Cambridge Journal of Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ccje20

Teacher wellbeing in England: teacher responses to school-level initiatives

Jude Brady & Elaine Wilson

To cite this article: Jude Brady & Elaine Wilson (2020): Teacher wellbeing in England: teacher responses to school-level initiatives, Cambridge Journal of Education, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2020.1775789

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1775789

CAMBRIDGE JOURNAL OF EDUCATION
https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1775789

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Teacher wellbeing in England: teacher responses to school-level initiatives

Jude Brady and Elaine Wilson

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the types of school-level teacher wellbeing initiatives reported by 51 teachers. The authors argue that the most well-received wellbeing measures are those embedded within supportive whole school cultures which aim to minimise burdensome workloads and maximise feelings of autonomy, relatedness and competence. Analysis shows that the least effective initiatives were those that reacted to a perceived problem, but did not seek to address the cause of perceived poor wellbeing. In some cases, activities such as compulsory cooking or sports sessions infringed upon teachers' basic needs for autonomy. Such initiatives acted as a barrier to teacher wellbeing when they were seen to respond to a perceived demand for accountability, or contribute to burdensome workloads by placing additional demands on teachers' time. Overall, teachers favoured school policies and practices which were conducive to promoting meaningful workloads, rather than one-off or limited-duration wellbeing activities.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 16 May 2019
Accepted 22 May 2020

KEYWORDS
Wellbeing; stress; workload; accountability; teachers

Introduction

Pupil and teacher wellbeing are now important topics for education stakeholders in England. Increasing reports of poor mental health in teachers coupled with a recruitment and retention crisis has prompted policy makers and researchers to consider the factors that contribute to poor teacher wellbeing and associated outcomes such as sick leave and turnover.

Recent research has found that England's teachers are more likely to report symptoms of stress and depression compared to the non-teaching general population (Health and Safety Executive, 2017). In a further study, Kidger et al. (2016) found that teachers reporting depressive symptoms were twice as likely to have taken sick leave in the preceding month compared to colleagues with better wellbeing and fewer depressive symptoms. Exempting parental leave, stress, anxiety and depression are the leading cause of teacher sickness in England and these conditions contribute to over 2 million days of sickness absence a year (Department for Education, 2018a; Precey, 2015). Further research commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) has suggested that poor 'general wellbeing' is a 'main contributing factor in [teachers'] decision to leave the profession' (CooperGibson, 2018b, p. 21). Findings from Gibson, Oliver, and

CONTACT Jude Brady jb2086@cam.ac.uk Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 8RP, UK

Dennison's (2015) qualitative analysis of 1685 teacher responses to the national teacher Workload Challenge are supported by other government commissioned research, notably the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) 2019 report into teacher wellbeing. Ofsted, the schools inspectorate body for state funded and some private schools in England, identified that state school teacher wellbeing is adversely affected by burdensome workloads, poor work–life balance, a lack of resources and in some instances a perceived lack of support from school leaders (Ofsted, 2019).

In response to such findings, the DfE and Ofsted published a series of guidelines and recommendations to help school leaders address the causes of burdensome workloads in schools and to encourage a better work-life balance for teaching staff. The most recent Teacher Workload Survey (2019) indicates a reduction in teachers' working hours since 2016, and the authors suggest that workload reduction measures could in part explain this improvement (Walker, Worth, & Van den Brande, 2019). Although national level surveys track teachers' working hours, there has been little independent research which has considered teachers' experiences or perceptions of such initiatives, or other types of initiatives that might inform teacher wellbeing.

In light of this gap in the literature, our study explores school-level work-related wellbeing from the perspective of 51 participants who work as classroom teachers or school leaders in England. We set out to identify the conditions and initiatives that practitioners perceive to enhance or act as barriers to their wellbeing.

What is teacher wellbeing?

There is considerable variation in the definition of 'wellbeing' across education literature (McLeod & Wright, 2016). In order to define the concept, we start by outlining the conceptualisation and application of the term 'wellbeing' over the last 20 years.

As McLellan and Steward (2015) explain, initial attempts to measure wellbeing theorised it in hedonic terms: as the absence of negative states/emotions such as excessive stress or depression, and the presence of positive feelings such as life or job satisfaction. While objective and hedonic understandings of wellbeing lend themselves well to measurement, these approaches have been criticised for underestimating the complexity of what it means to 'be-well'. Nesse (2005), for example, notes that 'positive and negative affect are not necessarily opposite ends of one continuum' and happiness cannot be expected to arise in the absence of suffering (p. 5). This consideration leads to the recognition of wellbeing as a process which is constructed within a context of interacting factors rather than the presence or absence of subjectively quantified emotions.

Subjective eudaimonic approaches recognise the complexity of wellbeing. In this view, it is defined in terms of the extent to which the individual has achieved 'self-actualisation', or 'fulfilment of one's potential' (McLellan & Steward, 2015, p. 310). These views arise from the Aristotelian traditions which consider that the purpose of human endeavour is to live well in accordance to socially constructed virtue. As McLellan and Steward (2015) explain, in a modern context, eudaimonia can be interpreted as the achievement of 'self-realisation' (p. 310).

The field of positive psychology draws on the idea of self-realisation or actualisation (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Parks, 2005). The movement prioritises individuals'

experience and self-knowledge; the individual is encouraged to use this knowledge to pursue fulfilment of the self, so that they might live in accordance with their fullest potential.

However, positive psychology is not without critics. Wright and Pascoe (2015) suggest that the field's Westernised and individualistic approach overlooks the situated and relational dimension of wellbeing. They suggest that genuine wellbeing is a 'process' which 'moves beyond the individual' to recognise the social contexts within which they are situated (p. 296).

