Staff Wellbeing and Sustainable Workload Policy

Board Approved Date:	**October 2026**
Version:	**0.1**
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Review Date:	**November 2028**

This policy has been rewritten to reflect the 2025-2030 EIP and development work undertaken since 2024

1. Purpose and strategic context

Education South West (ESW) is committed to creating working environments in which people feel valued, respected, included and able to thrive. Staff wellbeing and sustainable workload are integral to educational improvement: excellent outcomes for children and young people depend on skilled, supported and continually developing staff.

This policy aligns staff wellbeing and workload with ESW's Education Improvement Plan 2025-2030, particularly the Developing People strategic area, and with the People Strategy. It reflects ESW's mission, Educating to Lead Great Lives, and the values of Opportunity, Community, Character and Achievement.
The policy establishes Trust-wide principles and expectations. Each school will translate these into a proportionate staff wellbeing and workload plan that reflects its context while remaining aligned with this policy.

2. Our definition of wellbeing

A mentally healthy community is not one in which everyone is expected to be happy all the time. It is one in which people can work through challenge, share success and feel supported, heard, accepted, valued and empowered.
For ESW, staff wellbeing means creating the conditions in which colleagues can thrive professionally and personally. This includes respectful relationships, a sense of belonging, manageable and purposeful workload, appropriate professional autonomy, access to development, clear routes to support and confidence that concerns can be raised safely.

3. Our principles

1. **High expectations and sustainable practice.** Ambition for pupils and care for staff are mutually reinforcing. Improvement should be planned and implemented in ways that are purposeful, proportionate and sustainable.

2. **Ethical and respectful leadership.** Leaders have a particular responsibility to model respect, fairness, professional trust, clarity and appropriate challenge, and to consider the impact of decisions on staff.

3. **Workload is an organisational responsibility.** Workload should not be framed solely as an individual time-management issue. Policies, systems and improvement activities should be designed and reviewed with workload in mind.

4. **Belonging and inclusion.** Staff should experience an inclusive workplace in which positive professional relationships and relational practice enable people to contribute, learn, seek help and raise concerns.

5. **Development and growth.** Access to high-quality professional learning, coaching, collaboration and leadership development is an important part of feeling valued and being able to succeed.

6. **Early support.** Staff should know how to access support and should be encouraged to seek help early when workload, health or personal circumstances are affecting wellbeing.

4. Our commitments

4.1 Sustainable workload

- Consider workload and wellbeing implications when Trust and school policies, systems, initiatives and improvement strategies are designed, reviewed or implemented.

- Review whether administrative, assessment, feedback and reporting practices are purposeful and proportionate, avoiding activity that creates workload without sufficient benefit to pupils or the organisation.
- Use collaboration across ESW, including shared resources, curriculum development and professional networks, to reduce unnecessary duplication.
- Respect work-life boundaries. Colleagues may choose to work or send communications at different times, but there is no general expectation that staff respond to routine communications outside their normal working hours.
- Allow reasonable time for agreed tasks and avoid routinely requesting information beyond what is necessary for the stated purpose.
- Respond constructively when staff raise workload concerns and use feedback to improve systems and practice.

4.2 Culture, relationships and ethical leadership

- Promote respectful, relational and professional interactions between colleagues and across Trust teams.
- Embed ESW's Ethical Leadership Framework so that expected leadership behaviours are clear and consistently modelled.
- Create conditions in which staff feel safe to ask questions, seek support, offer challenge and raise concerns through appropriate routes, including the Whistleblowing Policy where relevant.
- Communicate change clearly, explain its purpose and consider the cumulative impact of change on staff capacity and workload.

4.3 Developing our people

- Provide classroom-based staff with structured professional development, including an entitlement to instructional coaching aligned with ESW pedagogical principles for all teachers.
- Use modelling, rehearsal and collaborative professional learning to develop practice in a supportive, improvement-focused culture.
- Ensure support staff have clearly signposted opportunities to access professional development relevant to their roles and aspirations.
- Strengthen leadership at all levels through coaching, leadership development, succession planning and opportunities to contribute through Trust networks.
- Ensure professional development is purposeful, evidence-informed and designed so that development expectations themselves remain manageable.

4.4 Inclusion, belonging and voice

- Build a sense of belonging for staff as well as pupils, recognising that inclusive cultures and positive professional relationships matter to wellbeing.
- Seek staff views through Trust and school-level mechanisms, including wellbeing and workload surveys, and communicate the themes identified and actions taken through a ‘You Said, We Did’ feedback system to staff.
- Ensure staff have accessible routes to suggest improvements or raise concerns without fear of disadvantage.

4.5 Support and early intervention

- Maintain clear signposting to the Employee Assistance Programme and other available wellbeing support.
- Maintain access to trained Mental Health First Aiders across ESW schools and support appropriate refresher and further training.
- Provide appropriate support following staff absence, including return-to-work conversations, reasonable adjustments or phased returns where appropriate.
- Use stress risk assessments where appropriate and signpost colleagues to relevant professional, occupational or HR support.

