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The School Health Research Network (SHRN)

Case Study: Abbey Primary School

From SHRN Insights to Action: Primary School Learners Leading Change in Digital Well-being

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Welsh Network of Health and
Well-being Promoting Schools



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Wales



HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Authors

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To read author biographies, please refer to the final section of this case study.

Acknowledgments

SHRN would like to acknowledge and thank Danielle Thomas, Head of Health and Well-being at Abbey Primary School, for her invaluable support and contribution to the development and writing of this case study.

Please note:

This case study is a way of sharing school practices. It draws on the experiences of this particular school that they found beneficial in their context. The effectiveness of these approaches may vary, and they have not been independently verified or evaluated by SHRN.



From SHRN Insights to Action: Primary School Learners Leading Change in Digital Well-being

Contents	Page
1. Case Study Overview	4
2. About Abbey Primary School	4
3. A SHRN Data-Informed Approach to Learner Health and Well-being	4
4. Key Findings from SHRN: Shaping the Next Steps	5
5. From Data to Dialogue	7
6. Working Together to Shape Well-being Priorities	8
7. Actions Taken: Turning Data into Practice	9
8. A Collaborative Approach: Involving the Whole School Community	11
9. Learner Voice at the Heart of the Evaluation	13
10. Evaluating Impact: Positive Change in Learners' Well-being	13
11. Role of SHRN Data in Self-Evaluation of Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being	14
12. Next Steps: Sustaining and Expanding Impact	15
13. Final Reflection	16
14-18. Additional Information and Resources	16

1. Case Study Overview

Abbey Primary School in Neath Port Talbot is a strong example of how data from The School Health Research Network (SHRN) can move schools from data insight to action. Their SHRN school-level report revealed that learners in Years 3 to 6 had higher levels of digital device ownership and social media use compared to the Wales average. From this, the school recognised how early online engagement might influence areas such as emotional well-being, self-image, and digital literacy and decision-making, prompting questions about digital influence and resilience.

In response, the school initiated a learner-led investigation and project titled 'Power and Influence in Digital Spaces' placing learner voice at the heart of the process. This approach not only addressed digital well-being as a key health and well-being priority but also empowered learners to become critical thinkers and responsible digital citizens.

By embedding their SHRN data into planning and aligning with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales, Abbey Primary School strengthened its Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being and created a culture where evidence informs action and learners lead the way.

2. About Abbey Primary School

Abbey Primary School has approx. 450 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 11 years, including 62 nursery children who attend part-time.

The school is an inclusive learning community where learner well-being is central to its approach. The school values diversity and aims to help every child reach their potential through a curriculum that is engaging, authentic, and enjoyable. Its ethos, reflected in the motto "Work together, Play together, Grow together" highlights commitment to collaboration and shared growth.

3. A SHRN Data Informed Approach to Learner Health and Well-being

In 2022, the school participated in The SHRN Student Health and Well-being in Primary Schools survey pilot. Following this in 2024, they further participated in the first national roll out of The SHRN Student Health and Well-being in Primary Schools survey, working closely with their local Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools (WNHWPS) team.

The school recognised the power of robust, school level data to track health behaviours and guide targeted support. Using insights from their SHRN school-level report, Abbey Primary School strengthened its health and well-being strategy in three key areas:

- **Amplifying learner voice** by involving learners, whose SHRN survey responses helped shape priorities and solutions, and ensuring they are genuinely heard.
- **Focusing on digital well-being**, informed by SHRN data showing high levels of device ownership and social media use.
- **Embedding SHRN data evidence into planning**, ensuring alignment with the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) and the Digital Competence Framework (DCF).

The SHRN data driven approach has enhanced the school's Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being, supporting high standards, inclusivity, and resilience. It reflects the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and promotes life skills and holistic growth for every learner.

"This project has been a really positive experience for our school. Using our SHRN data helped us to better understand our learners' digital lives and opened up important conversations about well-being, influence and online behaviour.

What has been most powerful is seeing learners take ownership of the work ... questioning, reflecting and leading change themselves. It has strengthened our whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being and reminded us how important it is to listen to learners and use evidence to shape what we do every day."

