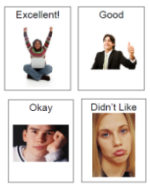
I know what this study is about.



I know that I will not be named in any reports or talks about this study.



I agree that my interviews with Angela McLaughlin can be recorded.



**NA** I agree to be part of the short group talks with AML at the end of each weekly RAP session.



**NA** Instead of being part of the short group talk with AML at the end of each week, I want to talk with AML alone.



I agree that AML can include things I say in my interview when they tells other people about this study. I know that I can change my mind about this until **May 2020** when AML is giving a talk about the study.



I was given a copy of the letter and this signed consent form.



\_\_\_\_\_  
You Sign Here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signs Here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Research Privacy Notice



### RESEARCH PRIVACY NOTICE

**Note for Principal Investigators/Research Supervisors/Researchers for a proposed research project when completing this Privacy Notice Template:**

- Please review all prompts in brackets below and populate so that they accurately reflect the proposed research project to go before the REC.
- Once the Privacy Notice template has been populated, please delete this comment box and any remaining yellow prompts. Include your edited Privacy Notice as an attachment with your Research Ethics Approval Submission to the REC.

This Privacy Notice governs the use and storage of your personal data by the University of Limerick (the University). The processing of this data is carried out in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) / Data Protection Acts 1988-2018 (“Data Protection Law”) and in accordance with this Data Protection Privacy Notice. The University is the Data Controller for personal data we process about you.

The purpose of this Data Protection Privacy Notice is to explain how the University uses and processes personal data we collect and hold about you as a research participant (“you”, “your”). This notice extends to all your personal data as defined under Article 2(1) of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

#### 1. Title and Purpose of the research project

“A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing: An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools”

This research aims to examine how staff wellbeing is supported within the context of the Wellbeing plan in Post Primary Schools.

#### 1.2 Potential benefits that may arise from the research project

The benefit of completing this study will be to outline if there are gaps in the current wellbeing policy in terms of a focus on staff, to examine if the current curriculum is adversely affecting the wellbeing of staff and finally to develop new insights into what would have a positive impact upon staff wellbeing.

## **2. Research Ethics Committee**

- 2.1 Ethical approval was granted by the EHS Research Ethics Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

## **3. Identity of the Data Controller(s)**

- 3.1 The Data Controller is:
- University of Limerick, Plassey, Limerick.

## **4. Identity and Contact Details of the Data Protection Officer of the Data Controller**

- 4.1 You can contact the University of Limerick's Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@ul.ie](mailto:dataprotection@ul.ie) or by writing to Data Protection Officer, Room A1-073, University of Limerick, Limerick.

## **5. The Identity of the Principal Investigator**

- 5.1 The Principal Investigator for this Research Project is Stephen Comiskey, Supervisor and Lecturer, University of Limerick.

## **6. Why the University Holds Your Personal Data**

- 6.1 The University must process your personal data in order to undertake research relating to this research.

## **7. Research Participant Personal Data held by the University**

- 7.1 You provide us with your personal data to enable us to undertake the research project. Participation in this research project is voluntary and participants may withdraw without giving any reason. Should you wish to withdraw you may do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at [stephen.comiskey@ul.ie](mailto:stephen.comiskey@ul.ie) or writing to him at: Stephen Comiskey, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, University of Limerick, Castletroy, Co, Limerick.
- 7.2 The categories of personal data collected/recorded may include:
- Name
  - Gender
  - Contact details: Email
  - Position in School

## **8. Lawful Basis for University Processing Personal Data**

- 8.1 Data Protection Law requires that the University must have a valid lawful basis in order to process personal data.
- 8.2 The University will rely on your explicit consent in order to process your personal data for research purposes. Consent must be freely given, specific, informed and an unambiguous indication of your wishes by which you (by a statement or by a clear affirmative action) signify agreement to the processing of personal data relating to you. Your decision not to consent will have no adverse consequences for you.
- 8.3 You are free to withdraw this consent and you can do so by contacting the Principal Investigator at the following email address [insert email address].

## **9. Protecting Your Personal Data**

- 9.1 Reasonable appropriate administrative, technical, personnel procedural and physical measures are employed to safeguard Personal Data against loss, theft and unauthorised users access, uses or modifications.
- 9.2 All researchers of the University must adhere to the University's Data Protection Policy when processing Personal Data on behalf of UL (available at [www.ul.ie/dataprotection](http://www.ul.ie/dataprotection)). Non adherence to the University's Data Protection Policy may lead to disciplinary action. Researchers of the University shall undertake Data Protection Training before they engage in the research project.
- 9.3 Personal data collected for this research project will be pseudonymised within 1 hour after collection and will fully anonymised within 1 month. Truly anonymised data is not Personal Data. Once data is anonymised for the purposes of this research project, the terms of this Privacy Notice will no longer apply.

