



# TEACHER WELLBEING: The State of the Nation and The Solutions Our Teachers Want Moving Forward

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND TEACHER WELLBEING SURVEY DATA TRENDS

By Adrienne Hornby
School Wellbeing Consultant and Strategist

# Introduction

Teacher wellbeing is not just a personal issue; it's a professional necessity. It's closely tied to educator success and student outcomes, and a lack of it is proven to lead to staff burnout, disengagement and attrition.

Therefore, it is important that schools as employers actively encourage, nurture and sustain teacher wellbeing to ensure teacher retention, satisfaction and whole school outcomes.

While issues such as workload and student behaviour are often front and centre in discussions around teacher stress, the issue runs much deeper... The most recent literature, as well as the voices of teachers themselves, highlight the need to move beyond resilience training or reactive supports. To make lasting change, we must think and work strategically, develop the skills and capacities of our leaders and staff, invest in strong people management practices and foster the social capital that enables school teams to truly thrive.

The wellbeing of all staff, not just teachers, requires our focused attention. Our teacher wellbeing surveys capture data across the whole school workforce, including leaders, administrative staff and non-teaching roles. This comprehensive picture enables schools to develop a tailored approach to address the unique needs of their people, within their specific context. While the challenges are significant, there are solutions. This report explores what the evidence says works, and what thousands of teachers across more than 60 Australian schools are telling us they need.

Importantly, it reminds us that while we wait for broader system reforms to catch up, schools still have the power to make an impact now. By understanding the real needs of their staff and taking deliberate, strategic action, school leaders can create workplaces worth showing up to each day - where teachers and teams are empowered to do the meaningful, life-changing work they were called to do.

#### This report includes:

- A snapshot of the current state of teacher wellbeing in Australia
- Key stressors and risk factors impacting teacher wellbeing
- The ripple effects of poor teacher wellbeing on students, schools and the community
- Data insights from our teacher wellbeing surveys administered across 60+ schools (incl. government, non-government, primary, secondary and colleges)
- What teachers themselves say they need to feel supported, valued and well
- Evidence-based strategies and school-wide initiatives that work, complemented with links to the recommendations of experts in the field
- How schools can take a strategic, data-informed approach to staff and teacher wellbeing

# The Problem: Why Teacher Wellbeing Demands Urgent Action

A recent <u>Black Dog Institute survey (2023)</u> of 4,000 Australian teachers revealed some confronting statistics:



of teacher absences in the previous month were linked to a mental health or emotional problem



reported high stress levels, compared to 11.4% in the general population



reported moderate to extremely severe symptoms of depression, compared to 12% in the general population



reported symptoms of anxiety, compared to 9% of the general population

Additionally, <u>Staff Pulse Index data from 2024</u>, gathered from a representative combined sample of selected <u>High Performance Schools</u>, shows that, on average throughout the year, 32% of staff do not feel positive about their work-life balance and overall wellbeing.

These figures are more than statistics. They represent a workforce under immense strain, a system at risk, and ultimately, a challenge that affects the quality of education our students receive. When teachers are unwell, dissatisfied, demoralised and/or disengaged, students cannot thrive and school outcomes are put at risk.

This picture is echoed in broader research over the past few years. Recent inquiries have shown that educators are not only facing rising stress levels, but also feelings of anger, isolation, and disconnection from their work. Australian teachers have lodged more mental health claims with WorkCover than any other profession, including healthcare workers (<u>Lemon & Tuner, 2024</u>). In NSW alone, studies indicate that half of teachers experience psychological distress, while two-thirds endure burnout (<u>Corbett et al., 2023</u>; NSW Public Service Commission, 2022).

The data from our teacher wellbeing surveys administered between 2023-2025 paint a similar picture. Across the 60+ schools we work with, on average:



report feeling stressed, worried, or anxious often



report feeling burned out



feel mentally and emotionally unwell



feel physically unwell

While these averages are alarming, they hide the nuances that matter most. **Every school tells its own story**. Our teacher wellbeing survey data shows that some schools reveal unique strengths and protective factors, while others highlight specific challenges around teacher wellbeing, mental health, burnout and unique school-specific factors.

This is why wellbeing data and teacher voice are essential for each individual school. A <u>teacher wellbeing</u> <u>survey</u> and associated results and trends provide a clear map for leaders to take targeted, meaningful action rather than relying on generic solutions and cookie-cutter approaches.