Mr. Hodder
Headteacher
Abbey Primary School

4. Key Findings from SHRN: Shaping the Next Steps

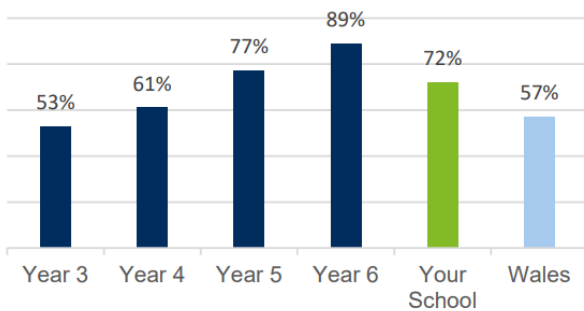
Abbey Primary School's SHRN report revealed a striking trend - learners in Years 3 to 6 reported owning more digital devices and using social media more frequently than the Wales average. This early exposure suggests that digital habits are forming sooner than expected, raising important questions about emotional well-being, self-image, and decision-making.

4.1 Abbey Primary School: SHRN Student Health and Well-being Survey Data 2024

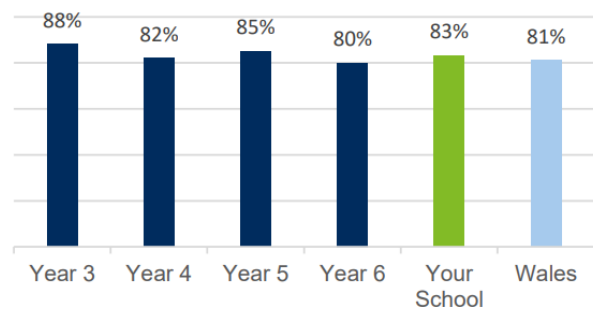
Devices

Learners were asked if they had their own smartphone, laptop or tablet. The percentage of learners who do own these portable devices are shown in the charts below.

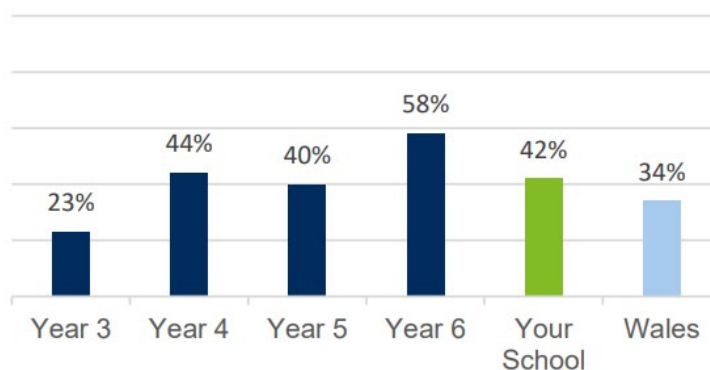
Percentage Who Own a Smartphone



Percentage Who Own A Computer, Laptop Or Tablet



Use Social Media Sites Or Apps



Year 6 stood out as the most active online as they were beginning to develop independent digital identities and engage with social platforms, prompting critical questions:

- How do algorithms shape what learners see? How might this influence their choices, friendships, and sense of self?
- What pressures do learners feel to post, share, or present themselves in certain ways?
- How do 'likes,' comments, and follower counts affect their confidence or decision-making?
- Who has power online, and how aware are learners of how their data is used?
- How do online trends or influencers shape what they think is "normal" or "popular"?
- What skills do children need to judge risks, evaluate information, or resist online pressures?
- How do algorithms reinforce certain behaviours, and are learners able to recognise this?
- What helps children stay safe, feel confident, and maintain positive well-being online?

"Our SHRN report showed just how early children are forming their digital identities. Even our younger learners are navigating social media, algorithms, and online pressures. This highlights how important it is to teach them the skills to stay safe, think critically, and protect their well-being as they grow up online."

**Mrs. D Thomas,
Health and Well-being Lead and Year 6 Teacher
Abbey Primary School**

5. From Data to Dialogue

Rather than just presenting the SHRN findings, the school invited learners to interpret the data themselves. Year 6 were surprised to see how much more they used social media compared to the Wales average, sparking curiosity and debate.