## **10. Sharing Your Personal Data with Third Parties**

- 10.1 The University will not disclose your personal data to third parties.

## **11. Transfer of personal data to other countries**

- 11.1 N/A in this Research

## **12. Retention of your Personal Data**

- 12.1 All Personal Data collected for this research project will be retained in accordance with the University's [Records Management and Retention Policy](#). *The Retention Policy currently states a retention period of 7 years (July 2019). Where the personal data collected for this research will be held for a longer/shorter period, this should be stated here. Note that truly anonymised data is not personal data.*

## **13. Your Rights**

- 13.1 Depending on the legal basis which we rely on to process your Personal Data, you may have the right to request that we:

- provide you with information as to whether we process your data and details relating to our processing, and with a copy of your personal data;
- rectify any inaccurate data we might have about you without undue delay;
- complete any incomplete information about you;
- under certain circumstances, erase your Personal Data without undue delay;
- under certain circumstances, be restricted from processing your data;
- under certain circumstances, furnish you with the Personal Data which you provided us within a structured, commonly used and machine readable format;

13.2 Requests for any of the above should be addressed by email to the Principal Investigator at [stephen.comiskey@ul.ie](mailto:stephen.comiskey@ul.ie) AND the Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@ul.ie](mailto:dataprotection@ul.ie). Your request will be processed within 30 days of receipt. Please note, however, it may not be possible to facilitate all requests, for example, where the University is required by law to collect and process certain personal data including that personal information that is required of any research participant.

13.3 It is your responsibility to let the Principal Investigator know if your contact details change.

#### **14. Queries, Contacts, Right of Complaint**

14.1 Further information on Data Protection at the University of Limerick may be viewed at [www.ul.ie/dataprotection](http://www.ul.ie/dataprotection). You can contact the Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@ul.ie](mailto:dataprotection@ul.ie) or by writing to Data Protection Officer, Room A1-073, University of Limerick, Limerick.

14.2 You have a right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (Supervisory Authority). While we recommend that you raise any concerns or queries with us first at the following email address [insert PI's email address], you may contact that Office at [info@dataprotection.ie](mailto:info@dataprotection.ie) or by writing to the Data Protection Commissioner, Canal House, Station Road, Portarlington, Co. Laois.

#### **15. Review**

15.1 This Privacy Notice will be reviewed and updated from time to time to take into account changes in the law and the experience gained from the Notice in practice.

## Appendix D: Interview Structure

### Interview Questions

**These interview questions are a framework for a semi-structured interview with staff volunteers. Additional probes and questions may be employed to facilitate the narrative.**

#### **Introduction**

Reiterate the purpose of the interview, check that the participant is comfortable with the previously signed agreement on the Informed Consent form and Research Privacy Notice and establish ground rules. State all ethical considerations, including confidentiality before beginning the discussion.

#### **Understanding of Wellbeing**

1. Could you describe to me what wellbeing means to you? [*Difficult to define but some key factors should be present*]
2. Thinking about wellbeing at work, is there anything that changes in how you would describe the term?
3. If you had to name one main component that contributes most to your wellbeing at work, what would that be?
4. Do you think that wellbeing has been more of a focus in recent years? [Possible follow up: why do you think that this is important now? What has caused this change/shift of focus? Do you believe it needs to be made explicit?] [*Empirical evidence of being 'more connected' than ever via online platforms/social media but less time actually in the presence of others. Is it a stretch to question whether the increased use of technology/social media has led to an increased need/emphasis on wellbeing?*]
5. [Possible follow up:] How does that compare to what is provided for students in terms of wellbeing in this school?