Acton and Glasgow (2015) synthesise literature on the topic of teacher wellbeing and provide a definition which recognises its hedonic, eudaimonic and relational aspects:

> Teacher wellbeing may be defined as an individual sense of personal professional fulfilment, satisfaction, purposefulness and happiness, constructed in a collaborative process with colleagues and students. (Acton & Glasgow, 2015, p. 102)

This definition recognises that fulfilment for teachers entails a 'personal professional' dimension, and it accords with other literature which indicates that teachers' work is highly emotive and intertwined with their sense of personal as well as professional identities (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996). Furthermore, the definition identifies that teacher wellbeing is collaboratively constructed within a social space, that is to say, that it is relational. Other studies such as Renshaw, Long, and Cook (2015) and McLellan and Steward (2015) (with reference to pupils) also identify the perceived quality of individuals' relationships as a composite factor underpinning the wellbeing concept. In a school context, research has suggested that the quality of teacher–pupil relationships is positively associated with teacher wellbeing, thus reinforcing the notion that wellbeing is constructed collaboratively (Aldrup, Klusmann, Lüdtke, Göllner, & Trautwein, 2018).

With the aforementioned studies in mind, we adopt Acton and Glasgow's definition and consider that teachers' experiences of wellbeing are formed in relation to their environments and interactions with others in the school space.

Factors affecting teacher wellbeing in England

Support and relationships

The quality of relationships within a school has been associated with teachers' job satisfaction. Edinger and Edinger (2018), for example, found a positive and significant relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and both perceived levels of organisational support and collegial trust. Other studies concur with these findings and indicate that the support of colleagues provides a crucial resource particularly for teachers at the beginning of their careers (Fox & Wilson, 2009). In addition to this, research conducted in the United States indicates that teachers who feel supported by colleagues improve at a faster rate compared to their less well supported peers and are more likely to remain in their posts (Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Yee, 2016; Kraft & Papay, 2014). As individuals' experiences of wellbeing are understood to be relational and socially constructed within the school environment, it is unsurprising that pupil outcomes are linked to the wellbeing of their teachers. Studies have found that pupils' academic gains are negatively correlated with increased teacher stress and depressive symptoms (Hoglund, Klingle, & Hosan, 2015; McLean & Connor, 2015).

Workload

In addition to the quality of support and relationships, workload volume has received considerable attention in discussions around teacher wellbeing – not least because teachers in England have been found to work more hours each week compared to most other jurisdictions (Micklewright et al., 2014). Recent estimates indicate that their average working week is in excess of 50 hours (Higton et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2019). As such, government advice has focused on efforts to improve teachers' experience of their jobs through recommending ways in which school leaders can reduce the quantity and improve the quality of teacher workload with a specific focus on three core areas identified in the national Workload Challenge: inefficient marking; planning and preparation of lessons; and data management (CooperGibson, 2018a; Gibson et al., 2015; Higton et al., 2017). Recommendations include the elimination of unproductive marking tasks (such as marking work multiple times or recording verbal feedback), limiting the amount of data teachers are required to collect on pupils, and limiting the number and duration of staff meetings (Department for Education, 2018b; Teacher Workload Review Group, 2016).

Accountability

Research has emphasised the role of high stakes accountability systems in contributing to burdensome workloads. State funded schools and some private schools are inspected by Ofsted. The summative outcomes of these inspections, combined with pupil performance data, are published on a national comparative website. As a school's reputation, and thus ability to recruit and retain pupils and teachers can be affected by its Ofsted grade and pupils' exam results, school leaders are anxious to ensure that they are 'inspection ready'. In practice, this has led school leaders to implement policies that mimic the Ofsted inspection process (Page, 2017; Perryman, Maguire, Ball, & Braun, 2018); this entails scrutiny of teachers through inspections of their marking, unannounced lesson observations, and regular analysis of pupil performance data (Page, 2015, 2016).

Page (2015) argues that teachers, fearing the material or symbolic sanctions of being identified as a failing practitioner, behave as though they are behind a pane of glass; aware that in a culture of normalised observation, they are continually subject to the judgemental gaze of pupils, peers and managers. In relation to wellbeing, research has linked such hyper-performative cultures (where the teacher is in a perpetual state of performance) to negative affective outcomes such as feelings of anxiety or stress (Perryman, 2007; Skerritt, 2019). Furthermore, Ball (2008) suggests that accountability-motivated workloads move teachers away from their core purpose of supporting pupils to learn, and thus as Perryman and Calvert (2019) conclude, can lead them to feel disillusioned by their work as it appears to be made up of low quality tasks that do not ostensibly benefit pupils. Our forthcoming research in this area finds that teachers in England's private schools do not share state school teachers' experience of high stakes and stressful accountability systems (Brady, 2020). In part this is because schools that are not inspected by Ofsted are not afforded an overall summative grade on their quality. Furthermore, private schools can 'opt out' of national comparative tables which appear to interact with teachers' experiences of accountability on a school level.