It was Year 6 that took the lead, given their greater access to devices and growing social media use. They were most likely to encounter personalised content such as social media posts, videos, and adverts tailored to their interests. By putting learner voice at the centre, the school moved beyond awareness to action. Learners helped define digital well-being as a priority and shaped practical steps, from creating class guidelines to leading peer discussions. This approach aligned with the Curriculum for Wales by promoting critical thinking and responsible digital citizenship.

Questions such as these opened the door to deeper conversations:

- *Why do we spend so much time online?*
- *How do apps decide what we see?*
- *How do I know if something online is safe to click on or share?*
- *Why do likes and comments feel important?*
- *Why do I end up scrolling for ages without meaning to?*
- *How does being online affect how I feel?*

These discussions laid the foundation for the next stage of working together to embed these priorities into the school's well-being strategy.

"These conversations became the spark for a more collaborative approach, where our learners and staff worked together to turn the data into practical steps. It stopped being just data and it became a springboard for critical thinking and digital awareness."

Mrs. D Thomas
Health and Well-being Lead and Year 6 Teacher
Abbey Primary School

6. Working Together to Shape Well-being Priorities

The process was collaborative and learner led. Learners explored the SHRN data, asked questions, and agreed to use their voices to make a positive difference. Teachers supported these conversations, helping learners understand what the data meant and why it mattered. With their teachers alongside them, learners created class guidelines for safe social media use and led peer discussions on online influence. The teachers then embedded this work into the school's well-being strategy ensuring alignment with the Health and Well-being AoLE and the Digital Competence Framework.

Using SHRN data as a starting point and keeping learner voice at the centre, the school developed a well-being strategy that was practical, responsive, and grounded in the real needs of its learners. This approach strengthened the school's commitment to evidence-based planning and created a culture where SHRN data informs action, and learners play an active role in shaping solutions.

“Using the SHRN data gave our conversations real purpose and grounded our well-being work in evidence. It gave us confidence that our strategy was responding directly to learners’ needs while keeping learner voice central to every decision. Our role was to support, question, and guide - but the ideas and solutions came from the learners. That’s what made the work meaningful and why it’s had such a positive impact on our whole-school well-being approach.”

Mrs. D Thomas
Health and Well-being Lead and Year 6 Teacher
Abbey Primary School

7. Action Taken: Turning Data into Practice

These conversations did not stop at ideas; they became the foundation for real change. The school adopted a whole-school approach, introducing learner-led activities focused on digital well-being and the theme of power and influence online.

Key interventions included:

- **Structured Learning:** Year 6 explored how algorithms¹ shape what they see online, from personalised content to targeted ads and social media feeds.
- **Learner-Led Inquiry:** Learners designed and ran their own surveys across the school to find out more about digital habits and experiences, building their sense of ownership. They asked questions such as:
 - *“Do you know what the term algorithm means?”*
 - *“Have you ever seen something online that made you feel sad, uncomfortable, or negative?”*
 - *“If you could change something about social media, what would it be?”*
- **Critical Digital Literacy:** Lessons helped learners understand how digital platforms use data and the impact this can have on well-being, decision-making, and self-image.
- **Creative Projects:** Learners produced podcasts, videos, and presentations to share findings with their peers and encourage responsible online behaviour.

¹ An algorithm is a set of rules or steps that digital systems (e.g. phones, tablets, computers, websites, and apps) follow to decide what to show you online, such as which posts, videos, or adverts appear in your feed.

- **Curriculum Links:** Digital well-being themes were woven into lessons through the Health and Well-being AoLE and the Digital Competence Framework (DCF).

These steps ensured the work was grounded in the school's data and real experience, giving learners ownership that made the experience more meaningful. The project also encouraged the school to review and improve its approach to digital well-being that made its teaching around online safety and digital citizenship more consistent and practical. For example:

- Digital well-being and online safety became a stronger focus across years 3 to 6 within Health and Well-being lessons.
- Teachers began to incorporate discussions about algorithms and online influence into Digital Competence lessons.
- The school started planning for consistent messages on device use, online behaviour, and social media awareness across all year groups.