### The Cost of Ignoring Teacher Wellbeing

When teacher wellbeing is overlooked, the effects extend far beyond the staffroom. The consequences ripple through classrooms, schools, communities, and even worldwide.

#### STUDENTS FEEL IT FIRST

Research continues to show that student wellbeing and achievement are closely tied to teacher wellbeing. When teachers are stressed or burnt out, students experience increased stress levels (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016), reduced motivation (Shen et al., 2015), and lower academic and behavioural outcomes (McCallum, 2021; McCallum & Price, 2010; Wentzel, 2010).

What's more, teacher burnout and attrition have a direct, detrimental impact on students' educational outcomes, including academic performance, test scores and overall wellbeing (<u>Herman et al., 2018</u>; <u>von der Embse et al., 2016</u>). Teachers who are overwhelmed or exiting the profession simply can't provide the consistent, high-quality support students need to thrive. Emotional exhaustion in teachers also reduces their classroom effectiveness and ability to connect with students (<u>Aloe et al., 2014</u>; <u>Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016</u>).

In short, when teachers struggle, students often do too.

Beyond the school gates, the effects extend to families and the broader economy. As <u>Lemon and Turner (2024)</u> note, teacher wellbeing also impacts "the emotional wellbeing and economic productivity of parents". This is not just an education issue - it's a societal one.

#### **WE'RE LOSING OUR WORKFORCE**

Poor teacher wellbeing is now one of the leading drivers of attrition. According to findings by <u>Goddard and Goddard (2006)</u>, there is a strong association between intention to leave the profession and teacher burnout, and subsequently high rates of attrition among early career teachers across numerous countries worldwide. However, since the onset of the pandemic, we are losing teachers, at all levels of their careers, at a rate faster than ever before. A <u>2019 study of over 2,400 Australian teachers</u> found that more than half planned to leave the profession within the next 10 years. Burnout, exhaustion, and disillusionment are pushing educators out, and the effects are already showing.

<u>UNESCO (2023)</u> estimates that 44 million new teachers will be needed globally to meet education demand and <u>Australia is now facing a critical teacher shortage</u>. Locally, modelling of teacher supply and demand shows that the teacher supply gap in Australia is widening (<u>Monash University</u>, <u>2024</u>). This shortage is recognised as a <u>significant risk to improving student outcomes</u>, both now and in the future.

"When teacher wellbeing is overlooked, the effects extend far beyond the staffroom.

The consequences ripple through classrooms, schools, communities, and even worldwide."



### The Cost of Ignoring Teacher Wellbeing

#### **BEHIND THE DATA ARE PEOPLE**

It's easy to talk about numbers, but **this is fundamentally a human issue.** Our teachers and school staff are not just professionals - they're also parents, carers and friends. And right now, they're emotionally exhausted. The personal toll of the job is higher than ever. Chronic stress, burnout and emotional fatigue are leading to reduced job satisfaction, lower self-efficacy and accomplishment, and rising attrition rates.

The system (and society) may view teachers as essential to delivering student and school outcomes, but we must remember, they're people first.





#### WE'VE KNOWN THIS FOR YEARS

This isn't a new conversation. Yet despite rising awareness, the gap between intention and meaningful action remains wide. If we're serious about improving outcomes for students, we must get serious about the wellbeing of the people who teach and support them every day. That means shifting from reactive, surface-level responses to strategic, data-informed approaches that honour the complexity and humanity of our workforce.

# What is leading to the teacher wellbeing crisis?

To unpack this issue at a teacher level, we must broaden our understanding of teacher wellbeing. Teacher wellbeing encompasses both their sense of <u>personal wellbeing and their workplace wellbeing</u>. It is essential that in education, we extend our conversation to one that acknowledges and addresses staff stressors and risk factors associated with the workplace, including teacher roles and leadership.

It is unfair to attribute the "wellbeing crisis" solely to a lack of teachers' personal wellbeing and their lives outside of work, and then shrugging our shoulders and dismissing concerns with the rationale that "the pressures are simply part of the job."