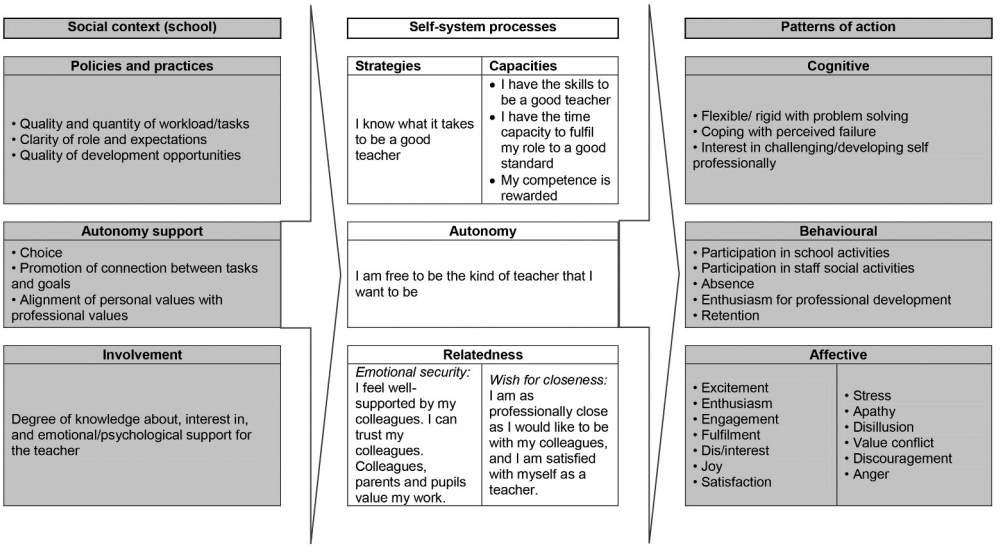

Figure 1. Conceptual framework adapted from Connell and Wellborn (1991).

Theoretical lens

Our study considers school-level practices aimed at improving teachers' working conditions or enhancing their feelings of overall work satisfaction as wellbeing initiatives. We consider that self-determination theory (SDT) illuminates the basic psychological conditions that must be met in order for teachers to experience a positive state of wellbeing: competence; autonomy; and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2006). In practice, the fulfilment of these needs means that teachers feel that they have the knowledge and capacity to do a good job, they have some control or choice over the type and quality of work that they do – and they are supported and trusted by colleagues to do this work.

The psychological basic needs are all interconnected: if one need is not met, the other requirements are unlikely to be fulfilled and this may jeopardise wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Beginning teachers, for example, who do not feel supported by their mentors, may not have their need for relatedness met (Fox, Wilson, & Deaney, 2010). This in turn may lead the teacher to feel that they are not competent, which can link to undesirable outcomes such as low job satisfaction, stress and attrition (Høigaard, Giske, & Sundsli, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Specifically, we draw on SDT in our conceptual model, which is adapted from Connell and Wellborn's (1991) work that situates teacher wellbeing within the wider social environment of its production.

In Figure 1, the arrows suggest that the school context affects teachers' professional self-systems, which in turn affect their patterns of action. According to Connell and Wellborn (1991), school contexts provide structure through policies and practices, autonomy support and involvement in understanding teachers' needs. When the school context is conducive to supporting the basic psychological needs, the teacher is enabled to develop self-systems that reinforce feelings of competence, autonomy and an appropriate degree of connection to

colleagues and the school context. Connell and Wellborn (1991) emphasise that these processes of self-appraisal, which are termed 'self-systems', 'develop out of interactions of psychological needs and social context' (p. 51). Thus the model foregrounds the importance of the underpinning psychological basic needs and the extent to which a school context facilitates the support of the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence. These positive self-systems translate into cognitive, behavioural or affective patterns of action. As exemplified in Figure 1, such actions can include problem solving, resilience, retention and work enthusiasm. As the literature review exemplified, the teacher's manifestation of positive self-systems may have benefits for wider school community members including pupils.

Methodology

As little is known about teachers' experiences of current wellbeing initiatives in schools in England, we determined that it would be most appropriate to analyse qualitative data to identify the intentional or unintentional measures that schools undertake to support this. We determined that this approach was appropriate because we needed to gain insight into the potentially broad range of practices that could be defined as wellbeing initiatives before we could assess teachers' feelings towards these activities.

We addressed two research questions:

- Which practices do teachers perceive support their wellbeing?
- What do teachers perceive to be the barriers to enhancing wellbeing?

To answer these questions, we first explored teachers' descriptions of their school context. We identified structural features of the school, such as policies, which affected teachers' wellbeing. In addition, we explored participants' narratives for accounts of autonomy support or opportunities for engagement which were facilitated by school management behaviours, policies or practices. Following this, we traced the way in which school contexts interacted with teachers' feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness. Specifically, we sought to identify key themes which would help us to understand the types of policies and practices which enabled or presented barriers to wellbeing.

As we wanted to learn about teachers' feelings concerning their experiences of their work, we considered that semi-structured interviews and focus groups would offer an appropriate social space for us to gain rich insight into these questions (Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2014).

Sample

Data were collected as part of a larger mixed-methods academic study exploring teacher stress, workload and accountability. The larger study was approved by the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Study findings are drawn from an overall sample of 51 teachers from 37 schools in England. Twenty-three of the teachers taught in state funded schools and 28 in private schools. Data were collected through 21 one-to-one interviews with teachers, 1 interview with 2 teachers, and 6 focus groups with

Table 1. Participant demographics.

	Primary	Secondary	Sixth form	Total
Female	6	24	1	31
Male	4	14	2	20
Total	10	38	3	51

between 3 and 5 participants. The interviews and focus groups were conducted over a seven-month period from 2017 to 2018.

One-to-one interviews lasted 45–75 minutes, whereas the focus group discussions were 75–90 minutes in duration. All the focus groups and individual interviews followed a semi-structured format during which participants were invited to discuss their experiences as teachers. Questions centred around school practices, workload, accountability, stressors and related school initiatives/policies. We adapted questions according to the role of the participant (e.g. classroom teacher, middle leader or senior leader). Although these were semi-structured interviews with variation in the phrasing, indicative questions included items such as: 'Can you tell me about the best/worst parts of your job?'; 'Can you tell me about workload/monitoring in your school'; 'Can you tell me about the kind of wellbeing policies your school has?', and 'What, if anything, contributes to stress at work?' From these discussions we were able to identify the policies and initiatives that supported or undermined teacher wellbeing and evaluate participants' responses to these measures, activities or practices.

As the focus groups were conducted after most of the one-to-one interviews had been completed, we had the opportunity to test hypotheses derived from the individual interviews with groups of participants. In this sense, the focus groups allowed us to triangulate our data by checking to see if findings were convergent (Morgan, 2019).