Next steps include expanding these activities to younger year groups, running parent and carer information sessions and workshops to build shared understanding, and embedding digital well-being as a core strand of the school's Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being.

Here's what some Year 6 learners had to say about how the project has supported their health and well-being²

"I didn't know what algorithms were before, but now I get why they matter!" Ava

² Please note: The learners' names used in this case study has been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

*"I didn't realise I go on social media that much. It made me think about it a bit more." **Freddie***

*"Now I know algorithms try to guess what we like, so it made me think about why I watch certain things." **Kayla***

8. A Collaborative Approach: Involving the Whole School Community

The school's response was a whole team effort, with learners, the school council and teachers working together to make real change.

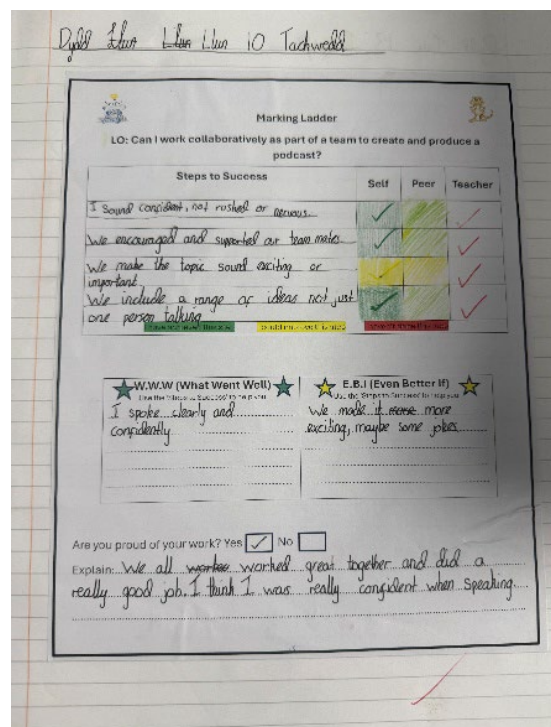
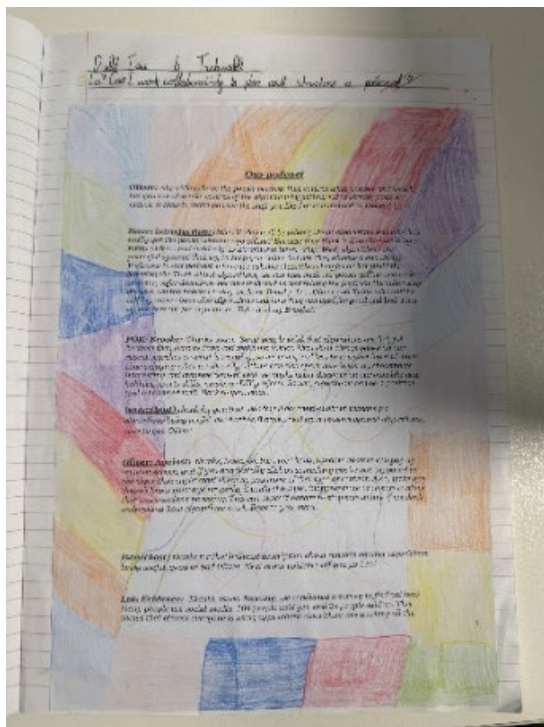
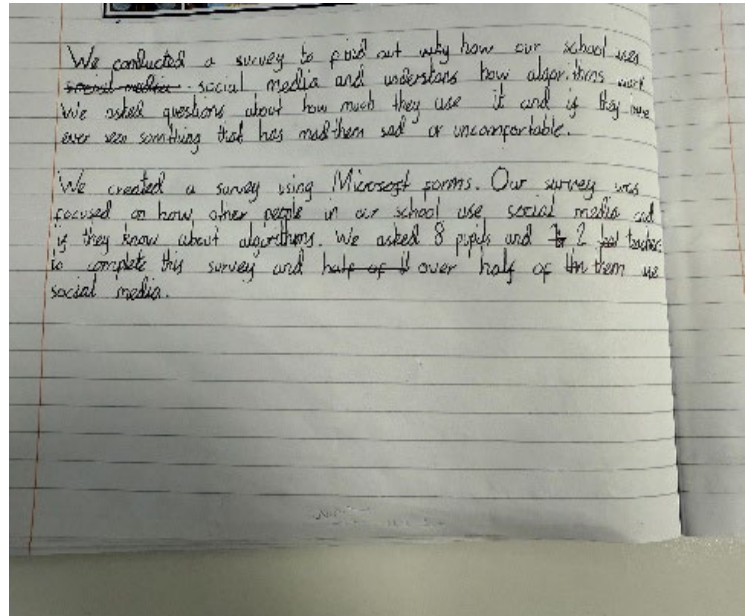
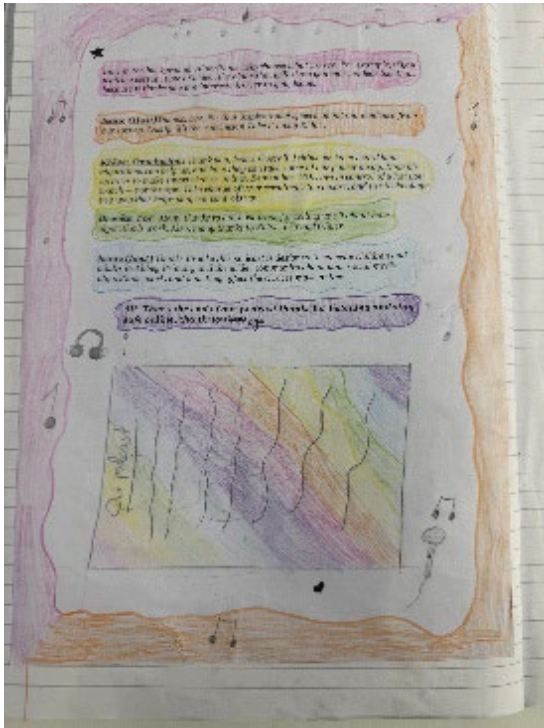
Year 6 learners led the way interpreting their SHRN data, designing surveys, and starting conversations. They also created podcasts, videos, and presentations to encourage positive online behaviour among their peers. Group discussions and presentations added further insight, supported by informal feedback from the School Council.