- Provide new staff with an effective induction and appropriate early contact to support successful transition into ESW.
- Maintain the wellbeing@educationsouthwest.org.uk route for staff to raise wellbeing concerns or suggest improvements.

5. Responsibilities

5.1 Education South West Trust

- Set Trust-wide expectations for wellbeing, workload, ethical leadership and professional development.
- Ensure wellbeing and workload are considered within policy formation and review.
- Provide and communicate Trust-wide support, development opportunities and shared resources.
- Monitor Trust-level themes and use evidence to inform priorities and improvement.

5.2 Headteachers and senior leaders

- Model ethical, respectful leadership and create a culture in which staff voice is welcomed.
- Maintain a school-level wellbeing and workload plan aligned with this policy and relevant EIP priorities.
- Consider workload implications before introducing or significantly changing systems and practices.
- Ensure staff understand the support available and how to raise concerns.
- Review staff feedback and other relevant evidence and take proportionate action in response.

5.3 Line managers

- Maintain clear and realistic expectations, priorities and deadlines.
- Use professional conversations to identify concerns early and agree appropriate support or escalation.
- Encourage professional development while considering workload and individual circumstances.
- Model appropriate communication and work-life boundaries.

5.4 Governors and trustees

- Provide appropriate oversight of staff wellbeing and workload, including consideration of staff survey evidence and organisational response.
- Seek assurance that school and Trust priorities consider workload, wellbeing and the conditions needed for staff to thrive.
- Use visits and governance activity appropriately to understand culture and the implementation of this policy.

5.5 All staff

- Treat colleagues with dignity and respect and contribute to an inclusive, professional culture.
- Engage constructively with professional learning and collaborative working.
- Raise workload or wellbeing concerns through appropriate routes so that support and improvement can be considered.
- Use available support where helpful and respect the working boundaries of colleagues.

6. Support available to staff

ESW will maintain and communicate a clear staff wellbeing offer. Current provision should be signposted through the ESW SharePoint site and updated without requiring the main policy to be rewritten whenever a provider or local arrangement changes.

- Employee Assistance Programme, including the current provider and access details published by ESW.
- Mental Health First Aiders across ESW schools.
- Mental health and wellbeing resources available through ESW SharePoint.
- Free use of school gyms where this remains locally available.

- Positive links with professional associations and trade unions.
- Professional Partner (through DSLS) and coaching support for headteachers/school leaders.
- Wellbeing and workload feedback route: wellbeing@educationsouthwest.org.uk.
- Appropriate return-to-work, reasonable adjustment, phased-return and stress risk-assessment arrangements.

7. Monitoring impact

Wellbeing should be evaluated through impact rather than provision alone. ESW and its schools will use relevant evidence to understand whether this policy is making a difference and to identify priorities for action.

- Staff perceptions of wellbeing, workload, leadership culture and belonging.
- Staff perceptions of access to and quality of professional development.
- Recruitment and retention information.
- Staff absence information and themes, considered appropriately and confidentially.
- Feedback from wellbeing and workload surveys and other structured staff voice.
- Evidence that workload implications are considered in policy and improvement activity.
- Progress against Trust and school-level wellbeing and workload priorities.

Trust and school leaders should communicate key themes and resulting actions to staff, creating a clear feedback loop between staff voice, action and review.

8. Strategic priorities for 2026-27

Priority	2026-27 focus
1. Sustainable workload	Embed workload impact consideration within policy review and improvement planning; ensure schools have a clear wellbeing and workload plan.
2. Culture and ethical leadership	Embed the Ethical Leadership Framework and reinforce respectful, relational and professionally trusting leadership behaviours.
3. Developing our people	Strengthen access to instructional coaching, professional learning, support-staff development, leadership development and succession planning.
4. Support and early intervention	Keep routes to wellbeing support visible and accessible, maintain Mental Health First Aid capacity and strengthen early support when concerns emerge.
5. Listening and responding	Use staff surveys and other structured staff voice to identify themes, communicate responses and monitor whether actions improve staff experience.

9. Related ESW strategies and policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Education Improvement Plan 2025-2030 and annual implementation plans.
- ESW People Strategy.
- ESW Ethical Leadership Framework.
- Relevant HR policies and procedures, including managing sickness absence, flexible working, leave of absence, code of conduct capability, staff grievance, disciplinary, whistleblowing, Equity, Equality, Inclusion and Diversity, menopause, recruitment and selection, ECT, and teacher and support staff appraisal policies.

- Professional development, teaching and learning and induction arrangements.
- Relevant behaviour, inclusion and relational practice documentation.

10. Review and local implementation

This policy should be reviewed alongside the Education Improvement Plan and People Strategy so that staff wellbeing and workload remain integral to ESW's strategic development. Annual implementation priorities may be updated without changing the core principles of the policy, subject to the Trust's normal governance arrangements.

Schools should not need to reproduce this policy. Instead, each school should maintain a concise implementation plan showing how Trust commitments are being enacted locally, what evidence is being considered and what improvement priorities have been identified.