#### **Experience of a Whole School Approach (WSA) to Wellbeing**

6. Can you describe a typical day to me and how you would promote wellbeing during this typical day?

7. Has this always been part of your professional practice or is this something that you have changed in recent years? [Follow up if necessary: Has this added/reduced your workload? What evidence is there of this?]
8. In your opinion, what is a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing? [Follow up: What should this mean/Guidance counsellors role in the context to WSA]
9. How/has a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing changed your approach to your day-to-day professional practice/interactions with staff and students?[Follow up as two separate questions if not focusing on interactions with others/WSA]
10. What individual, departmental and community approaches are being used to focus on wellbeing?
11. In your experience, what are the opportunities and challenges that you've faced with a WSA to Wellbeing? [Follow up to probe on value of student-staff wellbeing if not mentioned]
12. Are you aware of any benefits that a focus on wellbeing has for students? [Connection between wellbeing and academic performance, ability to develop skills of resilience etc. but more importantly it is a right of the student to feel cared for]

### **Support of Management and Peers**

13. Tell me about some of the staff wellbeing initiatives that are run within your school [Looking to see if they are a) aware of any and b) cognisant of what those are- following up with probing questions as necessary]
14. [Possible follow-up:] To your knowledge, have these been long-running or new initiatives?
15. What supports have management put in place to promote a Whole School Approach to Wellbeing?
16. In your experience, do *staff* work together to contribute to wellbeing practices for the school community? [Follow up if needed: do you believe that staff wellbeing, rather than teacher wellbeing is necessary?]

### **Support of Government and Department of Education agencies**

17. Are you aware of the levels of support given to Whole School Wellbeing in relation to facilities, funding etc? IF so, can you detail these?

18. Think back to the initial consultation of your Whole School Approach to Wellbeing. Can you describe what happened? Who was involved and how much input did staff have? [Possible follow up: may need to ask direct questions here if not discussing consultation specifically-JCT Wellbeing in-service]
19. Can you think of any professional outside agency that has been recommended to staff, by DES, to assist with times that challenge your wellbeing?
20. The INTO has allowed the use of Croke Park hours for Staff Wellbeing specifically in some Primary Schools nationwide. Do you believe it would be useful to have time dedicated to Wellbeing solely within these hours in Post Primary Schools? [May need to follow up: Why would this be important/not important in your opinion? What specifically could this time be used for?] [*Discussion amongst the school community about this, what exactly are they doing and evaluation of whether this is beneficial. Regular, consistent focus on this. INTO Doc: 'The staffroom needs to be a place of support and understanding.'*]
21. In your experience, have there been any issues which have had a negative impact on the Whole School Approach to Wellbeing?
22. In the INTO (2012) document, it stated that 'Many delegates suggested that positive feedback from the principal and colleagues was very important for teachers' wellbeing. Teachers should take the time to acknowledge colleagues and help them to feel good about themselves. As one delegate stated, 'we should model good behaviour and let the children see how we respect and care for our colleagues'. As well as nurturing and praise, delegates also saw the need for a time to 'vent', when necessary, to offload mounting stress. 'Taking this into consideration, are there any aspects that you agree or disagree with? [Possible follow up as necessary]

## **Conclusion**

23. Is there anything that you would like to add that I have not asked you in relation to this topic?

Thank volunteer and refer to Employee Assistance Service/Inspire Workplace service if necessary. Remind participant about transcript being sent for verification next week.

## Appendix E: Data Analysis: Excerpt of Transcript Coding

over things quicker maybe than other people can so like I go into work and, even on a day maybe where you'd struggle to get out of bed or think I don't know if I can handle this today, I'd walk into work and the first people I'd meet are our children, especially our two with down syndrome, and the minute you see them they over and they're hugging you and they're telling you it's a great day and you're thinking yes it is a great day and that starts me off on the right foot. Once I kind of try and stay focused on my actual job, I find that even though sometimes you get sidetracked by the little silly things that go on with teens that don't work together as well and things like that- sometimes that does take over, but I try then to pop myself back into why I'm there- which is to look after our children with special needs and that just gets me right back on track. Because I take one look at them and think, my goodness I just love this job, I just love what I do so I think, I hope, that that can nearly radiate then to other people then so that I can show that I'm content in my job and maybe you can meet people and be happier in yourself and pass it on and things pass by and it passes back to you, you know that sort of a way..

R: For sure and I know you said you're a glass half full person, so my next question was- is it something that has changed in recent years or for you is it something that has always been a part of how you looked at work?

P: [8:07] I think I've always done that. I've always worked with children, I've always felt that they gave me more than I nearly gave them, I know days I've come out a better person because of who I work with rather than maybe them feeling that

way- I don't think they feel better for being with me like, but definitely I try to give them as much as they give me

R: That's lovely

P: Previously I worked with little ones before I worked with teenagers and just I've always felt this when I'm with kids

R: In your own opinion, what is, or what does a WSA to wellbeing mean?