Teachers supported each step, from guiding discussions and helping with survey design to teaching critical digital literacy skills. Across the wider team, staff reflected on how digital well-being could be built into everyday teaching and explored ways to keep these themes consistent across the school.

This collaborative approach created a shared understanding and a strong commitment to tackling the digital well-being priorities identified in the SHRN data, ensuring that solutions were practical, evidence-based, and shaped by the learners themselves.



8.1 Abbey Primary School Year 6 Project Work



9. Learner Voice at the Heart of the Evaluation

Learner voice remained central throughout the project evaluation. They shared reflections during and after the project, and their own survey responses were analysed to capture real experiences. Group discussions and presentations added further insight, supported by informal feedback from the School Council. Teachers and teaching support assistants also contributed through professional dialogue, offering another perspective and helping ensure the evaluation reflected genuine learner experience and informed future planning.

The school used a range of evaluation methods, including learner designed pre and post project surveys, teacher observations, and reflections gathered through group discussions and School Council feedback. The multimedia projects made it easy to see what learners understood, while staff also noticed real improvements in digital literacy and the quality of well-being conversations. By combining measurable data with honest learner voices, the school built an evaluation that captured both the outcomes and the real experiences behind them.

“What we valued most about this project was hearing learners’ voices alongside the data. Their surveys, reflections, and creative work showed us not just what they knew, but how they were thinking and feeling. It gave us a much fuller picture of their digital lives and helped us understand the real impact our teaching was having.”

Mr. Mellin
Year 6 Teacher
Abbey Primary School

10. Evaluating Impact: Positive Change in Learners’ Well-being

Abbey Primary School has already made a real difference for learners, and the next SHRN survey will help them track progress over time.

