

Executive Summary: WeST Staff Survey 2025

Overview

Westcountry Schools Trust conducted an online staff survey in the period 31st March to 28th April 2025 to gather feedback across areas including Values & Vision, My Work-life, School Specific matters, Health, Safety & Wellbeing, and WeST as an Employer.

The survey saw 1,632 responses out of 2,442 invited staff, achieving a response rate of 66%. This places the Trust in the 2nd highest quintile for response rates compared to similar surveys, indicating a good level of participation, although it is slightly lower than the 70% achieved in the previous survey.

The analysis primarily uses the QDP Rating, a weighted percentage designed to capture the level of enthusiasm (both positive and negative) for each question, providing a more nuanced measure of satisfaction than a simple Agree%.

Key Observations

1. **Variations in Return Rates:** While the overall response rate is good, there is significant variation across schools and business units with notably low return rates in some areas. In some cases these can be attributed to known reasons, such as structural anomalies or administrative difficulties, in others further investigation is warranted with local leadership engagement to explore barriers.
2. **Areas of Strength:**
 - Staff report high levels of confidence in challenging sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour (Question 19) and believe their school or business unit has effective processes in place to deal with such issues (Question 21). This is seen as positive ratification of the Trust's stance and actions in this area.
 - High ratings were achieved for managers trusting staff to work independently (Question 3), being considerate of work-life balance (Question 4), and staff feeling able to discuss problems with their line manager (Question 8). These results suggest staff feel supported and autonomous in their roles, with work-life balance considerations benchmarking very highly (in the A quartile) externally.
 - Wellbeing, as a summary area incorporating several questions, emerged as a significant strength for the Trust, scoring higher than the national external benchmark and placing WeST in the B quartile.
 - Encouragingly, staff perceive that the culture they experience at work reflects the WeST values (Question 1).

3. Areas of Concern/Weakness:

- The perception that senior leadership teams support flexible working (Question 6) is low (rating of 36) and significantly below the external benchmark (-19 difference). This concern persists despite efforts to promote flexible working and increased uptake of requests. There is also variation across schools, with primaries generally more positive than secondaries.
- Pupil behaviour remains a significant challenge, with staff reporting that lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour (Question 13) as a low-scoring area (rating of 20). This of particular concern in five of our secondaries and one primary, indicating a clear impact on staff wellbeing.
- Staff perception that being part of the Trust brings benefit to their school (Question 14) is low (rating of 19). This is a common challenge in multi-academy trusts, suggesting the benefits may not be clearly defined or understood by staff.
- Several questions related to personal development and the Performance Development Review (PDR) process also scored lower: 'My PDR leads to positive actions' (Question 10, rating of 31), 'My individual training and development needs are discussed and agreed' (Question 11, rating of 39), and 'I have had the opportunity to observe good practice' (Question 12, rating of 31). This indicates areas for improvement in development opportunities and the perceived effectiveness of the PDR process, which is seen as linked to effective line management.
- While confidence in challenging harassment and having processes in place (Questions 19 and 21) scored relatively highly internally, the external benchmark for Question 21 suggests there is still room for improvement compared to other organisations.
- The data indicates that schools with low scores in one area often have low scores across multiple areas, indicating the importance of overall school leadership and culture. Others show consistent positivity across areas.

Identified Actions

Based on these observations, the following actions are planned:

1. **Return Rate Investigation:** Continue to explore the reasons for the slightly lower overall return rate and the significant variations across schools. Discuss barriers to survey completion with leaders at schools with low response rates.
2. **Address Structural Anomalies:** Integrate identified groups into wider staff structures for future surveys and, through increased leadership efforts, encourage harder to reach staff groups to participate.
3. **Marked Negative Responses:** Further investigate the specific issues contributing to negative responses at identified schools, potentially involving Directors of Education or line managers.
4. **Flexible Working Perception:** Highlight variations across schools with relevant leaders and work proactively to reinforce the commitment to flexible working and explore measures to change staff perceptions.

5. **Pupil Behaviour:** The secondary education team will continue implementing targeted interventions (drawing on examples of good practice from within). The primary team will investigate their results and report findings and planned actions to trustees and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).
6. **Benefits of the Trust:** Proactively articulate the 'trust dividend' and clarify the Trust's role and structure to counteract misconceptions and highlight benefits. Establish a dedicated email address ("westsaid@") for staff to query perceived directives from the Trust, allowing for direct clarification and correction of misinformation. This will be a key theme at the next strategy day, focusing on collaboration and listening to heads' perspectives.
7. **PDR and Staff Development:** Be more directive regarding expectations for line management, including regular meetings and meaningful PDR discussions. Explore options for enhancing the PDR process and providing training on effective appraisal conversations e.g. develop video training materials on PDR practices for primary and secondary heads.
8. **Sexual Abuse/Harassment Processes:** To improve the external benchmark score for processes in place, instruct heads to include a clear and consistent message in their September communications to staff, outlining the Trust's stance, expectations for reporting, and reporting mechanisms.
9. **Utilising Qualitative Data:** Encourage schools to use the local qualitative comments to explore specific issues relevant to their context. The Trust will provide schools with an internal analysis of the prose comments.
10. **Wellbeing Hotspots:** Engage with schools flagged with high negative numbers across 'wellbeing', particularly regarding pupil behaviour and health/wellbeing support, to understand local actions and potentially conduct focus groups with staff in those schools.

Conclusions

The 2025 WeST Staff Survey offers a valuable snapshot of staff sentiment across the Trust, highlighting both areas of strength and opportunities for growth. High levels of trust in line management, strong alignment with WeST values, and positive wellbeing indicators underscore a supportive and values-driven culture. However, challenges persist—particularly around perceptions of flexible working, pupil behaviour, and the effectiveness of personal development processes.

Targeted actions have been outlined, from addressing low response rates and school-specific concerns to enhancing communication around the benefits of Trust membership and refining the PDR process. By acting on these insights and fostering open dialogue, WeST can continue to build a culture where all staff feel heard, supported, and empowered to thrive.

Attachments:

- Return Rate and Explanation
- Full Graphical Outcomes
- External Benchmarking
- Appendix