(Dabrowski, 2021)



# What is leading to the teacher wellbeing crisis?

Over the last few years, research has highlighted the primary stressors for teachers, the associated risks, and the motivations behind their desire to leave or remain in the profession. Below, we present these findings along with the results from our staff wellbeing surveys conducted between 2023 and 2025:

'Boosting teacher wellbeing at the start of term helps combat attrition and burnout'

**UNSW (2024)** 

Teachers' experience, needs and recommendations for promoting their health and wellbeing in Australia

Corbet et al. (2024)

'Teacher mental health and burnout could halve the workforce, according to new data from the

Black Dog Institute (2023)

Unravelling the wellbeing needs of Australian teachers: a qualitative inquiry Lemon and Turner (2024)

Data from our teacher wellbeing survey capturing perspectives across 60+ Australian Schools 2023-2025

# Teachers reporting wanting to leave the profession are highlighting key determinants:

- Time pressure
- Disruptive student behaviour
- A lack of relevant professional learning opportunities

#### In Australia, the primary reasons cited for leaving the teaching profession were:

- High workload
- Lack of work/life balance
- Exhaustion and emotional detachment linked to burnout
- Feelings of diminished professional effectiveness

# Additional sources of teacher stress stem from:

- Poor student behaviour
- Increasing reporting requirements
- Conflicts with colleagues and parents
- Educational policy and curriculum changes

# Findings from the report highlight stress attributed to:

- Unmanageable workloads
- Teacher shortages in their schools at the moment
- Teaching classes outside of their area of training regularly

#### Stressors for teachers include:

- Excessive workload
- Poor work-life balance, not feeling safe at work
- Student behaviour
- Communicating with parents
- Administrative support

On average, across schools, the top stressors, as identified by teachers, are:

- 1. Administrative tasks 59%
- 2. Managing difficult/ challenging student
- 3. Long working hours or
  - excessive workload <u>- 51%</u>

behaviour - 54%

- 4. Lack of planning time 50%
- 5. Poor work/life balance 40%
- 6. Poor communication between leaders and staff - 37%

Percentages indicate on average which stressors were selected by survey participants from a list of workplace stressors which impact them

# What is leading to the teacher wellbeing crisis?

Overall, a review of the recent literature and our teacher wellbeing survey data show that the following stressors impact teacher wellbeing and require the attention of the system and schools:



# EXCESSIVE AND UNMANAGEABLE WORKLOAD

Includes long hours, insufficient planning time, administrative overload, increased reporting requirements, and the effects of teacher shortages adding to teacher load



#### STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AND COMPLEX NEEDS

Rising disruptive behaviour and growing student wellbeing challenges, especially without adequate training in positive behaviour strategies, trauma-informed practice, and inclusion



# POOR COMMUNICATION AND LIMITED CONSULTATION

Inconsistent or unclear communication and limited teacher input into decisions and school change, contributing to frustration, disengagement, and mistrust



#### LACK OF RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Insufficient access to targeted and relevant professional learning, coaching, mentoring, feedback, and goal setting - reducing teacher efficacy, motivation, and engagement



#### POLICY AND CURRICULUM PRESSURES

Frequent changes in policy and compliance requirements, often without consultation, creating uncertainty and adding to cognitive load



#### EMOTIONAL STRAIN AND BURNOUT

Stress, exhaustion, and emotional detachment - affecting physical, mental, and emotional health and increasing attrition risk



# WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Conflicts, lack of trust, and feeling undervalued - eroding a sense of connection, belonging and collective wellbeing



Know your numbers and your people

It is important to note that every school's data tells its own unique story. Our <u>teacher</u> <u>wellbeing surveys</u> help schools identify the top stressors affecting staff across the entire school, breaking down information across roles and/or subgroups of staff.

### What we can do about it...

Despite alarming statistics, teacher wellbeing in Australia remains underexplored, <u>too often framed as a "problem story" rather than a call to action</u>. As the conversation evolves, solutions must be practical, evidence-informed, and context-driven.

Some current literature is beginning to explore the truth behind what schools and the system need to do to improve teacher wellbeing to ensure positive outcomes for our students, our communities and our teachers and staff.