Year 6 learners now show:

- **A stronger understanding of how algorithms shape what they see online** and influence their choices, both at home and in school.
- **Better teamwork and communication skills**, developed through collaborative multimedia projects.
- **Greater responsibility for their own online behaviour** and an awareness of how their actions affect others.

The project focused on well-being rather than academic outcomes with clear benefits:

- **Engagement:** Learners were highly motivated by tackling real digital issues that mattered to them.
- **Responsible behaviour:** Staff noticed learners becoming more thoughtful about the content they view and share.
- **Well-being conversations:** Learners are now more willing to talk about how online experiences make them feel.
- **Classroom confidence:** Increased participation and ownership boosted confidence, especially among quieter learners.

“Our younger learners are also becoming more curious about digital well-being, which is great to see. Moving forward, we’ve discussed how we want to build on this by weaving digital well-being through the whole curriculum and offering information sessions and workshops for families so we can strengthen those home–school links. The next SHRN survey will help us see how far we’ve come and where we need to focus next.”

Mr. Mellin
Year 6 Teacher
Abbey Primary School

11. Role of SHRN Data in Self-Evaluation of Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being

SHRN data played a pivotal role in the school’s review of its Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being. It provided robust, evidence-based insights that guided curriculum development and informed strategic priorities. The data highlighted key trends, such as higher levels of digital device ownership and early social media exposure among learners in Years 3 to 6. This helped staff identify vulnerable groups and consider the wider emotional impact of digital life on learning, relationships, and self-image.

Using these findings, the school was able to:

- **Target support that was most needed**, focusing on digital resilience and online safety.
- **Embed digital well-being themes into the Health and Well-being AoLE and Digital Competence Framework**, ensuring alignment with the Curriculum for Wales.
- **Strengthen its Whole School Approach**, making planning more responsive and grounded in real learner experiences.

This evidence-driven process has enhanced the school’s ability to plan for meaningful, targeted improvements, ensuring that strategies are practical, inclusive, and informed by

real data rather than assumptions. It also reinforced the school's commitment to learner voice, as pupils were actively involved in interpreting findings and shaping solutions.

12. Next Steps: Sustaining and Expanding Impact

Building on what has been learned so far, Abbey Primary School has set out clear next steps to strengthen digital well-being and its wider Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being:

- **Continue Monitoring and tracking using SHRN Data:** The school will continue to track future SHRN data to spot changes in digital habits and well-being, identify current trends, and measure the long-term impact of current work. This ongoing review will guide curriculum planning and targeted support, keeping practice evidence-based and responsive.
- **Develop Progression in Digital Well-being:** Building on the Year 6 project, the school plans to create a clear progression in digital well-being across years 3 to 6 through the Health and Well-being AoLE and the Digital Competence Framework. Resources and examples will be developed to boost staff confidence in teaching these themes consistently and the involvement of parents and carers will support in building a shared understanding of digital well-being.
- **Share and Collaborate:** Abbey Primary School will continue to work with their local WNHWPS Team to share successful strategies and learner outcomes with cluster schools, exploring for opportunities to work together on joint projects and curriculum planning. As well as working with secondary schools in their region to inform key activities and support for learners who are transitioning from primary to secondary school. This will help spread impact beyond the school and promote a shared approach to digital resilience.
- **Strengthen Learner Voice:** To keep learners involved, the school will use learner-led surveys more widely to track awareness and behaviour. This ensures learners continue to shape priorities and influence future planning.
- **Make Use of SHRN Resources and its Wider Network:** They will draw on SHRN resources such as case studies, blogs, and guidance to support ongoing improvement. Being part of this network also provides opportunities to share learning and collaborate with other schools across Wales, researchers and wider practitioners.

By embedding these next steps into its strategy, the school aims to create a sustainable, whole-school culture where digital well-being is prioritised, learner voice drives decisions, and evidence informs action. SHRN data will remain central to this process, providing a reliable way to monitor and track trends, measure impact over time, and guide future improvements. This ongoing, data-informed approach ensures that the school's Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being continues to evolve based on tangible evidence and learner experience.