Participant demographics

Table 1 details teachers' genders and the age phase of the schools within which they were employed. One of the participants had recently left secondary teaching due to stress and she did not intend to re-enter the profession. All others were employed as teachers at the time of interview.

By way of further contextualisation, participants had been teaching for an average of 16 years (n = 48, min = 2 years, max = 41 years). Additionally, the sample includes teachers from across the country and teaching phases. As such, the sample afforded us a range of insights and perspectives from teachers at different points in their careers and from across sectors and school types.

Coding

We organised and categorised our interview and focus group data from transcripts in three phases.

Phase 1

During the first phase of coding, we identified teachers' comments which explicitly or implicitly discussed, or gave insight to, their self-regulation processes in relation to

feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness. In addition, we noted the aspects of school context that teachers associated with these processes.

Phase 2

As recommended by Coffey and Atkinson (1996), the second phase of coding involved drawing together these contributions to identify common themes across the transcripts. SDT provided the theoretical backdrop against which we could begin to interpret emergent themes.

Phase 3

Following the identification of common themes, we looked specifically at the policies and/or conditions that teachers identified as supporting or undermining their wellbeing. The conceptual model allowed analysis of the reasons why certain practices or initiatives were welcomed or not welcomed by participants – and the way in which these responses linked to patterns of action.

Findings

All of the teachers in the study were able to detail the ways in which their schools' policies and practices worked to support or undermine their wellbeing. Some teachers reported that their schools had initiatives directly targeted at enhancing 'wellbeing', whereas others explained that they had working groups to discuss and advise management on ways in which they could reduce workload, or improve marking and assessment procedures for teachers. Initiatives explicitly developed to support teacher wellbeing were more commonly reported by state sector teachers, with private school teachers less likely to perceive wellbeing as an area of concern that required specific intervention. Nevertheless, even in schools that did not have specific initiatives targeted at improving wellbeing or related matters such as workload, there was evidence that the policies and practices of those schools still impacted on the teachers' wellbeing, whether or not this was intentional.

From the data, we developed a list of the school-level practices and policies that interacted with teachers' reports of their wellbeing. Based on the teachers' narratives, we organised these findings into further subcategories on a continuum of reactionary, transactional and transformational measures (Table 2).

Reactionary wellbeing measures are characterised by their responsive nature; they treat the symptoms of a wellbeing problem, rather than disturb the conditions that may contribute to poor wellbeing in the first place. In some schools 'wellbeing sessions' were compulsory and placed during teachers' 'directed time' (time reserved for meetings/whole school activities); for others they were voluntary efforts run outside of the teachers' contracted hours. For the most part, these reactionary initiatives were explicitly aimed at improving aspects of staff wellbeing in the short or immediate term.

Compulsory wellbeing

Teachers' responses to reactionary wellbeing provision were in part contingent on the degree to which they felt obliged to participate in these activities; as one secondary school

Table 2. Types of wellbeing provision reported by study participants.

	Structure	Autonomy support	Involvement
Transformational (Policy)	Commitment to quality workloads: • Mechanism to avoid task duplication (e.g. streamlined IT systems) • Dedicated staff for administrative tasks • Teachers' tasks have clear benefit to pupils and/or teachers Marking and assessment policies: • Streamlined marking procedures • Limits on the frequency and/or depth of book marking required • Limited frequency of reporting to parents • Limited frequency and volume of data collection Working conditions: • Limitations on working hours • School building inaccessible at weekend/holidays • Limited number/duration of meetings • 'Bans' on taking marking home • Breaks throughout day • Access to basic facilities e.g. water and toilets	Indicators of trust: • Books not scrutinised • Class teachers' judgement informs data analysis • Observations are clearly linked to CPD (never conducted for general monitoring purposes) Classroom autonomy: • Free to plan own lessons which fulfil curriculum/topic criteria • Choice over lesson structure • No or very limited requirement to submit lesson plans/ schemes of work to senior leadership teams Career autonomy: • Opportunities for career progression • Choice over CPD courses Time autonomy: • Staff not required to be 'on-site' unless teaching/on duty • Restricted number of compulsory duties	Collegial culture: • Supportive leadership/colleagues • Allocated time for collaboration
Transactional (Contractual/ material)	Remunerative rewards: • Pay progression • Promotion opportunities CPD: • Provision of high-quality and relevant training within/outside of school Medical insurance: • Subsidised private health • Dental care	Flexibility: • Discretionary leave (e.g. to visit own children's school events)	Fostering appreciation and motivation: • Small gifts for staff (e.g. 'thank you cards' at end of term) • Verbal appreciation • Motivational quotations
Reactionary (supplementary)	Food, beverages and equipment for non-teaching time: • Free/subsidised meals/drinks/ snacks for staff • Staffroom equipment (e.g. kettle/toaster/water fountains/sofas)	Leave: • Mental health days Mental health provision: • Staff counsellors • Chaplain	Relaxation activities/ aids: • Massages/'pampering sessions' • Meditation/ relaxation classes • Relaxation/mindfulness apps Physical activities: • Group exercise classes • Team sports School community or competitive classes: • Baking/cooking competitions • Art classes • Choir • Quiz nights

classroom teacher suggested, staff did not enjoy 'forced fun'. This sentiment was expressed during a focus group discussion, when another teacher explained that her school had introduced 'compulsory sessions' for teacher wellbeing which included 'jogging, walking, or colouring'. Another teacher working in the same school stated that the provision was 'not genuine', but aimed at 'ticking the wellbeing box for an Ofsted purpose'. He perceived that these activities were 'not a good use of time or resources' and that he 'would prefer [the hour dedicated to wellbeing classes] to go home early'.