Alongside outlining stressors, the current literature is pointing to approaches, initiatives and focus areas that teachers really need and want:

'Boosting teacher wellbeing at the start of term helps combat attrition and burnout' UNSW (2024)

'Australian teachers' conceptualisations of wellbeing at work' Vo et al. (2024) 'Unravelling the wellbeing needs of Australian teachers: a Qualitative Inquiry'

Lemon and Turner (2024)

Data from our <u>teacher</u>
<u>wellbeing survey</u> capturing
perspectives across 60+
Australian Schools and
thousands of school staff
between 2023-2025:

#### How schools can sustain and support teacher wellbeing:

- Reduce workload:
   Streamline administrative tasks and review face-to-face teaching demands
- Invite teacher voice: Involve staff in decisions and explain the rationale behind tasks
- Build collaboration: Provide common planning time, create professional learning communities, foster peer mentoring, and cultivate a supportive staffroom culture
- Strengthen student
   relationships: Offer ongoing
   coaching, feedback, and
   goal-setting focused on
   improving teacher-student
   interactions
- Invest in professional learning: Prioritise opportunities (PL and coaching) to enhance highquality teaching practices
- Support stress
   management: Provide
   resources, training, and
   strategies to manage
   workload and wellbeing
   effectively

### The five essentials teachers say matter most for their wellbeing:

- Safety: A secure environment, free from physical and psychological harm
- Support: Access to resources, emotional care, and practical help from leaders and colleagues
- Value: Recognition and respect for their contributions as key members of the school community
- Trust: Confidence in their professional judgment, autonomy in decisionmaking, and freedom to manage responsibilities effectively
- Balance: The ability to manage work demands while maintaining time and energy for personal life

#### What effective teacher wellbeing strategies look like:

- Reduce stress at the source: Implement initiatives that address workload and pressure points
- Boost positive emotions and meaning: Create opportunities for teachers to feel accomplished and connected to their purpose
- Lead with care and consultation: Foster a leadership culture that prioritises wellbeing, respect, and trust
- Invest in professional growth: Provide ongoing learning and development opportunities
- Build a supportive community: Encourage collaboration, peer support, and strong team connections

The top wellbeing initiatives teachers are suggesting on average:

- 1. Reduction in workload 53%
- 2. Time off and flexible working schemes 43%
- 3.Improvement or more of a focus on student management, behaviour or wellbeing 41%
- 4.More/improved communication with the school's leadership team -40%
- 5. More consultation or involvement in decision-making 36%
- 6.A more focused approach on staff wellbeing and mental health - 36%

Percentages indicate, on average, which initiatives were selected by survey participants from a list of workplace wellbeing initiatives and workplace adjustments



# Suggested solutions to improve staff and teacher wellbeing in our schools

If we want to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our teachers, staff and community, as well as promote teacher retention and build staff morale, satisfaction, and engagement, we must take a data-backed and systematic approach to assessing teacher wellbeing in our individual schools and at a system level.

#### **KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Drawing on both the literature and averages from our teacher wellbeing survey across 60+ schools 2023-2025, the following priorities emerge for schools, and for the education system more broadly, to strengthen and sustain teacher wellbeing:

- 1. Streamline and optimise teacher workload: Review workload expectations and administrative demands, reduce unnecessary tasks, and streamline workload practices (e.g., planning, assessment, data collection, communication, etc). Prioritise uninterrupted collaborative planning time and explore flexible work options (i.e. flexibility during free periods, additional non-contact time, scheduled early finishes/start times etc). Equip teachers with strategies for time management and productivity.
- 2. Systemise student behaviour and wellbeing practices: Implement consistent school-wide systemised approaches to behaviour and wellbeing, underpinned by relationships, positive behaviour strategies, trauma-informed practices, restorative approaches, and explicit and in-context social-emotional learning opportunities
- 3. Help teachers meet diverse student needs in inclusive and adaptive ways: Provide targeted support for teachers to differentiate and support students with varied and/or complex needs and ensure ongoing access to coaching, mentoring, and professional development to ensure classroom application and recognised supports
- 4. Improve communication systems: <u>Develop clear</u>, <u>consistent</u>, <u>and transparent communication</u> processes and practices that reduce uncertainty, foster trust and keep teachers and staff informed about decisions, expectations, and changes
- 5. **Embed meaningful consultation:** Offer <u>regular, multi-modal opportunities for staff to provide input</u> on school priorities, <u>change initiatives</u>, and <u>decisions that affect their work</u>. Ensure that the <u>feedback loop is closed</u> and staff are updated on outcomes following these consultative opportunities
- 6. Strengthen teacher engagement and professional identity: Use leadership-led practices to re/build teacher professional identity, such as regular goal setting, feedback, coaching and mentoring practices and targeted professional development to help teachers connect with purpose, meaning, and accomplishment in their work
- 7. **Develop leadership capability:** Invest in building leaders' skills in transformational and <u>authentic leadership</u>, with a strong emphasis on <u>relational trust</u>, clear and consistent communication, developing relevant <u>personal attributes</u> (soft skills), and <u>emotional intelligence</u>. Encourage regular wellbeing and <u>professional check-ins that prioritise</u> <u>people</u>, not just performance or student outcomes. Ensure this can happen with a focus on leader wellbeing to <u>prevent compassion fatigue</u> so they can effectively support staff, students and the community
- 8. Foster a supportive, safe culture to bolster our <u>teachers' collective efficacy</u>: Create conditions where teachers feel <u>psychologically and physically safe</u>, supported by <u>high-performance teams</u>, collaborative relationships, <u>recognition and appreciation of contributions</u>, and a staff and school culture that values care and connection
- 9. Build staff skills in attending to their personal and professional wellbeing: Provide encouragement and opportunities to develop understanding and skills in the <u>different dimensions of their wellbeing</u>, the application of adaptive <u>coping strategies</u> and building on their wellbeing resources to enhance and evolve their <u>resilience</u>.
- 10. Adopt a strategic approach to staff wellbeing: Ultimately, for our efforts to support staff to be impactful, we must move beyond ad hoc initiatives to a whole-school strategy that includes <u>surveying our staff</u>, <u>scanning and reviewing wellbeing data</u> and embedding a tailored and an actionable <u>Staff Wellbeing Framework</u> and <u>Wellbeing Action Plan</u> to ensure consistency and longevity of our approach.