13. Final Reflection

Abbey Primary School's journey shows the power of combining SHRN data with learner-led action. Using their SHRN school-level data as a starting point, the school moved beyond assumptions to identify real needs and create interventions that reflect learners' everyday experiences. The focus on digital well-being, especially understanding power and influence online, has given learners vital skills for navigating an increasingly complex digital world.

This work also underlines the value of collaboration, with staff and learners working side by side to shape solutions and embed change across the curriculum. Crucially, SHRN data has provided a robust evidence base for self-evaluation and planning, enabling the school to track progress over time and adapt strategies as new trends emerge. By using measurable data alongside learner voice, the school ensures its Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being remains responsive, inclusive, and grounded in real experiences.

Looking ahead, the school is committed to sustaining this impact through ongoing monitoring, progression planning, and sharing practice, keeping well-being at the heart of its vision for learning and continuing to use SHRN data as a key driver for improvement.

For more information on supporting the health and well-being of your learners, please contact your local [WNHWPS Co-ordinator](#).

14. Join The 2026 SHRN Student Health and Well-being Survey in Primary Schools

If you work for a Primary School in Wales and would be interested in finding out more about the upcoming 2026 survey, please [sign up to our e-news](#) for more information about registration this summer. In the meantime, please contact the [SHRN team](#) if you have any further questions or queries.

- [Sign up to the SHRN Primary School e-news](#)

To stay up to date with the latest SHRN news, events, research and resources, [sign up to our monthly e-news](#).

15. Share Your SHRN Success Story

Sharing your SHRN story is a powerful way to demonstrate your expertise and the positive impact your initiatives have had on learners' health and well-being. SHRN welcomes case studies from both SHRN primary and secondary schools to showcase and share their use of SHRN Student Health and Well-being data and reports, and the value of evidence informed practice.

Discover how you can inspire others by sharing your SHRN journey with us. Your story could be the spark that ignites change and innovation in our community. Read more about how you can share your story [here](#). To read more inspiring school success case studies, visit our [website](#).

16. Additional SHRN Resources

For more insights on SHRN, read the [SHRN Blog](#) and explore the [SHRN webinars](#).

17. Contact Us

To find out more, email our [SHRN Engagement Manager, Charlotte Wooders](#).

About the Authors

Maria Boffey, SHRN Knowledge Exchange and External Affairs Manager

Maria's role in the SHRN Network is to manage its development by way of knowledge exchange, external affairs and communications, ensuring it meets the needs of schools, researchers, and key health and educational stakeholders. She provides support to schools, whilst developing strategic national and regional partnerships. Her passion for supporting the well-being of children has been constant throughout her career, spending over 20 years within the third sector leading on a wide range of national programmes supporting improved practice and policy outcomes for looked after children. She has also been a School Governor since 2007 in special, primary and secondary school settings. Maria has also worked on a number of research studies with Cardiff University, DECIPHer and CASCADE, as well as being an author of numerous health and well-being publications.

Danielle Thomas, Health and Well-being Lead, Abbey Primary School

Danielle is responsible for promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of all pupils across Abbey Primary School. She leads and coordinates whole-school well-being approaches in line with the Curriculum for Wales, ensuring health and well-being is embedded into daily practice and learning. Danielle works closely with staff to support the delivery of health and well-being provision, helps identify pupils who may require additional support, and liaises with parents, carers, and external agencies where appropriate. She also contributes to developing a positive, safe, and inclusive school culture where pupils and staff feel supported, valued, and ready to learn.

Charlotte Wooders, SHRN Engagement Manager

Charlotte is responsible for supporting the delivery of the SHRN engagement strategy. This involves working collaboratively with SHRN partners, including schools across Wales and WNHWPS. Her role includes organising knowledge exchange activities and supporting the SHRN strategy to ensure partners can share ideas and expertise. She works closely with schools to highlight the impact of SHRN and promote evidence-based practices to enhance learner health and well-being, bridging the gap between research and practical application. Additionally, Charlotte is involved in monitoring and evaluating initiatives by collecting and analysing data to assess the effectiveness of SHRN activities and refine future strategies.



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