P: Well I think that that has to come right from the top right down to the..well I won't say the bottom because there's..we're all equal..

R: Yeah we're all across

P: Authority-wise I'll say, right down to people who wouldn't have as much authority, I'm going to put it that way. I feel that everybody's personality's not always going to gel and that's clearly obvious on days when there's days when people would do things differently to the way I would do things and I would do things differently to other people and it probably drives so people mad the way I work and some people would drive me mad, you know that way. That would come right down from the principal to the SNAs, the catering staff, whatever but I think that in general, the staff gel together quite well like. I think that they way I could speak to the vice principal about something along the corridor would make me think, like you know they're treating me very well so that's a good thing. And then you kind of want to put more work into the school then because you're treated well from somebody that's of a higher authority. I always think that what somebody gives to me I give back ten-fold. When I get good feedback from them I

*Optimistic Personality + students leaders to good start to work day*

*Focus on what's important*

*Love of job / content*

*Happy workplace*

*Fulfilling work*

*Respective of SENs etc*

*Content in work*

*Collegial as equals WSA - top down*

*Individuality*

*Support of staff - management - treated well at work*

*Work harder when treated well - feel valued*

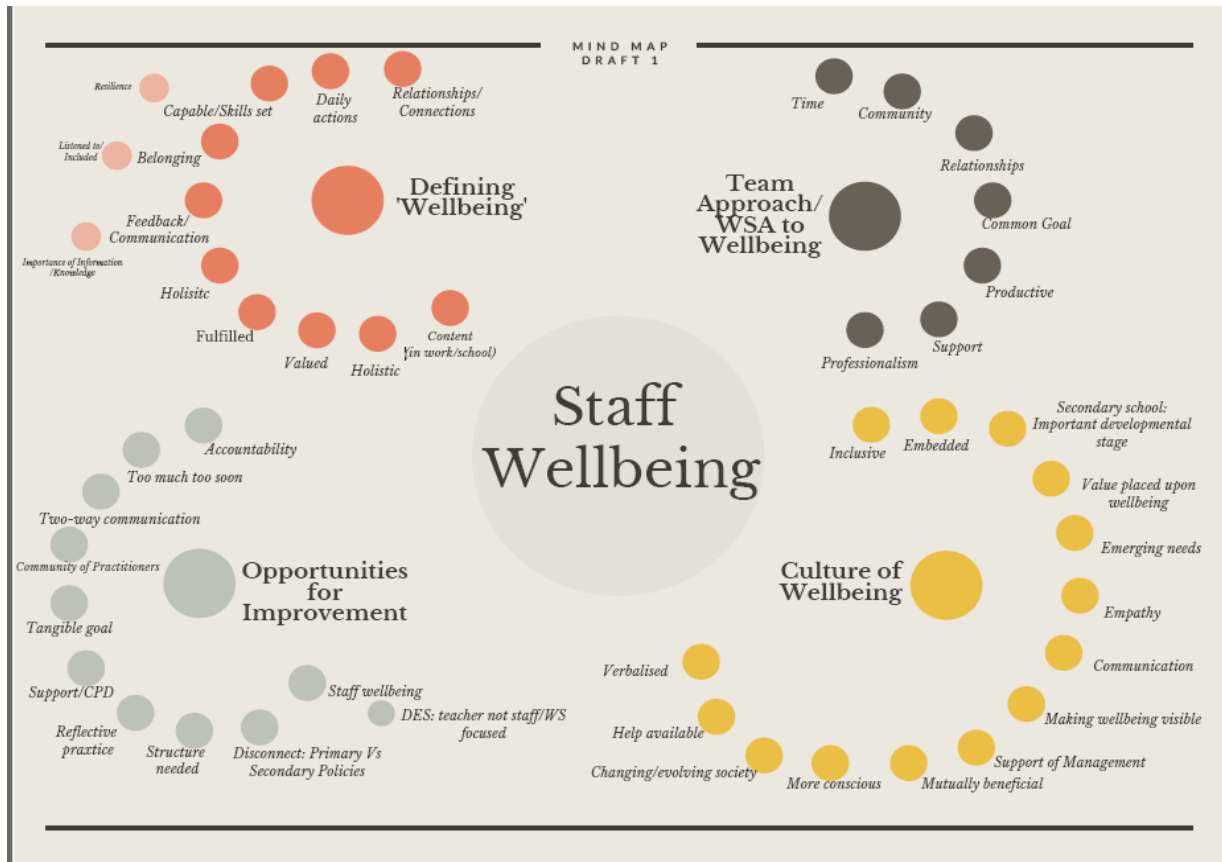


## Appendix F: Excerpt of Coding tables

	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6
<b>Understanding of wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content</li> <li>Working with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content</li> <li>Valued</li> <li>Place in society/belonging</li> <li>Capable</li> <li>Inclusive</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Holistic approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holistic: physical, mental, emotional and psychological</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Support</li> <li>Content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Happy/content</li> <li>Looked after</li> <li>Being well</li> <li>Appreciated</li> <li>Relationships</li> <li>Having information</li> <li>Feeling valued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simplicity</li> <li>Content</li> <li>Safe</li> <li>Work-life balance</li> <li>Togetherness/Relationships</li> <li>Respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holistic: mental, emotional, physical</li> <li>Support</li> <li>Resilience</li> <li>Knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>WSA to Wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Together/team/support</li> <li>Speaking about wellbeing</li> <li>More social and personal consciousness</li> <li>Staying focused on work/students</li> <li>Productive when working as a team</li> <li>Do your best to include all</li> <li>Beginning to know the limits to what can be achieved in one day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs of students addressed</li> <li>Collegiality</li> <li>Good communication vital for wellbeing</li> <li>Ingrained wellbeing: everyday/way of being</li> <li>Boundaries to role</li> <li>Knowledge of students</li> <li>Difficult to cater to all needs in large classes</li> <li>Being present</li> <li>Community approach</li> <li>Focused, organised,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential to do so much good, however too much being required too soon</li> <li>Need for a detailed plan</li> <li>Support for wellbeing: not a provision</li> <li>Respect for wellbeing: part of the fabric of the school to be successful</li> <li>Link to subjects and school policies</li> <li>More focus on staff wellbeing necessary</li> <li>Need to incentivise wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More focus on wellbeing</li> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Management see value in wellbeing</li> <li>Collective focus on student wellbeing</li> <li>Vocabulary/identification of issues</li> <li>School as sanctuary for students</li> <li>Reason behind student behaviour noticed</li> <li>Move from academic to wellbeing/perspective change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calm approach</li> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Recognition of complexity individuals face</li> <li>Catering to needs</li> <li>Value placed on wellbeing</li> <li>Visibility of wellbeing</li> <li>Perspective change                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Societal impact</li> </ul> </li> <li>Creating culture of non judgement</li> <li>Demanding job</li> <li>Creating space for wellbeing</li> <li>Code of courtesy for all</li> <li>Respect</li> <li>Code of conduct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness</li> <li>Importance of wellbeing having recognition</li> <li>Focus on more than academic success</li> <li>Support structure for staff and students</li> <li>Focused approach/Community</li> <li>Giving wellbeing a status</li> <li>Making the link to wellbeing clear</li> <li>Lifelong skill building</li> <li>Wellbeing needs to be evident/need to make wellbeing</li> </ul>

Code	Theme
<p><b>Interview 1:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Togetherness/team/Support</li> <li>Working with others</li> <li>Individual yet professional workplace</li> <li>Common goal brings individuals together</li> <li>Working together: more productive, wellbeing catered to</li> <li>TIME to focus on wellbeing as a staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Interview 2:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of relationships with colleagues</li> <li>Collegiality/working together build positive relationships</li> <li>Wellbeing as a community focus</li> <li>Staff getting together regularly/Relationships/ time allocated</li> <li>Common goal</li> </ul> <p><b>Interview 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of relationships</li> </ul> <p><b>Interview 4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of relationships</li> <li>Common goal</li> <li>Regular staff contact/time together as a whole staff</li> </ul> <p><b>Interview 5:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work as a team/community</li> <li>Time needed together as a staff for wellbeing</li> </ul> <p><b>Interview 6:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community focus of wellbeing</li> <li>Importance of relationships- does a sense of collegiality promote wellbeing in itself/increase the likelihood of everyone buying into and implementing wellbeing policies?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Importance of Relationships/Common goal/Team approach</b></p>

## Appendix G: Thematic Mapping of Overarching Themes



## **Appendix H: EHS Email of Approval**

Email Received: 17/02/20

Thank you for your Research Ethics application which was recently reviewed by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The recommendation of the Committee is outlined below:

**Project Title:** 2020\_02\_33\_EHS (ER) A Whole School Approach to Wellbeing: An investigation into Staff Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools

**Principal Investigator:** Stephen Comiskey

**Recommendation:** Approved