#### Apply strategic initiative backed by data and staff voice:

Using a <u>teacher wellbeing survey</u> designed to assess the overall wellbeing of teachers and staff, their burnout risk and perceptions of the school's approach to wellbeing, we can uncover a strategic direction directly relevant to the teachers and staff in each school.

### Key Takeaways for Schools and the System

Inside the literature and in our data collection, the message is clear: what teachers don't want is another surface-level, tokenistic gesture, empty promises, or being told to fix their personal wellbeing on their own.

What teachers need is a <u>strategic</u>, <u>school and system-wide approach</u>, supported by data and solidified with a plan that fosters clarity, accountability, meaningful progress and a genuine commitment to change.

Teachers want to feel valued, recognised, heard, supported and engaged. They want to be part of a connected and collaborative team - one built on professional communication, mutual respect and a shared drive to achieve meaningful outcomes.

They want to work efficiently and purposefully, spending their time where it matters most: with their students, making a difference. Instead, too many are weighed down by the mounting and sometimes unnecessary compliance requirements, excessive administrative work and constant red tape.

Finally, they want strong, supportive leaders who keep them informed, follow up, check in and truly show that they care. With their workplace wellbeing supported, teachers are more likely to be able to focus on their personal wellbeing and from here, they can bring their best selves to work.

Teacher wellbeing is simultaneously individual and systematic. While there are complex systemic barriers that impact the profession, schools have the power to take action. By listening to their people and responding with thoughtful data-informed strategies, schools can build environments where staff and teacher wellbeing, engagement and growth are valued just as much as student outcomes.

The transformation begins when we work alongside our people.





#### About the Author

Adrienne Hornby is a Staff Wellbeing Consultant and Strategist who partners with schools to become 'Well-Led Schools' - Schools that "lead with staff wellbeing in mind" so they can create thriving workplaces where teachers and students flourish.

With a background in school leadership, teaching, and health and wellbeing coaching, Adrienne has supported over 60 schools across Australia and internationally to improve staff wellbeing and design tailored Staff Wellbeing Frameworks and Action Plans. Adrienne is proud of the impact her work has made in numerous school, evidenced by staff perception data.

Her evidence-based <u>6 Steps to Becoming a Well-Led School</u> model combines Positive Psychology, up-to-date educational leadership research, and practical strategies to help leaders reduce burnout, strengthen culture, and improve staff engagement.

Learn more at: <u>adriennehornby.com.au</u>

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# School Case Study



#### St Philip's College - Alice Springs NT

When Leslie became Principal at St Philip's College in Alice Springs, NT, she saw firsthand the impact of high stress, burnout, and low morale on her staff. Determined to create a supportive and positive school culture, she partnered with us to develop a targeted wellbeing strategy that helped staff feel valued, empowered, and equipped to manage their workload effectively.