While teachers were not receptive to compulsory wellbeing sessions, others expressed more ambivalent views towards reactionary provision. A further secondary school classroom teacher explained that the establishment of a staff wellbeing committee was a 'mixed thing' because there was a 'split' between staff who enjoyed 'the community feel' and those who felt 'resentful' about being asked to participate in after work activities, such as baking classes, organised by the committee. The participant continued to explain that other reactionary provision, such as massages for teachers, failed to address the underlying causes of teacher stress:

> I don't want to stay in school for an extra hour of massage. I'd like my job to not be stressful, so I don't need a massage.

The teachers' narratives suggested that reactionary wellbeing initiatives were poorly received when teachers felt that it was provided for an accountability 'Ofsted' purpose, or when it exacerbated rather than alleviated heavy workloads – by requiring teachers to dedicate time to an additional activity, for example. For these teachers, managers did not fully understand the wants and needs of staff and thus they had introduced sessions that the teachers felt infringed upon their personal autonomy. They suggested that they were compelled into participatory behaviour and this contributed to a negative affective outcome of feelings of annoyance or anger.

Flexible working

In some instances, teachers welcomed reactionary wellbeing provision as an 'add-on' to policies and practices that were conducive to ensuring that teachers' workloads were meaningful and manageable. As one middle leader explained, although her school offered 'stuff' such as massages, meditation opportunities and facilities in the staffroom:

> It is not just the stuff. It is the cultural things like we can go home early. It is being flexible.

The teacher here indicated that the policies, practices and behaviours that constituted the working 'culture' of her school were an important component to supporting her wellbeing. It appeared that the 'stuff' to which she referred was valued only because it was embedded within a working environment that encouraged 'flexible' work patterns. She elaborated and explained that 'being flexible' meant that teaching staff could take 'no questions asked' mental health leave, or managers would allow teachers additional time off to attend their own children's events during working hours. We termed policies and practices such as discretionary leave or long holidays as 'transactional', as such provision could be conceptualised as a reward or compensation for teachers' physical, intellectual or emotional labour. Several interviewees from the private sector, for example, made

comments of the 'We work long hours during the term times, but we are compensated with long holidays' type.

Enabling meaningful workloads

Transformational provision was situated as crucial to efforts to support wellbeing. Such provision was perceived as preventative, as typically it created conditions that fostered positive cognitive, behavioural and affective outcomes in the long term. For example, one state school teacher stated:

> Removal of unnecessary marking of classroom books has probably had the biggest impact on my workload in the 14 years I've been teaching.

The teacher went on to suggest that streamlining policies had had no adverse impact on pupil progress because she retained her professional knowledge of 'who's writing well and who isn't'. The teacher estimated that the new marking policy saved her 'six or seven hours a week' of 'unnecessary marking'. In this instance, improved marking policies helped to ensure a manageable volume of work for the teacher. While these practices appeared to support wellbeing from our participants' perspectives, they were not necessarily explicitly identified as 'wellbeing initiatives'.

High volume and low quality workloads generated by high stakes accountability systems appeared to be the main barrier to enhancing wellbeing for teachers working in the state sector. With few exceptions, state school teachers variously described the volume of their work as 'overwhelming', 'intense' and 'completely and utterly unacceptable'. On the other hand, those working in the private sector also spoke of long hours and intense days, yet interviewees typically stated that they were engaged with their work and that they found the interpersonal aspects of it enjoyable. The wider study from which these data are drawn showed that private school teachers worked a similar number of hours each week to their state counterparts, but that they maintained lower levels of stress and better overall perceptions of their workload (Brady, 2020). In part these different perceptions were due to the different priorities of teachers' work. Many private school teachers expressed that they found fulfilment in working closely with pupils, whereas state school teachers frequently suggested that accountability demands acted as a barrier to such engagement.

Teachers in both sectors wanted to support pupils in their academic, personal and social development, and this was where teachers derived their major job satisfaction. One private school teacher described the profession as 'the best job in the world', while another approaching his retirement reflected: 'I've had a very much more satisfactory working life than an awful lot of people I know.' Another private school teacher with a pastoral role also described teaching as 'the best job in the world' because she worked with pupils on 'an academic front' and the 'pastoral side'. Her colleague agreed that she found teaching a 'powerful' experience because she saw pupils 'grow' which was 'rewarding'.

Participants working in the state sector similarly identified the interpersonal aspects of their role as the most enjoyable aspects of their job. They spoke of 'building those personal relationships' and 'building relationships with pupils' alongside altruistic factors such as '[making] a difference to [pupils'] lives' as the 'best' part of their work. However,

teachers enjoyed their work only as long as they felt that the tasks they undertook benefitted the pupils. In the state school data, there were multiple instances of teachers describing feeling burdened by tasks that were completed for audiences other than the children. One state school practitioner explained:

> When you are marking children's work you are marking it for the adult who is going to be looking in the books, rather than necessarily the benefit of the children [. . . .] It is those kinds of low-level pointless tasks multiplied by 100.

The teacher's comments were typical in that she identified 'low-level' pointless tasks to be symptomatic of a wider pressure to evidence the quantity and/or quality of her marking 'for the adult who is looking'. The comment could have referred either to intra-school inspectors, or external inspectors from Ofsted. However, as Page (2017) observes, state schools in England have become preoccupied with Ofsted inspections to the extent that many have entered a state of simulation whereby both formal and casual inspections by managers, colleagues and even pupils have become normalised. A state school teacher in a different interview reflected: 'You are working to the scrutiny rather than what is best for the children sometimes.' When questioned further, she suggested that she worked under such scrutiny because 'it's accountability for public funds', and so teachers and school leaders had to evidence their value for money. Another suggested that school leaders had become 'more and more tied up in book scrutinies' (inspections of teachers' marking of exercise books). However, she considered this to be a 'box ticking exercise' which had no clear purpose because she did not know 'what [managers] get from it really'.

