

# Wellbeing After the Bell: How Schools Are Supporting Pupils and Staff Beyond the Timetable

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In the past, school wellbeing was largely confined to pastoral care within the school day.

But in 2025, that's no longer enough.

Rising anxiety among pupils, staff burnout, cost-of-living stress, and stretched family support systems mean that the **true test of a school's culture often begins after 3:30pm.**

Across the country, schools are responding—not with quick fixes, but with structured, strategic approaches that **extend care beyond the timetable.** From protected CPD time and wraparound childcare to after-hours mental health access, this article explores what works, what's scalable, and how school leaders are leading the charge.

## The Case for “After-Hours” Wellbeing

### For Pupils:

- 1 in 5 children in England are estimated to experience a mental health issue by age 14.
- Post-Covid school refusal and social anxiety are still rising.

- Working families increasingly rely on schools for safe, enriching wraparound support.

### **For Staff:**

- Burnout and retention risks are now board-level issues.
- Planning time is being swallowed by supervision or cover.
- Safeguarding teams are absorbing the weight of complex needs with little respite.

**What's emerging** is a new model: schools that proactively build “after the bell” wellbeing into their staffing, budget, estate, and timetable planning.

### **What Schools Are Doing Right Now**

#### **1. Staff CPD Time, Protected and Prioritised**

- One West Midlands trust has created “protected Wednesday afternoons” for CPD, with all pupils in enrichment or sports.
- A primary in Kent has blocked out two INSET-equivalent days across the year just for pastoral and trauma-informed CPD.

#### **2. Mental Health Hubs That Stay Open Late**

- A South Coast secondary now offers drop-in counselling until 5:30pm two days a week, staffed by its existing Mental Health Support Team.
- One rural MAT repurposed a mobile library bus into a mobile wellbeing station, visiting three schools after school hours.

#### **3. Wraparound Childcare as Core Provision**

- In a North Yorkshire village, the school offers 7:30am-6pm childcare funded partly via Pupil Premium and LA subsidies—improving attendance and reducing lateness.
- An East London MAT partnered with a local charity to deliver arts-based enrichment from 3:30-5:30pm—run by trained youth workers, not teaching staff.

#### **4. ELSA Time Built Into Contracts**

- Several schools are now contracting Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) for after-hours support, especially in the lead-up to

GCSEs or during family breakdowns.

- A SEND base in Birmingham has a fixed 4–6pm “soft close” routine to support neurodiverse pupils with structured transitions out of the school day.

## Planning Wellbeing Beyond 3:30 – A Leadership Framework

Area	Leadership Action
<b>Timetable</b>	Build CPD blocks into the weekly structure, not just twilight INSETs
<b>Staffing</b>	Allocate PPA-equivalent time for wellbeing leads, ELSAs, or MHSTs
<b>Facilities</b>	Use unused spaces (libraries, nurture rooms, outdoor shelters) for soft-close or drop-in support
<b>Finance</b>	Budget for wellbeing like a core provision—link to Pupil Premium, attendance, and retention
<b>Community</b>	Work with local services (CAMHS, youth clubs, mental health charities) to extend reach

### What the Data Shows

- Schools with structured wellbeing provision outside normal hours report up to **30% fewer exclusions** and **improved attendance**.
- Staff turnover reduced by 15–20% in schools with protected non-teaching time and embedded CPD.
- Wraparound enrichment tied to attainment for disadvantaged pupils—especially in reading and oracy.

### Final Thought

Supporting wellbeing doesn’t end when the bell rings.

In fact, some of the most impactful interventions happen **after hours**—in the quiet, structured, intentional spaces where pupils decompress, staff reconnect, and school life feels human again.

In 2025/26, we’re not just extending the timetable—we’re redefining what a school day means.

And the schools leading this charge?

They're not working harder. They're working **more strategically**—planning, partnering, and prioritising wellbeing as the foundation for everything else.