#### **Overview**

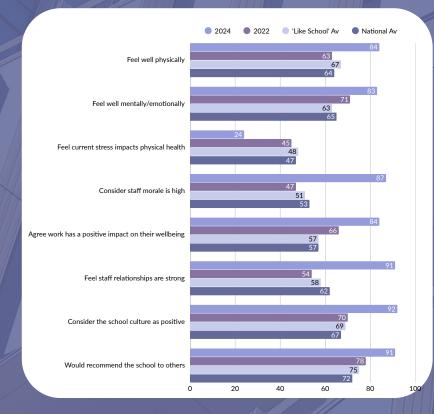
We worked with Leslie and her leadership team to survey her staff to quantify the state of staff wellbeing and identify key areas contributing to staff stress and burnout so they could be addressed meaningfully.

After the survey and a review of the data, three priority focus areas emerged:

- **1.Addressing student behaviour** Ensuring staff had clear processes and support to manage student behaviour effectively.
- 2. Managing workload and work/life balance Implementing strategies to reduce pressure and improve sustainability in staff roles.
- 3. Strengthening accountability, consistency, and clarity in leadership and staff communication.

With this insight, Leslie led a proactive and structured approach, ensuring leaders and staff had the right tools, strategies, and mindset shifts to create long-term, meaningful change.

#### Results



#### **Key Initiatives**

- ✓ Getting clear on and cocreating vision and strategic direction with staff
- √ Refining student behaviour management strategies
- ✓ Optimising workload management - Reviewing workload expectations, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, and promoting work/life balance.
- ✓ Embedding a culture of recognition and support Ensuring staff felt valued and heard through leadership engagement and wellbeing initiatives.



### Leslie Tilbrook

School Principal, St Philin's College, NT

"We started working with Adrienne when our staff morale was at a particularly low point in our school history.

This gave us excellent data to move forward with in the following year. We used that information and worked with Adrienne to develop a wellbeing plan.

The improvement in staff wellbeing was measurable and backed up by the data. Most importantly, the emphasis on looking after both the physical and mental wellbeing of all our staff helped to build a stronger community.

The way we all know how to support each other is a testament to this program, which teaches us to "Put your oxygen mask on first."

I believe staff are now more committed to staying in our regional community as a result of knowing they are valued and respected at school."



# School Case Study



#### Lumen Christi College, WA

Lumen Christi College recognised the need for a structured, evidence-based approach to staff wellbeing. Through our partnership, the school identified key priority areas and developed a Staff Wellbeing Action Plan that provided clear, strategic steps to improve workplace culture, communication, and workload management.

#### **Overview**

Our engagement with Lumen Christi College began with a comprehensive school scan and survey, designed to pinpoint key workplace stressors and identify priority areas for action.

#### The data highlighted three core challenges:

- 1. A lack of planning time Teachers and staff reported limited time for structured lesson preparation and collaboration
- 2. Poor communication Staff sought clearer, more transparent communication
- 3. Workload management Staff were suggesting optimisation of workload

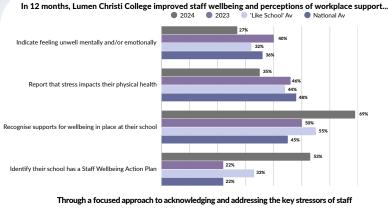
With these findings, the school committed to implementing a targeted Wellbeing Action Plan to directly address these issues in practical and measurable ways.

#### **Key Initiatives**

Over the course of 12 months, Lumen Christi College focused on the following strategies:

- ✓ Embedding a structured Staff Wellbeing Action Plan
- √ Addressing workload concerns
- ✓ Improving college communication practices
- ✓ Aligning wellbeing initiatives with staff needs Ensuring existing and new wellbeing supports were well-communicated, accessible, and relevant.

#### Results



Poor communication

Poor communication

40%

40%

40%

41%

41%

61%

61%



#### Rachel Goodchild

Lumen Christi College, WA

"Partnering with Adrienne has been transformative for our staff wellbeing at Lumen Christi College.

Adrienne's structured, clear approach provided us with the framework we needed to make meaningful changes. By involving all staff in the process, we were able to gain valuable buy-in and create a real sense of community around our wellbeing goals.

The program emphasised listening to staff needs, and with that input, we developed a targeted action plan based on our shared goals. This collaborative approach has made all the difference, empowering our staff with practical, sustainable support."



# State of the Nation Reports:

Leader Wellbeing &
Support and Non-Teaching Staff Wellbeing

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