The joy of working with pupils

In terms of teacher wellbeing, the quality of the work, rather than the volume *per se* appeared to play a greater formative role. In particular, teachers found work that they felt directly benefitted the pupils in their care, or their own professional development, to be valuable and worthwhile. For example, a senior leader from a private school explained the fulfilment that she found in her work:

> We give such a huge amount to this community both through our professional working day-to-day life, but also in our free time and in our social lives as well. It's more than just a job. It's a lifestyle and that pays dividends for both the pupils and the members of staff I believe.

The teacher found her work meaningful because it was situated within a 'community'. The social context was such that she felt motivated to 'give such a huge amount' to the point where her work became 'more than just a job' and it morphed into a 'lifestyle'. She felt that this input had a positive outcome for 'both the pupils and the members of staff'. As the teacher felt that her work '[paid] dividends for both the pupils and members of staff', she found it purposeful and enjoyable. Her highly positive view of her workload allowed her job to become more than a profession: it formed part of her identity and a social context from which she drew a strong sense of wellbeing. References to 'community' and the school context being akin to a 'family' were frequent within the private school data and immersion in the community was presented as an expectation of the role by such teachers, and particularly those working in boarding school environments.

Teachers in the state sector also found joy in working with pupils. However, for some, this joy was hampered by systemic features that presented a clear barrier to their overall wellbeing. For example, a state secondary practitioner reflected that teachers 'should be getting a lot of joy' from their work, but that this had been 'squished and squeezed' out of her experience by 'this data driven system we're in'. In a separate focus group, the notion of joy re-emerged. A primary teacher suggested that:

> We actually really enjoy being with children and there's a real joy in that and for many of the colleagues I talk to that has disappeared basically. It's been completely squeezed out of the profession.

In an uncanny echo of the other interviewee's experience, this teacher also used the imagery of 'joy' being 'squeezed out of the profession'. She later identified that intensive monitoring in her school led her to feel 'not trusted' and as quoted above, that workloads associated with monitoring intervened in teachers' ability to be 'with children', the core aspect of their work from which they derived 'joy'.

Supporting autonomy

Teachers from the private sector frequently explained that they felt 'trusted' by managers to do their jobs and that they felt that they had autonomy over their classrooms and teaching decisions. Such a sense of autonomy may explain why such teachers chose to immerse themselves in their work as a 'life style'. One participant speculated that higher levels of autonomy were possible in the private sector because the sector's teachers and schools were 'not subject to the same government regulation and Ofsted process' as state school teachers. Another private school classroom teacher perceived that government interference in the form of curriculum changes, policy initiatives and inspections could be 'off-putting' for state school teachers. Although he did not have direct experience of conditions in the state sector, he suggested that 'autonomy' from government in the private sector 'is leading to better satisfaction' for teachers. Interviews from the state sector supported the notion that teachers did not feel 'trusted'. Rather, they reported feeling 'micro-managed', with one stating that 'you're always being scrutinised' by managers preparing for Ofsted. In a separate discussion, a senior leader reported working under a 'culture of fear', which a headteacher in a different school attributed to the 'political monster' of Ofsted and its demands.

There were some examples of state school teachers whose schools effectively supported their psychological basic needs through their structures and provision. One notable example was the previously quoted secondary school teacher who attributed her overall feelings of wellbeing to an effective school 'culture'. She explained that workload reduction strategies allowed her to feel 'very happy' in her job. However, underlying this work enjoyment was 'high stakes accountability' which she stated remained present even though her school 'managed it better [...] than anywhere else [she'd] been'. Although this interview was not typical of the state sector sample, combined with findings from the private sector, it indicates that the policies and practices within a school can meaningfully support teacher wellbeing even within a national context of high stakes accountability.

Constructing boundaries

In discussions about the factors that supported or acted as a barrier to wellbeing, some participants explained the personal measures that they took to protect themselves from the potentially damaging effects of their work. Some had built psychological or physical boundaries between work and home as a way to protect their own wellbeing, for example, by ensuring that they finished all tasks by a certain time, or by refusing to take items such as exercise books into their homes. As one primary school teacher explained:

> I never take anything home, never ever. I don't . . . because it's not just a pile of books in your house, it's 30 kids, 30 kids coming to your house with all of their problems and all of their parents and you need to keep them out of your head.

Through the construction of a physical and psychological separation between work and home, the teacher could become an autonomous agent in supporting his own wellbeing. He stated that he prioritised his 'mental wellbeing' and 'happiness', and he was enabled to do this by physically closing out the stresses of 'kids' and 'their problems and all of their parents'. He used the same strategy to protect himself against the negative affective impacts of intensive school-level accountability procedures. He gave the example of an imitation Ofsted inspection ('Mock-Sted') to which he physically 'closed his door' and advised his headteacher that the mock inspectors '[were] not coming in because they have absolutely no entitlement'. He took this approach because he determined that the 'extra stress' of a mock inspection would not benefit him or the pupils.

A secondary school middle leader who had resigned from the profession shortly prior to interview explained the way in which the stresses of her work invaded her private life to a point where she could no longer sustain in the job:

> With my partner – it was just going round and round and round. It was conversations about my job. And it just started eating away. I thought, 'I just have no control'.

In this instance, the participant attributed her stress to heavy scrutiny and unsupportive managers. Her narrative demonstrated the way in which breached psychological and emotional boundaries can interact with the personal domain of teachers' lives to invade personal relationships, in this case between the teacher and her partner. Furthermore, the teacher found that her concerns were 'going round and round and round' dominating her thoughts and conversations to the point that it had 'started eating away' at her sense of autonomy and she felt she had 'no control'. Her sense of a lack of control contributed to the action of leaving the profession.

