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
Timetable	Build CPD blocks into the weekly structure, not just twilight INSETs
Staffing	Allocate PPA-equivalent time for wellbeing leads, ELSAs, or MHSTs
Facilities	Use unused spaces (libraries, nurture rooms, outdoor shelters) for soft-close or drop-in support
Finance	Budget for wellbeing like a core provision—link to Pupil Premium, attendance, and retention
Community	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.