For private school teachers, the boundaries between work and home were less clearly delineated. For some, this was because working in a boarding school meant that they lived on site and thus the personal and professional domains of their lives had merged. In other cases, teachers derived their wellbeing through their total engagement with the school community. As a previously quoted interviewee suggested, this meant that teachers willingly dedicated 'huge amounts' of their 'free time' and 'social lives' to work-related activities. Their personal and professional sense of wellbeing was constructed within the school context, which several referred to as like a 'family' or 'community'. These cases provided an interesting comparison to those of the state school

teachers who supported their wellbeing through a distancing from the demands of their work, rather than a deeper immersion within the school environment.

Discussion and conclusions

Overall our study found that teachers perceive that school contexts that promote high quality workloads and appropriate levels of autonomy and relatedness are supportive of their wellbeing. On the other hand, accountability motivated workloads, practices or policies that are perceived to infringe on teachers' personal time or home lives are salient barriers to wellbeing. However, as was exemplified by some cases, teachers are not necessarily averse to immersion in the school community. The differentiating factor appears to be the extent to which teachers feel managers prioritise staff's genuine psychological basic needs over the need to evidence wellbeing provision 'for Ofsted'.

High quality workloads are defined as those which have a clear and direct benefit to pupils. The perception of undertaking high quality work enabled teachers to develop positive self-systems that affirmed their sense of being a competent and valuable contributor to the school community. In turn, these self-systems linked to expressions of fulfilment or job satisfaction because teachers felt that their work with pupils was worthwhile. However, we found evidence that for some state school participants meaningful work is hindered by unnecessary and burdensome workloads which are motivated by the perceived demands of the schools inspectorate – a finding which mirrors other studies drawing the same conclusions (Gibson et al., 2015; Ofsted, 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Our findings extend on this previous research because they provide a novel comparison between sectors and this comparison indicates that a lower stakes approach to accountability may be more conducive to supporting teacher wellbeing than an intensive highstakes approach.

Other participants felt that their schools' wellbeing provision compelled them into an unwanted closeness with others and undermined their work/home boundaries. Compulsory wellbeing sessions, particularly when set outside school hours, are not likely to be well received by staff. In part, this is because potentially well-meaning provision curtails teachers' sense of autonomy over their time and breaches the work/home boundary that some wish to construct.

It was a notable feature of the data that participants from state schools typically desired a clearer delineation between the personal and professional compared to private school teachers. While state school practitioners often explained that they cared profoundly about their work and the pupils they served, many had a desire to leave work 'at work'. Contrary to their state counterparts, some private school teachers explained that they willingly undertook long hours and participated in the extra-curricular life of the school because they felt connected to the wider community. As suggested by other research, such feelings of value alignment and belonging are important to teachers' overall work fulfilment (Fox & Wilson, 2009).

When teachers do not experience this connection with the school context, we found evidence that they might engage in a particular behavioural pattern that is dissonant with their affective responses. There were clear instances of teachers performing a behavioural outcome, such as participation in staff activities, while displaying a dissonant affective response. As exemplified in the findings, teachers may participate in

baking, colouring or running, but feel resentful or annoyed by such activities or 'forced fun'. Thus in challenge to our conceptual model, it appears that behavioural patterns of action could be accompanied by disjunct affective responses and self-system processes. With this finding in mind, it cannot be assumed that teachers' presence at wellbeing events, or even decisions to remain in a role within a school, are reliable indicators of their perceptions of the school's structures, autonomy support or involvement in their needs.

Overall, our study emphasises the essential role of the school context in enhancing teacher wellbeing and it points to the importance of school leaders working to understand the needs and wants of staff. In some contexts, autonomy support may involve respecting or even encouraging the boundaries between teachers' work and home lives, perhaps through ensuring workloads that are manageable within standard working hours, or by offering voluntary opportunities to socialise with colleagues. Furthermore, the research suggests that the enaction of heavy monitoring of teachers' performance on a school level acts as a barrier to wellbeing, as teachers perceive that they are working to provide evidence of their competence, rather than towards the best interests of pupils. Those who work in lower-stakes accountability environments reported feeling trusted and more fulfilled by their work because they found it to be more meaningful. School leaders looking to support the wellbeing of their staff might usefully consider the role of monitoring within their schools and the extent to which this may impede wellbeing by generating either a low-trust environment and/or workloads that do not clearly benefit pupils. From here, we consider that there is clearly more research to be done which examines the effectiveness of specific wellbeing initiatives, or collections of policies and practices. It may also be useful to continue research that considers the effect of such policies not only on teachers, but also on pupil outcomes in the broadest sense.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Jude Brady http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6142-1771
Elaine Wilson http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6914-7321

References

Acton, R., & Glasgow, P. (2015). Teacher wellbeing in neoliberal contexts: A review of the literature. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(8), 99–114.

Aldrup, K., Klusmann, U., Lüdtke, O., Göllner, R., & Trautwein, U. (2018). Student misbehavior and teacher well-being: Testing the mediating role of the teacher-student relationship. *Learning and Instruction*, *58*, 126–136.

Ball, S. J. (2008). *The education debate*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Brady, J. (2020). *Workload, accountability and stress: A comparative study of teachers' working conditions in state and private schools in England* (Unpublished PhD dissertation). University of Cambridge, UK.

Burton, N., Brundrett, M., & Jones, M. (2014). *Doing your education research project*. London: Sage.
Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Connell, J. P., & Wellborn, J. G. (1991). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness: A motivational analysis of self-system processes. In M. Gunnar & A. Stroufe (Eds.), *Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology* (pp. 43–77). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
CooperGibson. (2018a). *Exploring teacher workload: Qualitative research* (Report 56). Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686734/Exploring_teacher_workload.pdf
CooperGibson. (2018b). *Factors affecting teacher retention: Qualitative investigation* (Report 56). Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/686947/Factors_affecting_teacher_retention_-_qualitative_investigation.pdf
Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2000). The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11*(4), 227–268.
Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: An introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *9*(1), 1–11.
Department for Education. (2018a). *Schools workforce census: November 2018*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2018
Department for Education. (2018b). *Workload reduction toolkit*. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/workload-reduction-toolkit
Edinger, S. K., & Edinger, M. J. (2018). Improving teacher job satisfaction: The roles of social capital, teacher efficacy, and support. *The Journal of Psychology*, *152*(8), 573–593.
Fox, A., & Wilson, E. (2009). 'Support our networking and help us belong!': Listening to beginning secondary school science teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, *15*(6), 701–718.
Fox, A., Wilson, E., & Deaney, R. (2010). Beginning teachers' workplace experiences: Perceptions of and use of support. *Vocations and Learning*, *4*(1), 1–24.
Gibson, S., Oliver, L., & Dennison, M. (2015). *Workload challenge: Analysis of teacher consultation responses* (Report 49). Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401406/RR445_-_Workload_Challenge_-_Analysis_of_teacher_consultation_responses_FINAL.pdf
Health and Safety Executive. (2017). *Health statistics – education sector*. Retrieved from http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/industry/education/index.htm
Higton, J., Leonardi, S., Richards, N., Sofroniou, D. N., Owen, D. D., & Choudrey, A. (2017). *Teacher workload survey 2016* (Report 100). Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594696/TWS-2016_FINAL_Research_brief_Feb_2017.pdf
Hoglund, W. L. G., Klingle, K. E., & Hosan, N. E. (2015). Classroom risks and resources: Teacher burnout, classroom quality and children's adjustment in high needs elementary schools. *Journal of School Psychology*, *53*(5), 337–357.
Høigaard, R., Giske, R., & Sundsli, K. (2012). Newly qualified teachers' work engagement and teacher efficacy influences on job satisfaction, burnout, and the intention to quit. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, *35*(3), 347–357.
Jeffrey, B., & Woods, P. (1996). Feeling deprofessionalised: The social construction of emotions during an OFSTED inspection. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *26*(3), 325–343.
Kidger, J., Brockman, R., Tilling, K., Campbell, R., Ford, T., Araya, R., … Gunnell, D. (2016). Teachers' wellbeing and depressive symptoms, and associated risk factors: A large cross sectional study in English secondary schools. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 192, 76–82.
Kraft, M. A., Marinell, W. H., & Shen-Wei Yee, D. (2016). School organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53*(5), 1411–1449.

Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2014). Can professional environments in schools promote teacher development? Explaining heterogeneity in returns to teaching experience. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *36*(4), 476–500.
McLean, L., & Connor, C. M. (2015). Depressive symptoms in third-grade teachers: Relations to classroom quality and student achievement. *Child Development*, *86*(3), 945–954.
McLellan, R., & Steward, S. (2015). Measuring children and young people's wellbeing in the school context. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *45*(3), 307–332.
McLeod, J., & Wright, K. (2016). What does wellbeing do? An approach to defamiliarize keywords in youth studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *19*(6), 776–792.
Micklewright, J., Jerrim, J., Vignoles, A., Jenkins, A., Allen, R., Ilie, S., … Hein, C. (2014). *Teachers in England's secondary schools: Evidence from TALIS 2013* (Report 206). Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594696/TWS-2016_FINAL_Research_brief_Feb_2017.pdf
Morgan, D. L. (2019). Commentary – after triangulation, what next? *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *13*(1), 6–11.
Nesse, R. (2005). Natural selection and the elusiveness of happiness. In F. Huppert, N. Baylis, & B. Keverne (Eds.), *The science of well-being* (pp. 3–35). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ofsted. (2019). *Teacher well-being at work in schools and further education providers*. Author. Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819314/Teacher_well-being_report_110719F.pdf
Page, D. (2015). The visibility and invisibility of performance management in schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, *41*(6), 1031–1049.
Page, D. (2016). Understanding performance management in schools: A dialectical approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *30*(2), 166–176.
Page, D. (2017). The surveillance of teachers and the simulation of teaching. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32*(1), 1–13.
Perryman, J. (2007). Inspection and emotion. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *37*(2), 173–190.
Perryman, J., & Calvert, G. (2019). What motivates people to teach, and why do they leave? Accountability, performativity and teacher retention. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *68*(1), 3–23.
Perryman, J., Maguire, M., Ball, S. J., & Braun, A. (2018). Surveillance, governmentality and moving the goalposts: The influence of Ofsted on the work of schools in a post-panoptic era. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *66*(2), 145–163.
Precey, M. (2015). Teacher stress levels in England 'soaring', data shows. *BBC News*. Retrieved fromhttp://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-31921457
Renshaw, T. L., Long, A. C. J., & Cook, C. R. (2015). Assessing teachers' positive psychological functioning at work: Development and validation of the teacher subjective wellbeing questionnaire. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *30*(2), 289–306.
Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2006). Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality*, *76*(6), 1557–1586.
Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A new understanding of happiness and well-being – and how to achieve them*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
Seligman, M., & Parks, A. (2005). A balanced psychology and a full life. In F. Huppert, N. Baylis, & B. Keverne Steen (Eds.), *The science of well-being* (pp. 275–306). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2014). Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: Relations with teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. *Psychological Reports*, *114*(1), 68–77.
Skerritt, C. (2019). Irish migrant teachers' experiences and perceptions of autonomy and accountability in the English education system. *Research Papers in Education*, *34*(5), 569–596.
Teacher Workload Review Group. (2016). *Eliminating unnecessary workload around marking*. (Report 13). Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/511256/Eliminating-unnecessary-workload-around-marking.pdf

Walker, M., Worth, J., & Van den Brande, J. (2019). *Teacher workload survey 2019*. Department for Education website. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/838457/Teacher_workload_survey_2019_report.pdf

Wright, P. R., & Pascoe, R. (2015). Eudaimonia and creativity: The art of human flourishing. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *45*(3), 295–306.